Realist Cinema as World Cinema

Non-cinema, Intermedial Passages, Total Cinema

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Acknowledgements

My research interests have always been cinematic realism and, since my relocation to the UK in the early 2000s, the controversial concept of world cinema. However, it took me more than a decade and several books to arrive at the conclusion that 'world cinema' could be advantageously replaced with 'realist cinema'. This idea is now fully developed and articulated in this book after a long journey of stimulating encounters and exchanges with like-minded (and acutely critical) friends and colleagues. My dear friend and brilliant scholar Cecília Mello has been a companion from the very beginning of my theorising on cinematic realism. She co-edited a book with me on *Realism and the Audiovisual Media* (Palgrave) back in 2009, and has been since an intellectual partner of incomparable generosity, precision and intuition, not to mention her knowledge of all things British which I will never learn. Tiago de Luca is another treasured friend and discussion partner, as well as an extremely refined thinker on realism and cinematic 'visions of the world', alongside the equally talented Cecilia Sayad, whose original research has now veered towards the notion of reality in the horror genre, a most exciting development. My thanks go to these three gifted minds for sharing their invaluable thoughts and opinions with me.

Introduction

This book is about films and filmmakers committed to reality. For them, the world is not a mere construct or discourse, but made of people, animals, plants and objects that physically exist, thrive, suffer and die. They feel part of, and responsible for, this material world and want to change it for the better. 'Realism', this book argues, is what defines these films' *mode of production* and binds them together across world cinema history and geography.

The idea that 'realism' could serve as the common denominator across the vast range of productions usually labelled as 'world cinema' is widespread and seemingly uncontroversial. Thomas Elsaesser (2009: 3), for example, starts his insightful essay 'World Cinema: Realism, Evidence, Presence' by declaring: 'European art/auteur cinema (and by extension, world cinema) has always defined itself against Hollywood on the basis of its greater realism'. The potted history contained in this formula suggests that world cinema started in Europe, more precisely with Italian neorealism in the 1940s, which, on the basis of a documentary approach to the real, offered fertile ground for the development of art and auteur cinema. Turning its back on the Nazi-fascist propaganda machine as much as on Hollywood fantasy, this new realist strand unveiled on screen the gritty reality of a poverty-stricken, devastated Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War. As we know, the raw aesthetics and revelatory power of this foundational movement inspired a flurry of subsequent (social-)realist schools in the world, such as Indian independent cinema in the 1950s, Brazilian Cinema Novo in the 1960s, African post-independence cinemas in the 1970s, the New Iranian Cinema in the 1980s, Danish Dogme 95 in the 1990s and many other new waves and new cinemas, remaining influential up to today. Neorealism was moreover the touchstone of André Bazin's concept of cinematic realism, the world's most foundational and enduring film theory ever written, albeit in the form of short magazine articles – 2,600 of them, in the count of Bazin specialist Dudley Andrew (2010: 13) – left behind after his death at a mere 40 years of age. As is well known, the film medium, for Bazin (1967), is intrinsically realist thanks to the 'ontology of the photographic image', that is, the medium's

recording property, which establishes a material bond with its referent in the objective world, a process later equated by Peter Wollen (1998: 86) to 'indexicality' as defined by Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory. Bazin was moreover, and most importantly to my own approach, the first to locate realism *at the point of production,* by extolling, in neorealism (Rossellini, Visconti, De Sica), the regular use of real locations, non-professional actors (as well as actors stripped of their acting personas) and the combination of long takes and long shots that preserve the space-time integrity of the profilmic event.

But Elsaesser's synthetic formula also contains some incendiary material. Should we take for granted that Europe is the centre of world cinema and that theory about it must consequently be Eurocentric, or at least Europe-centred? Does all world cinema depend on its artistic and auteurist pedigree? And is world cinema forever condemned to be the other of Hollywood – or Bollywood, or Nollywood, or any popular cinema? These questions were at the heart of world cinema theorising at the beginning of the new millennium, as an increasingly globalised world made it imperative to look at different cinemas through their transnational relations. My own contribution to this debate was to attempt to define world cinema positively, as a set of active expressions of local histories and cultures, rather than mere reactions against commercially and/or ideologically hegemonic cinemas (see Nagib 2006; Nagib et al. 2012). In this book, however, I shall propose to leave the Euro- and Hollywood-centric as well as the art/auteur vs commercial dilemma behind and move a step further by favouring the more substantive 'realist cinema' over the catch-all term 'world cinema'. Realism here will be understood as an ethics of the real that has bound world films together at cinema's most creative peaks.

But before moving on to the elaboration of what 'realist cinema' is and its advantages over the somewhat outmoded 'world cinema' appellation, let me first make the case for the latter's continuing relevance as a refuge and safeguard for cinematic diversity and inclusion. The massive exodus of films of all sorts from cinema screens to domestic on-demand streaming services and other digital platforms is today a consummated fact. If this has entailed the easy spread and prevalence of English-language commercial films on offer, it has also provided a home for a huge number of non-commercial independent, experimental and documentary films, which can now bypass the intricate and selective network of distribution and exhibition, and find a direct path to audiences. But it has also caused a major disruption to the way world films would, in the past, naturally filter through international festivals and arrive at arthouse venues (see Iordanova 2012). Granted, Hollywood's

screen dominance worldwide long antedates the on-demand streaming phenomenon, but it has been substantially boosted by it. Arthouse and other 'alternative' cinemas still exist, of course, and they are getting more comfortable, better equipped and sophisticated, but this comes at the price of much-reduced programmes, which are speedily rotated and dictated by a handful of major distributors generally suspicious of non-English languages and subtitles. This means that, for example, in the UK, from the 30+ world films reviewed every month in *Sight & Sound,* a mere half dozen are actually distributed to the cinemas. This scarcity is compounded by the rise of ticket prices in the arthouse circuit, which has become unaffordable to students, the low-waged and the unemployed.

Fortunately, most films excluded from theatrical screenings can now be viewed one way or another on the Internet, in the comfort of one's home. The difficulty, however, lies in one becoming aware of their existence and actively unearthing them from behind the fortified barrier of the VODs' chaotic front-page menus, entirely dominated by American films and series. Those purposely unhelpful menus are the culmination of a process through which consumers have seen their right to window-shop and browse through diversity rapidly corroded, with the increasing demise of physical books, CDs, DVDs and Blurays caused by Amazon's near-monopoly of online sales, which has led to the general collapse of street shopping around the world. World cinema is simply one of the many casualties of this phenomenon. As Stefano Baschiera was quick to observe, Netflix and Amazon, the world's biggest VOD providers,

> move away from geographical classification if not for a general, hidden, (and often imprecise) 'foreign films' category. This 'geographical indeterminacy' and the digital possibility to crosscategorise a film, listing it under several categories at the same time (something that the brick and mortar store shelves do not offer), means that several world cinema products 'mingle' in the catalogue, finding places under different classifications and genres.

Baschiera (5) goes on to observe that 'foreign films' end up associated, in a peripheral manner, to mainstream generic products by means of this new categorisation and suggestions for 'further viewing'. There is therefore an active process of decontextualising, neutralising and burying cultural difference behind a uniformising wall of American and English-speaking films to which other world films are attached as a kind of tail-end appendices. To watch world films through these services hence requires the spectator's

previous knowledge and a great dose of patience and determination, as well as the ability to enjoy their viewing in the isolation of one's computer, phone or another private screen, without the endorsement of like-minded crowds a cinema can provide.

That this mode of viewing evolves on a par with world films' ever-greater availability, with the help of smaller, but more diverse, platforms such as MUBI, Curzon and other specialist apps, should, however, be reason to celebrate. These, and the thriving film festivals around the world which showcase a burgeoning production of thousands of films from all over the world every year, are proof that, though exiled and diluted in the VOD market, world cinema continues to be alive and well, as the films studied in this book demonstrate. It is also true that, precisely because of their undifferentiated shelving as 'what to watch next', films in non-English languages can unexpectedly ascend to the limelight, as was the case of *Roma* (Alfonso Cuaron, 2018), a Mexican film spoken in Spanish and Mixtec and distributed by Netflix, which went on to win the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival, seven BAFTA awards, including best film, three Academy awards and a host of other prizes worldwide, paving the way for other such films, such as the Korean Oscar-winning *Parasite* (Bong Joon-ho, 2019)*,* to accede to the mainstream.

In her vigorously argued book *Women's Cinema, World Cinema* (2015), Patricia White defines World Cinema as a privileged realm for women filmmakers and an antidote to their woeful underrepresentation in the mainstream. Along the same lines, Robert Stam, in his newly-launched *World Literature, Transnational Cinema, and Global Media* (2019), sees 'a renewed popularity' of the term 'world cinema', which for him combines with what has been alternately called 'Transnational Cinema' and 'Global Cinema' in its drive to 'deprovincialize the film canon by opening it up to minority, women, and Global South directors' (Stam 2019: 104). In fact, our mission as film critics, historians and philosophers has acquired today a true sense of urgency, in terms of uncovering, organising, disseminating and preserving the memory of world cinema's enormous artistic and cultural wealth. Thanks to the advances in digital technology, we are no longer restricted to the written word; on the contrary, filmmaking is today available to scholars like us, as much as to professional filmmakers, allowing us to communicate beyond the academic walls. Videographic criticism is now common currency in academia and dedicated online journals, and an increasing number of academics are venturing into the feature format, a notable example being *The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer, Christine Cynn and anonymous, 2012), a landmark in documentary filmmaking resulting from an AHRC-funded

academic project, studied in Chapter 3. Thomas Elsaesser's widely acclaimed *The Sun Island* (2017) is another example of academic thought translated into the essay-film genre. My own feature-length film-on-films *Passages,* co-directed by Samuel Paiva and showing at film festivals worldwide at the moment of writing, is another such venture that serves as a companion piece to Chapter 7. These are all potential candidates for what Stam (2019: 33ff) calls a 'transartistic commons', a utopian realm without borders, fostering 'transnational, transdisciplinary, transtextual, translinguistic, transartistic, transsectional, transgender/transsexual, trans-mediatic, transregional and transcultural' productions. My own, more modest and hopefully verifiable argument in this book is that thinking along the lines of 'realist cinema' may help us to understand what 'world cinema' actually stands for.

Realism as Mode of Production

The revival of Bazinian film studies in the 2000s, following the decline of psychoanalytic and semiotic approaches, liberated scholars to talk more freely about 'realism', a term banned from the progressive agenda between the 1960s and 80s as 'politically retrograde' and 'naïve' (Gunning 2011: 119). In 2003, Ivone Margulies edited a collection of essays, entitled *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema,* which included, among its many excellent essays, Bazin's 'Death Every Afternoon', a key piece on the singularity of the recorded event underpinning his realist thought hitherto unavailable in the English language. Margulies's most important contribution to the realist debate was to shift the focus from narrative verisimilitude to what she calls 'performative' realism, i.e., the enactment or re-enactment of the profilmic event in the phenomenological world that she went on to crystallise in the idea of the embodied self in her latest single-authored *In Person: Reenactment in Postwar and Contemporary Cinema* (2019). Margulies's take on realism, necessarily focused on the point of production, strongly chimes with my own in this book.

The last two decades have also seen a flurry of works by Dudley Andrew resulting from his life-long devotion to Bazin's project and memory. In 2010 he published a single-authored book provocatively titled *What Cinema Is!* in response to Bazin's structuring interrogation *What Is Cinema?* as announced in the title of his most influential collection of articles (1967; 2005). In his book, Andrew boldly reasserts Bazin's realist ethos, by proclaiming: 'in whatever manifestation or period, real cinema has a relation to the real' (xxv), before delving into Bazin's philosophical peers (Sartre, Malraux,

Benjamin) and institutional ties, such as the *Cahiers du Cinéma.* In 2011, together with Hervé Jourbert-Laurencin, Andrew then edited the hitherto most encompassing and in-depth study of Bazin, *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory & its Afterlife,* which was followed in 2014 by *André Bazin's New Media,* a collection of articles by Bazin edited and translated by him. This scholarship, to which my own collection *Realism and the Audiovisual Media* (2009, co-edited by Cecília Mello) and single-authored book *World Cinema and the Ethics of Realism* (2011) sought to make a contribution, re-instated realism into the film studies agenda, as a result of what Thomas Elsaesser's 2009 essay on realism aptly defined as the 'ontological turn' (5ff). Unlike Bazin's, however, Elsaesser's view of realism concentrates on the spectator's body and senses, as expressed in his book *Film Theory: an introduction through the senses,* co-authored with Malte Hagener (2010: 12), which states:

> The cinema seems poised to leave behind its function as 'medium' (for the representation of reality) in order to become a 'life form' (and thus a reality in its own right). Our initial premise of asking film theory to tell us how films and cinema relate to the body and the senses thus may well lead to another question [...] namely whether [...] the cinema is not proposing to us, besides a new way of knowing the world, also a new way of 'being in the world', and thus demanding from film theory, next to a new epistemology, also a new ontology.

Richard Rushton, in his *The Reality of Film: Theories of Filmic Reality* (2011), strikes a similar chord by defining film (any film) as a real experience for the spectator. Building on Cornelius Castoriadis's notion of reality, he states:

> [F]ilms do not re-present anything. Instead, they create things; they create realities, they create possibilities, situations and events that have not had a previous existence; they give rise to objects and subjects whose reality is filmic. (Rushton 2011: 3)

Important though these approaches are in highlighting the spectatorial experience of film, there is very little of that experience that is actually demonstrable. As Tiago de Luca, author of *Realism of the Senses in World Cinema: The Experience of Physical Reality* (2014), aptly states, with regard to recent world cinema's realist vocation: 'this new realist aesthetic is [...] characterized by *a sensory mode of address* based on the protracted inspection of physical reality' (1) (my emphasis). Whether this realist 'mode of

address' can indeed effect a 'realist reception' by any spectator is, however, a major conundrum these studies have not yet resolved.[1]

In fact, the growth of the emphasis on a phenomenology centred on the spectator's body and senses has been accompanied by an opposite, non-anthropocentric trend on the philosophical front. The 2000s saw the birth and development of what is variously known as 'speculative realism', 'speculative materialism', 'object-oriented philosophy' and 'object-oriented ontology' (OOO), which has shifted the focus onto things regardless of their correlation with human thought. Involving promoters from Alain Badiou's disciple Quentin Meillassoux to popular scientist Timothy Morton, and corralling heavyweights, such as Graham Harman, Ray Brassier, Slavoj Žižek, Alberto Toscano and François Laruelle, this current is now gaining traction amidst media scholars, starting with Steven Shaviro, who adhered to it from a perspective informed by the metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead. Despite the great divergences among them, speculative realists are united, according to Shaviro, 'by a common commitment, shared with Whitehead, to metaphysical speculation and to a robust ontological realism':

> [T]hese recent thinkers are all forthright realists – in contrast to the way that so much twentieth-century thought was premised on a fundamental antirealism. [...] [P]henomenology, structuralism, and most subsequent schools of twentieth-century continental philosophy assume one version or another of the antirealist, Kantian claim that 'phenomena depend upon the mind to exist' [...]. It is this assumption, above all, that speculative realism seeks to overturn. (Shaviro 2014: 5)

Speculative realism's non-anthropocentric and environmentally-minded stance resonates in many respects with Bazin's own ontology of the photographic image and his privileging of the objective over the subjective world. So do most of the films and filmmakers in focus in this book, and further attention will be devoted to this line of thought in Chapter 2, focusing on Jafar Panahi's self-defeating attempt at mobilising an 'autonomous' camera whose function it is to capture the world regardless of a filmmaker's will or control.

In order to locate my own approach within the theories outlined above and to make an effective contribution to the debate, I will start by asking: where does realism actually lie? Why did a film such as *Ossessione* (Luchino

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1   For further reading on cinematic realism, see: Kappelhoff (2015); Peucker (2007); Foster (1996); Jerslev (2002); Aitken (2006), among others.

Visconti, 1943), studied in Chapter 8, strike everyone who saw it at the time as 'realist' to the point of inaugurating the most influential film movement of all time, Italian neorealism? It was certainly not for its conventional illusionist mode of storytelling, nor its highly melodramatic overtones, and not at all for any overwhelming sensory experience it afforded the spectator, but for its realist *mode of production,* that is, because the film crew went to real locations and inserted its highly trained celebrity actors into a context of poverty provided by the place's real population and habits. These, in turn, were caught on camera through long takes and long shots that preserve space-time continuity, which Bazin famously hailed as the realist procedure par excellence. In other words: because the evidential power of the audiovisual medium (its automatic nature, or ontology, or indexicality) could still be perceived in the final product. As much as the Deleuzian time-image and the sensory-motor relation it establishes with the spectator have become the all-time champions of world-cinema theorising, not least thanks to the rise of what has become known as 'slow cinema', it is now time to turn the gaze to *how* these images and sounds are manufactured and captured, and the tremendous effort a number of film crews and casts from all over the world put into *producing* as well as reproducing reality. Visconti's prowess in 1943, in terms of realism as mode of production, may sound tame, in our day, compared to the daring experiments enabled by light-weight and digital filming equipment, and in Chapter 8 I look into how *Ossessione*'s operatic endeavour caters more strongly towards what Visconti calls 'the reality of art' than the highly manipulated real settings and non-professional acting in his film.

Whatever the case, the drive towards realistic modes of production in world cinema has only increased ever since. It was moved by this drive that, for example, filmmakers Joshua Oppenheimer and Christine Cynn remained for eight years in close contact with utterly dangerous and powerful criminals in Indonesia, learning Indonesian in the process, in order to make *The Act of Killing*, analysed in Chapter 3, an instant watershed in documentary making. It was this same urge for evidential realism that motivated the duo Byambsuren Davaa and Luigi Falorni, the directors of *The Story of the Weeping Camel* (2003), discussed in Chapter 10, who faced the hardest conditions in the Gobi Desert, in Mongolia, driving thousands of kilometres amidst sandstorms in order to find the ideal pregnant camel. They then waited for this camel to give birth, in front of the cameras, to an albino calf which, as they could have only hoped for, was rejected by its mother. The fact that this camel was then calmed down, made to weep and accept its forlorn calf under the effect of an indigenous violin provided

the most irrefutable, even miraculous, proof of the reality of the fabled weeping camel.

Other film directors, such as Mizoguchi and Ozu, analysed in Chapter 5; Raul Ruíz, in Chapter 6; and Tata Amaral, Beto Brant, Cláudio Assis and Paulo Caldas, in Chapter 7, have grounded their realist project in the revelation of the multiple artistic and medial forms at the base of the audiovisual medium, which create in their films a passage to material and political reality. This also applies to Edgar Reitz and his crew and cast, whose life-long project *Heimat* became a mode of History-telling as well as of living this history, on the basis of the actors' exercise of their actual musical and other artistic talents in their onscreen performances. Others yet, such as Abderrahmane Sissako, Mikhail Zvyagintsev, Cristina Gallego and Ciro Guerra, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles, as much as Davaa and Falorni, have turned their cameras onto threatened landscapes, animals and populations of which their films become witnesses as much as engaged participants. Location is also key to a film such as Wim Wenders's *The State of Things* (1982), looked at in Chapter 1, which sprang from his stumbling on the extraordinary ruin of a half-submerged hotel on the Sintra seaside that materialises the postmodern condition as clearly as any high-level theorising. Jafar Panahi, banned as he is from making films for 20 years, has swapped filmmaking with life itself in what I term his non-cinema tetralogy, in Chapter 2. *Tabu* (Miguel Gomes, 2012) is yet another example of the negative use of cinema, by gravitating around an irresistible, all-consuming black hole, where the sombre legacy of colonialism makes itself felt by resisting representation, both in the African continent and in the former coloniser, Portugal. Realism as mode of production, in these films, means that these crews and casts believe that reality exists and can be inflected and improved through film.

In order to prove this point, this book will veer away from the still prevailing trend of focusing on the materiality of the spectatorial body and the sensuous reception of films, locating cinematic realism, instead, in the way films are made. I will argue that film crews and casts who choose to produce rather than just reproduce reality and to commit themselves to unpredictable events are moved by an ethics that Alain Badiou has defined as 'an active fidelity to the event of truth' (2006: xiii; see also Nagib 2011: 1ff). Three facts speak in favour of this model. First, realism at the point of production is clearly identifiable and measurable, as opposed to the 'reality effect' at the point of reception, which varies widely from one individual to another, remaining inevitably restricted to the speculative realm. Second, realism can be achieved at the point of production regardless

of the technology utilised for the capturing of images and sounds, whether it is the now obsolete celluloid strip or digital equipment. And third, realism is timeless, as the recurrent emergence of realist trends at certain historical junctures demonstrates, and is consequently not the result of the 'evolution of the language of cinema' or tributary to a supposed postwar modernity, as Bazin (1967b) would have had it.

In order to substantiate these contentions, I will start, unavoidably, by revisiting Bazin's realist theory. I will then proceed to laying out a possible taxonomy of cinematic realism according to modes of production, address, exhibition and reception. This will be followed by an explanation of the sub-modalities of the realist mode of production, which provide the structure of this book, from the negation of cinema that changes it into a way of living and interfering politically with world phenomena; to the intermedial procedure that turns other art forms within films into a passage to reality; and finally to the utopian 'myth of total cinema' which Bazin defined as the human desire for 'integral realism.'

Reality Between Modernity and the Digital Age

Bazin is central to this book because most of what he said about realism in the late 1940s and 1950s would apply to what is understood under 'world cinema' nowadays. This being a term that originated in the Anglophone world, untranslatable in most other film cultures and unavailable in Bazin's time, he chose to give to the new realism of his time the name of 'modern cinema.'

As I have discussed at length elsewhere (Nagib 2016: 25ff), this choice was coherent insofar as it represented the culmination of Bazin's evolutionist approach, according to which the best films ever made could not but be located in his own time. 'Modern cinema' thus starts with Italian neorealism in the late 1940s, excluding from its ranks not only what Bazin (1967b) calls the 'classical' Hollywood cinema, but prewar modernist cinema itself, as represented by Eisenstein and Soviet cinema, German Expressionism and the European avant-gardes in general, due to their allegiance to montage. Though circumstantial and transient at origin, the concept of 'modern cinema' has prevailed in film studies ever since, having been lavishly applied to signify almost any narrative films produced outside the Hollywood system from the Second World War onwards. However, beyond the questionable opposition between modernity and modernism, this model is further flawed by the fact that many realist filmmakers of Bazin's own pantheon, including Renoir, Stroheim, Murnau and Dreyer, were active much before the Second World

War and already resorting to the techniques he deemed both realist and modern. Conversely, neorealist filmmakers were not necessarily averse to montage, if you just think of the quick-fire editing in Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* (*Germania anno zero,* 1947), a neorealist milestone which is more akin to the urban velocity featured in a modernist film like *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (*Berlin: die Symfonie der Grosstadt,* Walter Ruttmann, 1927) than to the contemplative attitude associated with the Bergsonian *durée* at the base of Bazin's definition of modern cinema. These contradictions have not stopped Bazin's evolutionist model from continuing to be widely adopted in film scholarship, not least thanks to the endorsement it received from Deleuze (2013), the most influential film philosopher of all time, who adopted the Second World War as the dividing line between classical and modern cinema, these being respectively characterised by the 'movement-image' and the 'time-image,' which disregard chronology even more frontally than Bazin.

Whilst paying due respect to these seminal theories, my proposal is to think about realism and world cinema away from evolutionist models that fail to cohere even with the schemes in which they originated, and which inevitably place Europe as the gravitational centre of world/modern cinema and in irrevocable opposition to Hollywood and all other so-called classical/commercial cinemas. As David Martin-Jones (2011: 7) rightly suggests, keeping away from Eurocentric and 'othering' mechanisms can reinvigorate these thinkers' ideas and broaden their scope for future usage. Thinking in terms of modes of production can do precisely that without excluding works pre- or post-WWII, along the lines, for example, of Siegfried Kracauer, whose famous book *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* describes cinema as dominated from the outset by 'realistic' and 'formative' tendencies, represented respectively by Lumière's documentaries and Méliès' fantasy films (1997: 30ff).

My proposal of a timeless view of realism has nonetheless to overcome the challenge represented by the advent of digital technology. Both Bazin and Kracauer were theorising on the basis of photographic recording, or, in Bazin's terms, the 'ontology of the photographic image', through which the object is directly imprinted on the film emulsion without the mediation of the human being, as in the case of the death mask or the Holy Shroud (Bazin 1967: 14). However, digital technology changed the process of recording in radical ways that disrupted film's fundamental link with the objective real, as Miriam Hansen (1997: viii) was quick to note in her introduction to the new edition of Kracauer's book:

> Digital technologies such as computer enhancement, imaging, and editing have shifted the balance increasingly toward the postproduction phase.

> Not only can 'mistakes' made during shooting be 'corrected' and recorded effects be maximized, but on the very level of production live-action images and sounds can be generated independently of any referent in the outside world.

This argument was later expanded upon by new-media herald Lev Manovich (2016), who observes:

> Cinema traditionally involved arranging physical reality to be filmed through the use of sets, models, art direction, cinematography, etc. Occasional manipulation of recorded film (for instance, through optical printing) was negligible compared to the extensive manipulation of reality in front of a camera. In digital filmmaking, shot footage is no longer the final point but just raw material to be manipulated in a computer where the real construction of a scene will take place. In short, the production becomes just the first stage of post-production. (29)

Perfectly valid in principle, this argument however obscures the fact that many filmmakers continue to valorise production above post-production, even when using digital technology. Indeed, one of the most remarkable consequences of the digital revolution was to enable filmmakers from the most disparate areas of the globe to embark on otherwise unthinkable realist ventures, if you just think of Panahi and his constant use, in the forbidden tetralogy, of small digital cameras and smart phones, without which his whole secret subversive project would have been unfeasible.

Having sparked an avalanche of scholarship and ushered in a 'post-cinematic' era, as announced in the excellent collection *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st Century Film* (2016), the digital revolution is also at the core of Elsaesser's (2009) aforementioned essay, which defines realism in the post-photographic era as an 'ontology mark two'. Unconcerned with the loss of the index and brought about by computer-generated images and sounds, this new ontology, for him, 'breaks with the Cartesian subject-object split, abandoning or redefining notions of subjectivity, consciousness, identity and the way these have hitherto been used and understood' (7). It is however intriguing that Elsaesser should produce evidence for his thesis through the analysis of a film such *Three Iron* (*Bin jip,* Kim Ki-duk, 2004). Granted, in this film, humans share agency with objects and spaces, the animate and inanimate swap roles, and characters become visible and invisible at will. The real and its representation are thus brought into question, but only as

mode of address, that is, as fictional subjects in a plot akin to postmodernism and the horror genre. As a result, 'ontology mark two' turns out to be, in this case, an exercise in style.

As always, however, Elsaesser has his finger on the pulse, and his film example highlights the blind spot still in need of clarification: the phases and modes in which cinematic realism may (or may not) be produced. In order to clarify this point, I will now proceed to lay out a tentative taxonomy of cinematic realism covering the film process in its various phases, from production to reception.

Towards a Taxonomy of Cinematic Realism

Bearing in mind the limitations and artificiality of all schemes, and that the modes below never come in isolation, but are entwined and mutually dependent, I will attempt to establish the possible locations of realism in cinema as follows **(Table 1)**:

Table 1   Taxonomy of Cinematic Realism

Modes of Production	Modes of Address	Modes of Exhibition	Modes of Reception
Physical engagement on the part of crew and cast with the profilmic event	Narrative realism as obtained by the 'cinematographic apparatus'	Films that include live performance, such as in expanded cinema experiments	Audiences' and market behaviour
Identity between casts and their roles	The production of an 'impression of reality'	Or the opposite, films aiming at extreme illusionism: 3D and Imax environments, and 4D Virtual Reality works	The way films affect the 'mind' or 'mental structures'
Real location shooting	The 'reality effect' derived from graphic or sensational representations		Realism as affect involving the body and the senses
Emphasis on the index			Interactive behaviours as enabled by the Internet, DVDs, games, etc.
The inclusion of artworks in progress within the film			

In recent times, most theories on cinematic realism have been concerned with the last category, that is, with realism as **mode of reception**. This has a history that I have addressed in detail in two books (Nagib 2009; 2011) and will deserve a brief summary here. The emphasis on spectatorial reception emerged as a reaction against Cartesian traditions of body-mind dualism as seen in psychoanalytic approaches to film in the 1970s, in particular in French semiology and the *Screen* criticism, which famously defined the film spectator as a passive subject regressed to the Lacanian mirror-stage infancy. Most contentiously within the *Screen* criticism, but bearing uniquely foundational insights, Laura Mulvey's essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' ([1975] 2009) condemned spectatorial pleasure as elicited by Hollywood cinema as narcissistic, scopophilic and ideologically charged. The reaction to these accusations came in the 1980s, when David Bordwell (1997), drawing on Constructivism, formulated theories around 'mental structures' to explain the universal popularity of American mainstream cinema, while cognitivists such as Noël Carroll (1988) and Murray Smith (1996) rejected the Brecht-inspired opposition between illusionistic absorption and critical spectatorship. In the early 1990s, Deleuze's emphasis on sensory-motor modes of communication motivated critics such as Steven Shaviro (2006) to add the body to this equation, with a view to reinstating pleasure as constitutive of spectatorial experience. This was followed by the celebration of the 'embodied spectator' in the 2000s, as most notably represented by Vivian Sobchack. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Sobchack (2004: 4) proposed 'embodiment' as 'a radically material condition of the human being that necessarily entails both the body and consciousness, objectivity and subjectivity, in an *irreducible ensemble*'. Along the same lines, Laura Marks (2002: xiii-xv) put forward the concept of 'haptic criticism' as a kind of physical fusion between film and viewer.

As can be seen, the common thread across these views is the focus on realism as a *reality effect* on the human body and senses, hence on realism at the point of reception. It is indeed a fact that, regardless of their recording processes or modes of storytelling, audiovisual media can affect spectators by means of graphic representations able to cause physical and emotional impact even when there is no representational realism at play, for example, when the physical impact on the spectator derives from animation or computer-generated images and sounds (Black 2002). Traditional 2D screenings of action films are perfectly capable of producing reality effects, but particular **modes of exhibition**, such as 3D projections, Imax environments and the more recent 4D Virtual Reality devices, have been specifically designed to enhance them. With all of them, however, reality

effects can only be effects and not actual reality, given the interdiction of spectatorial participation. Even Virtual Reality devices, though allowing the viewer to move their head freely and choose what to look at or listen to within a 360° spectrum, are unable to provide any kind of actual interaction. As Christian Metz (1982: 61-65) was the first to note, there is an unbridgeable fracture between seeing and being seen in audiovisual media due to the temporal gap that separates the moment of shooting from that of viewing, and this is why, for Metz, the spectator's position at any film projection is necessarily scopophilic.

Reality effects are moreover subordinated to varying subjective susceptibilities, hence impossible to measure by universal standards. There is also the fact that, as technology evolves and tricks are cracked, reality effects tend to wane with time and lose the battle against the human brain, which opposes a natural resistance to illusionism. A historical example is that of the audience members who purportedly fainted or ran away when first exposed to Lumière's *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (*L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat,* 1895), a film which has become perfectly innocuous to current-day spectators. As Oliver Grau (2003: 152) aptly explains:

> When a new medium of illusion is introduced, it opens a gap between the power of the image's effect and conscious/reflected distancing in the observer. This gap narrows again with increasing exposure and there is a reversion to conscious appraisal. Habituation chips away at the illusion, and soon it no longer has the power to captivate. It becomes stale, and the audience are hardened to its attempts at illusion. At this stage, the observers are receptive to content and artistic media competence, until finally a new medium with even greater appeal to the senses and greater suggestive power comes along and casts a spell of illusion over the audience again.

There is however one case in which objective realism can be found at the exhibition stage: when the film projection involves live performance. Expanded cinema experiments are the ultimate expression of this category, insofar as they preserve the auratic *Einmaligkeit* (or uniqueness) held by Benjamin as the very definition of an artwork. However, for this same reason, they also have to relent on the recording and replicating properties of the film medium aimed at reaching the masses – the 'public' without which, as Bazin (1967c: 75) claims, there is no cinema – as well as to the possibility of being preserved for posterity. Film studies tools alone are therefore insufficient to address such phenomena.

As for **modes of address,** realism must forcibly be associated with the impression of reality elicited by what Baudry (1986) famously defined as the basic cinematographic apparatus (*l'appareil de base*), including the projector, the flat screen and the dark, collective auditorium. Despite film's vertiginous technological development since its invention and the multiplication of its uses, supports and platforms, the basic cinematographic apparatus as provided by the cinema auditorium has demonstrated extraordinary resilience, remaining for over a century the standard outlet for filmic experience. This endurance, I believe, is due to the comfort zone if affords the spectator between the reality effect and the natural brain resistance to total illusionism. It is moreover a space capable of accommodating a range of cinematic genres and styles, from classical narrative cinema of closure, devoted to eliciting an impression of reality, to mixed-genre productions endowed with disruptive devices that draw attention to the reality of the medium. Moreover, as Arnheim (1957: 3) had already noted, human 3D perception of reality is itself an illusion given that the human retina is as flat as the traditional cinema screen. The three-dimensional impression we have of objective reality is only produced thanks to our stereoscopic vision that promotes the fusion of two slightly different images resulting from the distance between our eyes.

This brings us back to the hypothesis announced earlier in this section that the only clearly identifiable and measurable cinematic realism derives from the first category, that is, from **modes of production**, relying heavily on: the physical engagement on the part of crew and cast with the profilmic event; the near-identity between the cast and their roles; real location shooting; the audiovisual medium's inherent indexical property; and the engagement with works of art in progress within the film. In films resulting from this mode of production, the illusionistic fictional thread (if it exists) interweaves with documentary footage and/or approach, as well as with crew and cast's direct interference with the historical world, aimed not only at highlighting the reality of the medium but also at producing, as well as reproducing, social and historical reality. Needless to say, none of the modes above exist for their own sake, a film relying on physical engagement at production point being only conceived in this way for the specific reality effect it is expected to have on the spectator. Modes of production are however, I wish to argue, the only *objective* way of proofing and proving a film's intention, given the countless variables inflecting the ways in which films are subjectively perceived by each individual.

Non-cinema, Intermedial Passages and Total Cinema as Modes of Production

To recapitulate, this book proposes to replace the general appellation of 'world cinema' with the more substantive concept of 'realist cinema', all the while valorising world cinema as an invaluable reservoir of diversity and inclusion. Arguing that an ethics of the real has bound world films together across history and geography at cinema's most creative peaks, the book veers away from the usual focus on modes of reception and spectatorship, locating instead cinematic realism in the way films are made. The volume is structured across three innovative categories of realist modes of production: 'non-cinema', or a cinema that questions the film medium, aspiring to be life itself, in constant, and often self-defeating, competition with the medium's inevitable manipulation of world phenomena; 'intermedial passages', or films that incorporate other artworks in progress as a channel to historical and political reality; and 'total cinema', or films moved by a totalising impulse, be it towards the total work of art, total history or all-encompassing landscapes, deployed as the only universe available to humans and other animals inhabiting it. Though mostly devoted to recent productions, each part starts with the analysis of foundational classics, which have paved the way for future realist endeavours, thereby reasserting the point, made earlier in this introduction, that realism is timeless and inherent in cinema from its origin.

Thus Part I, Non-cinema, starts, in Chapter 1, with an analysis of Wim Wenders's 1982 *The State of Things,* a watershed film that distils, in programmatic fashion, the idea of cinema's inherent but unachievable mission to become material reality. The film is located at a significant historical juncture, which marks, on the one hand, the end of the European new waves and new cinemas, and, on the other, Hollywood's move into a self-styled postmodern era, dominated by self-reflexive remakes. More pointedly, it attempts to theorise, in form and content, this cinematic end of history by means of a mise-en-abyme construction evolving across multiple layers of self-referentiality and self-negation, that exposes it to the contingencies of the local environment and improvisations of the characters/actors, rendered idle with the disruption of the film within the film they were working on.

Chapter 2 brings a reflection on Jafar Panahi's forbidden tetralogy, *This Is Not a Film* (*In film nist*, co-directed by Mojtaba Mirtahmasb, 2011), *Closed Curtain* (*Pardeh,* co-directed by Kambuzia Partovi, 2013), *Taxi Tehran* (*Taxi,* 2015) and *Three Faces* (*Se rokh,* 2018), all of which have come into being despite (or rather as a result of) the 20-year ban from making films imposed on him by the Iranian authorities. Forcibly shot in enclosed spaces – his own apartment in

This Is Not a Film, his leisure home at the Caspian Sea in *Closed Curtain,* inside a car in *Taxi Tehran,* and mostly inside a car again in *Three Faces,* as Panahi travels to his remote native village in Iranian Azerbaijan – the forbidden tetralogy is marked by a relentless scrutiny of these restrained locations and of the director himself, turned into reluctant protagonist of his non-films. Incipient plots are commented on, but remain undeveloped amidst the register of the frustrated filmmaker's daily routine and conversations with occasional interlocutors. In such restrictive circumstances, Panahi's irrepressible creative vein is channelled towards bringing to the fore, with radical realism, film's inherent conundrum between its recording and artistic properties.

Chapter 3 focuses on *The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer, Christine Cynn and anonymous)*,* a film that opens up uncharted territory on which to recast the tenets of documentary, world cinema and filmmaking in general. It required the entire crew to put their own lives at risk in the name of a project they hoped would change the way we experience cinema and reality with it. The film's realist commitment emerges from where it is least expected, namely from Hollywood genres, such as the musical, the film noir and the western, which are used *as* documentary, that is to say, as a fantasy realm where perpetrators can confess to their crimes without restraints or fear of punishment, but which nonetheless retains the evidentiary weight of the recording medium. The usual process of illusionistic identification on the part of the spectator is turned on its head by means of disguising these criminals as amateur filmmakers, led to shoot, act within, and then watch their own film within the film so as to force them to experience beyond any illusion the suffering they had caused. Thus, *The Act of Killing* negates cinema in order to usher in the stark reality of death.

Part I closes with a study, in Chapter 4, of Miguel Gomes's *Tabu* (2012), another eloquent example of the negative use of cinema for realist ends. As is the case with the *The Act of Killing, Tabu* addresses a nation's tainted historical past by means of a relentless questioning of the film medium and its representational properties. Though similar in their self-reflexive method, the two films differ greatly in their approach. Whereas the former tracks down perpetrators of genocide in Indonesia in order to obtain the evidence of their crimes, in the latter, the horrors of Portuguese colonialism in Africa – the main issue at stake – remain conspicuous by their absence. Both in Mozambique and Lisbon, where the film was shot, the sombre legacy of colonialism makes itself felt by resisting representation.

Part II, Intermedial Passages, starts by revisiting, in Chapter 5, the work of two cinematic giants, Kenji Mizoguchi and Yasujirō Ozu, and their recourse to theatre in *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* (*Zangiku monogatari,*

1939) and *Floating Weeds* (*Ukigusa,* 1959) respectively. In them, the mediums of theatre and film are scrutinised through the self-reflexive genre of *geidōmono*, encompassing films in which the protagonist is a practitioner of one of the traditional Japanese arts. Here, theatre serves both the Mizoguchi and the Ozu films to break down the system at the base of the mediums of theatre and film into their constitutive parts, provide evidence of their reality, and propose a fairer arrangement of them. As a result, realism becomes closely associated with self-reflexivity as regards the ruthless hierarchy of kabuki and related theatrical forms, which correspond to the film directors' extreme demands on the cast themselves. Thus, the theatre spectacles, on the rare occasions they are presented to the spectator, become infused with the reality of life, not just that of the characters on stage, but also of the actual film actors and their real world.

Chapter 6 is an analysis of Raúl Ruiz's 2011 *Mysteries of Lisbon*, the lengthiest film ever made by the director, consisting of a monumental adaptation (4h26min as a film, 6h as a TV series) of Camilo Castelo Branco's eponymous novel in three volumes, in which interconnected narrative strands multiply wide and deep across generations. Whilst questioning the medium and its hierarchical position among other media, the film also brings storytelling close to reality and history-telling by creating holes in the narrative mesh through which the spectator can catch a glimpse of the incompleteness and incoherence of real life. In this context, the film's constant intermedial morphings become 'passages' to the real, through which drawings, paintings, sculptures and murals change into live action and vice versa, silently subverting the idea that the story could have one single end, or an end at all.

A companion piece to the feature-length documentary *Passages: Travelling in and out of film through Brazilian geography* (directed by me and Samuel Paiva)*,* Chapter 7 crystallises the main issue at stake in Part II, that is, the utilisation within film of artforms such as painting, theatre, poetry and music as a bridge or a 'passage' to political and social reality. Rather than focusing on individual artists and films, the chapter addresses a national phenomenon, more specifically, selected works by filmmakers from the states of São Paulo (Beto Brant and Tata Amaral) and Pernambuco (Cláudio Assis/Hilton Lacerda, Paulo Caldas/Marcelo Luna), in Brazil, who over the years have bridged across their regions' very different social history and geographic situation by means of a shared artistic and political platform. Their films commingle in the desire to reassess questions of national identity and social inequality, once at the heart of the Cinema Novo movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which they revisit through a less ideological lens, but an enhanced commitment to realism at the point of production. At the

same time, the films' independent character favours an emboldened use of the film medium that recognises no borders and exposes its inextricable connections with other art and medial forms. The intermedial method is thus strategically poised to shed a new light on the ways in which these films not only represent but interfere with and transform the world around them.

Part III focuses on films bearing an irrepressible desire for totality, be it the total work of art, the complete history of a country or the entire world as represented by monumental landscapes. It starts, in Chapter 8, with a study of *Ossessione* (Luchino Visconti, 1943), a film universally recognised as a masterpiece and foundational work of Italian neorealism, the most influential film movement of all time, which has inspired new realist film currents and independent productions around the globe. Accordingly, it has been scrutinised from a variety of angles by successive generations of scholars. Yet, as is the case with any masterpiece of this magnitude, the possibilities of novel approaches to it are inexhaustible. In this chapter, I revisit the crucial topic of realism in *Ossessione* through a perspective hitherto underexplored in scholarship on the film, namely the contribution of opera and music to its realist endeavour. Under this light, *Ossessione* changes into an accomplished example of the aspiration to total cinema or even total artwork, not at reception point as Bazin (1967d) would have had it, but at the point of production.

Chapter 9 focuses on *Heimat 2: Chronicle of a Generation* (*Die zweite Heimat: Chronik einer Jugend,* 1992), the second part of the monumental *Heimat* TV and cinema series, scripted and directed by German filmmaker Edgar Reitz. The project, spanning over 60 hours so far, has in *Heimat 2* its longest instalment, with 13 episodes totalling more than 25 hours of film. My objective here is to evaluate the ways in which the *Heimat 2* series, as part of a 'total-history' project, i.e. the retelling of the history of Germany from the nineteenth century to today, presents history in the making by means of intermediality, that is, through the use of music as theme, diegetic performance and organisational principle of all episodes. Set in the clearly demarcated decade of the 1960s, *Heimat 2* is devoted to chronicling the development of the Neue Musik (New Music) movement amidst the artistic effervescence in Germany at the time, including the beginnings of what was initially known as Junger deutscher Film (Young German Cinema) and later Neuer deutscher Film (New German Cinema). Beyond its many allusions to real facts and personalities in film and music, all the musical roles in the series feature real instrumentalists, singers, conductors and composers, who were all, almost miraculously, also brilliant actors, able to enact on-camera as fiction their actual musical talents. It is in the reality of this musicianship, and the way it inflects the series' form and content, that

lies, I wish to claim, an element of incontestable truth, beyond the inevitable, even necessary, betrayals of history taking place on the level of the fable.

Part III, and the book itself, closes with Chapter 10, which examines Bazin's 'myth of total cinema' in light of a major trend in recent world cinema to focus on monumental landscapes, in films by Byambsuren Davaa and Luigi Falorni (*The Story of the Weeping Camel/Ingen nulims,* 2003), Abderrahmane Sissako (*Timbuktu,* 2014), Mikhail Zvyagintsev (*Leviathan/Leviafan,* 2014), Nuri Bilge Ceylan (*Winter Sleep/Kış uykusu,* 2014), Cristina Gallego and Ciro Guerra (*Birds of Passage/Pájaros de verano*, 2018), and Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles (*Bacurau,* 2019). Taken together, these films testify to the remarkable convergence among filmmakers from the most disparate corners of the globe in resorting to expansive landscapes as a totalising cosmos and a sealed-off stage for the drama of existence. In all these films, the totalising impetus, expressed through the monumental scale of the landscape, combines with a desire for realism by means of real locations endowed with unique geological formations, vegetation, populations and fauna. In all cases, however, the isolated, remote and self-contained settings remain vulnerable to alien invaders whose presence produces a tear in their integrity allowing for issues of our time – political corruption, drug trafficking, destructive tourism, gun culture – to seep in and ultimately restore their indexical link with the real world. This is also, and most importantly, the process through which landscape reveals itself as a repository of history. The chapter goes on to define the drive towards total cinema, in the films in focus, as realist, but of a realism at the opposite end of Bazin's famous 'myth of total cinema', which he describes as the human desire for the 'reconstruction of a perfect illusion of the outside world' (1967d: 20). It argues, instead, that realism in these films takes place at the point of production, by focusing on real landscapes that change fiction into fact. The chapter ends up, nonetheless, meeting Bazin's total illusionism through the back door, which he left conveniently open for cinema's return to the moment when it 'had not yet been invented' (Bazin 1967d: 21).

Committed to a realist mode of production, all films in this book are political, transformative and promising of a new, hopefully better, world.

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Part I

Non-cinema

1 The Death of (a) Cinema

The State of Things

Abstract

Chapter 1 focuses on Wim Wenders's 1982 *The State of Things,* a watershed film that distils, in programmatic fashion, the idea of cinema's inherent but unachievable mission to become material reality. The film is located at a significant historical juncture, which marks, on the one hand, the end of the European new waves and new cinemas, and, on the other, Hollywood's move into a self-styled postmodern era, dominated by self-reflexive remakes. More pointedly, it attempts to theorise, in form and content, this cinematic end of history by means of a mise-en-abyme construction evolving across multiple layers of self-referentiality and self-negation, that exposes it to the contingencies of the local environment and improvisations of the characters/actors.

Keywords: Wim Wenders; *The State of Things*; Postmodernism; Remakes; Allusionism; German Cinema

The State of Things (*Der Stand der Dinge,* Wim Wenders, 1982) constitutes the ideal object with which to initiate this part of the book because it distils, in programmatic fashion, the idea of non-cinema, that is, cinema's inherent but unachievable mission to become material reality.[1] The film is located at a significant historical juncture, which marks, on the one hand, the end of the European new waves and new cinemas, and, on the other, Hollywood's move into a self-styled postmodern era, dominated by self-reflexive remakes. More pointedly, *The State of Things* attempts to theorise, in form and content, this cinematic end of history by means of a mise-en-abyme construction evolving across multiple layers of self-referentiality and self-negation. The film starts as a post-catastrophe sci-fi entitled *The Survivors,* which is interrupted after

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1   I have previously elaborated on the idea of 'non-cinema' in Nagib (2016).

a few minutes to reveal itself as a film in the making brought to a halt due to the disappearance of its Hollywood producer and the exhaustion of film stock. It then proceeds as a faux documentary of the crew and cast of *The Survivors,* idly waiting for the shoot to resume on the real locations, a ruined hotel semi-sunken into the sea and its rocky surroundings in the vicinity of Sintra, Portugal. The characters, now donning the mask of actors and technicians, spend their time in the exercise of individual hobbies, such as drawing, painting, playing music, photography, reading, writing and computing, all portrayed as frustrated attempts at capturing and making sense of the real world around them. In the meantime, dialogue lines and voiceovers weave together the film's main declaration of purpose, namely the insufficiency of film, together with all its constitutive artistic and medial forms, to accurately reproduce reality.

With its extensive theorising on the end of the world, the end of cinema and its own failure to deliver a fictional narrative, *The State of Things* prefigures Fredric Jameson's (2001 [1984]: 188) groundbreaking definition of the postmodern, published just a couple of years later in the article 'Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism':

> The last few years have been marked by an inverted millennarianism, in which premonitions of the future, catastrophic or redemptive have been replaced by senses of the end of this or that [...]: taken together, all of these perhaps constitute what is increasingly called postmodernism.

Jameson (188) locates at the origin of this tendency a historical break or *coupure,* which

> is most often related to notions of the waning or extinction of the hundred-year-old modern movement (or to its ideological or aesthetic repudiation). Thus, abstract expressionism in painting, existentialism in philosophy, the final forms of representation in the novel, the films of the great *auteurs*, or the modernist school of poetry [...]: all these are now seen as the final, extraordinary flowering of a high modernist impulse which is spent and exhausted with them.

The State of Things fits this description to perfection, with its apocalyptical discourse on the end of times which Russell (1990: 15) has referred to as 'apolitical romanticism'. As is well known, the film was born out of director Wenders's frustrated experience with the making of a neo-noir in Hollywood, where he had been summoned to work by New-Hollywood grandee, Francis

Ford Coppola, thanks to his auteurist style, but where his exercise of it was thwarted by the producer's own commercial concerns. Thus, the hero in *The State of Things*, played by the discretely blasé Belgian actor Patrick Bauchau, is Wenders's alter-ego Friedrich (Fritz) Munro, a pun on the names of Fritz Lang and Friedrich Murnau, two legendary German directors who migrated to Hollywood at the turn of 1920s and 30s. Embodying the sacrificial auteur in the ruthless industrial capital of cinema, Fritz ends up murdered together with his Hollywood producer, Gordon (Allen Goorwitz), who stands for the now defunct American cinema which had been so inspirational to the European new waves. Among New German Cinema directors, Wenders was perhaps the most outspoken American cinema devotee, paying constant homages in his films to the same classical Hollywood directors and B-movie icons enshrined in the auteur pantheon by erstwhile *Cahiers du Cinéma* writers and Nouvelle Vague filmmakers, under the leadership of François Truffaut. In *The State of Things* Wenders testifies to this affiliation by means of explicit references to the Nouvelle Vague's foremost self-reflexive director, Jean-Luc Godard, and *Contempt* (*Le Mépris,* 1963), Godard's reckoning with and self-affirmation against Hollywood. Indeed, *Contempt* contains some key elements of *The State of Things*: the film about a film, here the interrupted screen adaptation of the *Odyssey*; the presence of Fritz Lang, not just as a citation, but in person, speaking the three languages Wenders claims to be his own comfort zone, German, English and French; a representative from Hollywood, in the person of legendary actor Jack Palance, who embodies the most sordid side of the film industry, including its despicable treatment of women; among other things. Not accidentally, Jameson (2001: 189) lists, under the postmodern category, 'Godard, post-Godard and experimental cinema and video, but also a whole new type of commercial film', as represented, in *The State of Things,* both by the victimised auteur and the New-Hollywood catastrophe film, *The Survivors*. From that perspective, Wenders's film, albeit against its own grain, is a salutary swansong of the chain of male geniuses who until very recently constituted the staple of western cinema, including the producers at the head of the Hollywood system; the American directors revered by their French and German new-wave counterparts; and the European auteurs themselves. It was indeed time for them all to retreat to the background and make room for the enormous diversity of films produced around the world with plenty of stories to tell.

Rather than in the film's profuse and often dubious philosophising on the end of times, this chapter is interested in the overflowing of the objective reality beyond the various devices and frames employed to capture it. I shall argue that the emphasis on the 'postmodern' character of *The State of*

Things obscures the most positive aspect of its proclaimed death of cinema, namely its realism. The film is first and foremost its real locations in Los Angeles, Lisbon and, in particular, the cliffs around Sintra complete with a monumental modernist seaside hotel half-destroyed by the waves. After stumbling upon this extravagant semi-ruin in Sintra, Wenders is said to have immediately decided to shoot his next film there (Boujout 1986: 99). More than the characters' postmodern reiterations of the end of history and of storytelling, it is the disintegration of this hotel which provides material evidence of the end of the modernist project. The idea of a Europe and its imperial power being irretrievably eroded from the edges, as the sea invades its westernmost extremity, comes across compellingly by means of the camera's careful scrutiny of these locations more than from the lofty verbal quotations to this effect that abound in the film. Depicted as the victory of the objective over the subjective world, the film's realism is entirely in tune with Bazin (2005: 37-38), who defines, about a neorealist film such as *Paisan* (*Paisà,* Roberto Rossellini, 1946), what he calls the 'image fact':

> [T]he nature of 'image facts' is not only to maintain with the other image facts the relationships invented by the mind [...] Each image being on its own just a fragment of reality *existing before any meanings* [my emphasis], the entire surface of the scene should manifest an equally concrete density [...] Man himself is just one fact among others, to whom no pride of place should be given *a priori.*

In tune with more recent non-anthropocentric approaches to film and art, such as critical realism and speculative realism (further elaborated upon in the next chapter), Bazin offers with the concept of 'image facts' a suitable explanation to the chosen imagery in *The State of Things,* in which realism is directly connected to style, or, in Bazin's (2005: 37) words, to the 'deliberately intended quality in the photography'. In the hands of an aesthete such as French DoP Henri Alekan, and combined with Wenders's own exceptional photographic talent, film itself becomes material presence, not only as landscape, but as apparatus, as its innards are exposed as reflectors, cables, cameras, false background screens, hanging film strips, photographs, drawings, paintings, books, typewriters with blank pages of the stagnant script, computer data and sound recordings. Through the camera's exacting fidelity to its objects, all these are revealed as the pre-existing reality of a (non-)film.

Thanks to this '*pre*givenness of the universe to the human' – as Philip Rosen (2003: 57) has defined the Bazinian realist principle – non-cinema,

as much as the 'postmodern', lends itself, in *The State of Things,* to a positive reading. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre (2003: 40) explains his negative dialects as follows:

> [B]eing is prior to nothingness and establishes the ground for it. By this we must understand not only that being has a logical precedence over nothingness but also that it is from being that nothingness derives concretely its efficacy[...] [N]othingness, which is not, can have only a borrowed existence, and it gets its being from being. Its nothingness of being is encountered only within the limits of being, and the total disappearance of being would not be the advent of the reign of non-being, but on the contrary the concomitant disappearance of nothingness. *Non-being exists only on the surface of being.*

Sartre's atheistic existentialism is however strongly anthropocentric, as he emphatically declares in *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (2000: 15):

> Atheistic existentialism, which I represent [...] states that, if God does not exist, there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept, and that this being is man or, as Heidegger puts it, human reality.

Having drawn upon Sartre's phenomenological ontology for his own realist project, Bazin went on to turn it on its head with regard to cinema, by stating, in his Impure Cinema essay, that 'we must say of the cinema that its existence precedes its essence' (1967: 71). In order to test the application of this thought to our case study, I propose to consider non-cinema as intrinsically dependent, not on the cinema *The State of Things* has declared dead, but on what preceded it, that is, objective reality.

The State of Things and 'Allusionism'

The fact that, 30 years on, film in its most various forms and platforms, is still alive and well suggests that the postmodern announcement of the death of cinema, in *The State of Things,* should not be taken at face value. Suffice it to remember that, rather than providing a closure to Wim Wenders's career, the film is only the twelfth of his prolific production, spanning 39 feature-length titles at the time of writing. Within this long career, peppered with masterpieces and milestones such as *Kings of the Road* (*Im Lauf der Zeit,* 1976), *Paris, Texas* (1984), *Wings of Desire* (*Der Himmel über Berlin,*

1987) and *Pina* (2011), *The State of Things* stands out as a kind of symbolic capsule. It marks the peak as much as the decline of the New German Cinema, signalling the retreat into obscurity of some of its most illustrious representatives (such as Hans-Jürgen Syberberg), while others, such as Werner Herzog, Volker Schlöndorff and Wim Wenders himself, move on, in the wake of their international success, to greener pastures abroad, i.e. Hollywood in Wenders's case. The film functions as a landmark of this process, offering cinematic expression to a debate first initiated by André Bazin and Gilles Deleuze, which had hitherto been circumscribed to film theory and could be summarised as follows:

<div align="center">

Hollywood vs Europe
↓
Classical vs modern cinema
↓
Realist vs illusionist cinema
↓
Movement vs time
↓
Pure vs impure cinema

</div>
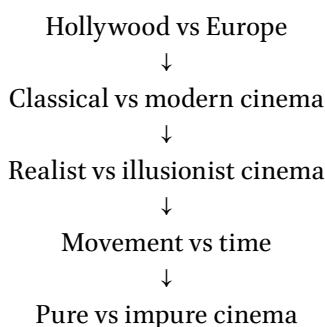
In previous writings (Nagib 2006; 2011; 2012) I have addressed with suspicion these binary oppositions as well as the resulting evolutionist understanding of history and film history that perpetuates the centrality of Hollywood and Europe within world cinema history. Hence the usefulness of the concept of non-cinema, which allows us to transfer the theoretical debate from the outside to the inside of the medium, configuring it as film's constitutive dilemma. Be it covertly, as in conventional narrative cinema, or overtly as in *The State of Things,* self-negation lies at the heart of the film medium given its time-based properties that allow it to self-present as reality. Non-cinema specimens, such as the films analysed in Part I of this book, recognise and expose this dilemma by striving for an identity with the phenomenological Real, an aim whose impossibility results in a bottomless mise-en-abyme. In the film in focus here, a self-conscious exercise in non-cinema, the film medium is first dismembered into its various constitutive art and medial forms before its final demise, forever inching towards, but never really crossing, its ultimate self-destructive border with real life.

Jean-François Lyotard (1986: 3), the first to theorise on what he calls 'the postmodern condition', dates it back to 'the end of the 1950s, which for Europe marks the completion of reconstruction'. Jameson (2001: 189)

agrees with the timeframe of 'the end of the 1950s or the early 1960s', though questioning whether the artistic movements taking place in that period 'imply any more fundamental change or break than the periodic style- and fashion-changes determined by an older high-modernist imperative of stylistic innovation'. Whatever the case, the mere use of the prefix 'post' implies a teleological and evolutionist understanding of history. By contrast, the idea of non-cinema refers to a non-teleological tendency to self-negate inherent in the medium, which unveils itself as such at cyclical turning points in film history triggered by the 'imperative of stylistic innovation' mentioned by Jameson, which is likely the case of *The State of Things.* From the late 1970s, Hollywood had become awash with remakes and sequels that recycled both home-made and foreign classics. The period is variously defined as 'New Hollywood', 'postmodern' and 'postclassical', all to signify an increasing dearth of fictional subjects and modes of storytelling. In 1982, the same year *The State of Things* was released, Noël Carroll (1998 [1982]: 241) published an insightful explanation for the phenomenon, which he referred to as 'allusionism':

> Allusion [...] is an umbrella term covering a mixed lot of practices includ-ing quotations, the memorialization of past genres, the reworking of past genres, homages, and the recreation of 'classic' scenes, shots, plot motifs, lines of dialogue, themes, gestures, and so forth from film history, especially as that history was crystallized and codified in the sixties and early seventies.

Rather than to a postmodern exhaustion of fictional storytelling, Carroll (241) ascribes allusionism to 'an aggressive polemic of film criticism, often called auteurism', developed in Europe on the basis of the Hollywood clas-sical canon. As a result, according to Carroll, American filmmakers felt motivated to revisit their own film history with renewed attention and to profusely cite from it as well as from those European works that paid homage to them, chiefly from the French Nouvelle Vague, but also from other world new waves.

   As one of the most gifted among his New German Cinema peers, Wenders was handpicked in 1978 by Francis Ford Coppola, a central figure within New Hollywood, to conceive and direct a film for his newly-founded film production company, Zoetrope Studios, whose aim was to foster new local and international film talents. The venture should not have meant for Wenders a radical departure from his habitual self-reflexive, meditative filmmaking style, on the contrary, to all appearances, Hollywood was

opening up precisely to that kind of approach. Wenders was even convinced, at the time, that European cinema, including his own, would be filling in the gap created by the end of the Hollywood B-movie strand, a cheaper and more personal kind of commercial cinema, including the likes of Edgar Ulmer, Howard Hawks and Preston Sturges, who had been inspirational to him (Schütte 2001: 200). He had just come from shooting *The American Friend* (*Der amerikanischer Freund*, 1977), a neo-noir adapted from the novel *Ripley's Game* by American writer Patricia Highsmith, featuring Dennis Hopper, the star and director of the 1969 iconic road movie *Easy Rider*; and he was about to embark on the shoot of *Nick's Film – Lightning over Water* (1980), a documentary on the agony and death of director Nicholas Ray, another of his B-movie idols. He was thus ideally placed for the Coppola enterprise.

The plan was again a neo-noir, though not a remake, but a reflexive reassessment of the crime genre as such via the adaptation of Joe Gore's fictional biography of Dashiell Hammett, the private eye turned detective writer that bequeathed to genre cinema one of its most iconic characters, Sam Spade, the protagonist of *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941). Wenders shot a first version of the film in his usual realist style, on location in San Francisco, though not in black and white as he had originally intended. Unfortunately, however, this version seems to have been lost or destroyed. What remains is a disastrous second version, entirely re-shot with a different cast in Coppola's Zoetrope studios, that could perhaps be described as an involuntary film-noir caricature that prefigures the kind of postmodern cinema Tarantino would inaugurate ten years later, but devoid of the latter's irony and humour. This notwithstanding, Wenders's Zoetrope misadventure, stretching over four years, was not entirely wasted, as he managed to produce two independent films in the meantime, in an attempt to set the record straight about his ambiguous relationship with Coppola and Hollywood: the today unavailable *Reverse Angle* (1982) and the internationally acclaimed *The State of Things.*

As for the latter, the story goes that in 1981, on one of his trips between Europe and the US, where *Hammett* had stalled, Wenders stopped over in Sintra, Portugal, to visit his then girlfriend, Isabelle Weingart, an actress in the film *The Territory* being shot there by Raúl Ruiz. Deceased in 2011, Ruiz (studied in Chapter 6) was a Chilean exile living in France since the mid-1970s, who has to his credit over 100 films and an equal number of theatre plays. Though famous for his uncompromising personal style, Ruiz was also courted by Hollywood in the wake of the 'allusionist' trend, in his case, by Roger Corman, a mentor of some New-Hollywood directors such as Coppola. Corman joined French Nouvelle Vague producer Pierre Cottrell and Portuguese producer Paulo Branco in support of *The Territory*,

a Buñuelian allegory of humanity's inherent cruelty, focusing on a group of American tourists who get stranded in a French forest and finally engage in cannibalism. Corman had reportedly advised Ruiz to produce a 'very, very disgusting' film so as to make a 'break into a large United States market' (Kahn 1981: 103). Though certainly extremely violent, the work in progress did not promise any of the graphic gore Corman was probably expecting, so he left the production, and the shoot of *The Territory* was brought to a halt due to the lack of film stock.

Along came Wim Wenders and, according to some versions,[2] offered Ruiz his own leftover film stock, but on condition that he could use the whole cast, crew and Portuguese locations of *The Territory* in a film of his own, which he started to write on the spot and became *The State of Things.* Accounts diverge here, with Kahn (1981) reporting that, rather than offering succour to Ruiz's endangered production, this was actually completely disrupted with Wenders's arrival on set, forcing Ruiz to return to Paris*,* reorganise his finances and then resume the shoot of *The Territory* once Wenders was gone. Ruiz himself never confirmed this version of the events (Martin 1993) and *The Territory* was eventually completed, though today it is classed under Ruiz's 'rarities' and only remembered for its connection with *The State of Things*. Indeed, it supplied the latter not only with crew, cast and locations, but also with its central theme*,* the shoot of a film brought to a halt for lack of film stock and the disappearance of its Hollywood producer. Corman himself makes a brief appearance as the lawyer of Hollywood producer Gordon, the latter, an allusion to Beckett's elusive Godot as well as a parody of Francis Ford Coppola.

In addition, Wenders cast, for the protagonist Fritz, Patrick Bauchau, whom he had found 'wonderful in Eric Rohmer's *La Collectioneuse*' (Schütte 2001: 199). The choice has further cinephilic (and postmodern) resonances. As Boujut (1986: 99) notes, Brazil's foremost filmmaker and Cinema Novo leader, Glauber Rocha, was in Sintra when Wenders stationed there to shoot *The State of Things,* and Bauchau, a Rocha fan, took the opportunity to conduct a video-interview with him, in which the latter solemnly declared that 'Sintra is a beautiful place to die', the title-phrase of Bauchau's video interview. Rocha's untimely death would come just a few months thereafter, giving further fodder to the apocalyptic premonitions of the end of cinema in *The State of Things*. Another Wenders's addition was B-movie icon Samuel Fuller, cast in the role of cinematographer Joe Corby, who appears, with

2   It is entertaining to see producer Paulo Branco (2015) publicly diverging from Wim Wenders on this point during a post-screening Q&A.

his unfailing cigar, in another three Wenders films, *The American Friend,*
Hammet and *The End of Violence* (1997).

Allusionism therefore pervades the film across all its self-reflexive layers.
Rather than detracting from its substance, the pre-existence of other film
stories, casts, crews and locations responds to those 'image facts' which
for Bazin precede the birth of a realist film. Talking a propos of *The State*
of Things, Wenders mentions three types of images: 'grammatical images',
which are necessary for the purpose of storytelling; 'profound images', or
those that the filmmaker stores in the back of his mind; and 'found images',
which are those found in the process of shooting (Russell 1990: 19). *The*
State of Things could be read as a 'found film', in the sense that its point of
departure is a collection of pregiven phenomena in the objective world in
which humans are condemned to play a secondary role.

In Search of the Real

The opening scenes in *The State of Things,* a fragment of the disaster sci-fi
in the making, *The Survivors,* are a citation of the beginning of two Hol-
lywood B-movies, Roger Corman's *The Day the World Ended* (1959) and
Alan Dwan's *The Most Dangerous Man Alive* (1961), placing the film from
the outset within the allusionist trend described above. Following some
kind of nuclear disaster, a group of four adults and two children, covered in
protective suits and masks, is shown crossing a devastated expanse of land
covered in scrap iron, abandoned vehicles, rubble and skeletons. A young
girl, wrapped in gauze around her hands and face, moans continuously
and is finally choked to death by her own father because she has 'started
to melt'. The group proceeds towards the sea, following in the footsteps of
previous fugitives, until they arrive at an abandoned hotel half-sunk into
the sea, strewn with parts of a crashed airplane.

At this point, the camera angle opens up to unveil the film within the
film, by capturing the group of survivors in a real landscape on the left-hand
side of the frame, while the right-hand side is occupied by a large canvas
containing a landscape painting like those that serve as false background
in Hollywood studio sets (Figure 1.1). This pedagogical shot, unveiling the
false background that is *not* being utilised in *The Survivors,* can only be
there to tell us the kind of commercial film Wenders refuses to make, even
when shooting on commission from Hollywood. The process of unveiling
reality to the spectator proceeds with the sepia tone, hitherto utilised via a
day-for-night filter, changing into black and white within a single shot. The

Figure 1.1   The film within the film in *The State of Things:* a real landscape is on the left-hand side of the frame, while the right-hand side is occupied by a large canvas containing a landscape painting like those that serve as false background in Hollywood studio sets.

'realism' of black and white – defined as such in the film by cinematographer Joe – is thus offered to us didactically, by degrees, so as to demonstrate its superiority over the usual Hollywood colour tricks. By the same token, the soundscape, hitherto dominated by the atmospheric music by Wenders's faithful composer Jürgen Knieper, makes room for the sound of the sea waves which had been muted up to this point.

This is when Hollywood veteran Joe, in a condescending tone to fledgling Fritz, breaks the bad news: stock has run out and the shoot has to stop. This gives Wenders the opportunity to move from the postmodern citational mode back to the modern, or 'Bazinian', search for presentational realism, via a careful survey of the environs and a systematic dismantling of cinema's various constitutive artistic and medial components, in order to test and dismiss, one by one, their mimetic properties. Drawing on some of the casts' real skills, as they retreat to their individual hotel rooms, the camera lingers on their solitary artistic and recording exercises. Actress Joan (Rebecca Pauly) undertakes a scales exercise on her violin with the scores on a stand by the window facing the sea, but she soon stops to retune the strings and start her metronome, in apparent despair at adequately responding to the magnificent seascape. Another, Anna (Isabelle Weingart), takes notes on her diary, but also suddenly stops to cover her dressing-table mirror with a cloth, a scene Russell (1990: 25) reads as an attempt at blocking the cliché of an actor's narcissism in order to give free rein to 'the anti-"story" aesthetic of contingent realism'. The superiority of the Real is confirmed by Fritz's

Figure 1.2 Kate, in *The State of Things,* weeps for being unable to reproduce the dramatic landscape before her eyes in her watercolour painting.

partner and scriptgirl Kate (Viva Auder) in a dialogue line, as she weeps for being unable to reproduce the dramatic landscape before her eyes in her watercolour painting (Figure 1.2). There is even a point when the Polaroid photos, taken by Fritz's daughter Julia and Kate's daughter Jane, displayed on Fritz's bedroom wall, are attacked by nature itself, when a hefty piece of driftwood breaks through the window and a gust of wind blows them away. Still photographs, including the negative film strips hanging on a line in Joe's bedroom, are there to remind us of the material stillness at the base of cinema.

As all these amateur artists fail to communicate their vision of the real, their inconclusive medial activities presage not only the end of the love story between Europe and America, but the end of love tout court. Anna confesses to Mark (Jeffrey Kime), after their first sexual encounter, that she has a sense of déjà vu, while Kate places a drawing of her lover Fritz on his body as he sleeps, and we are offered the two images for comparison: the real-life man and its small, sketchy reproduction complete with the caption: 'I feel like sleeping alone tonight. Kate'. Given the impossibility of relating to an overwhelming reality, love is reduced to onanistic exercises, such as that of Mark in his bathtub and Fritz in his drunken sleep, both of whom have their hands suggestively placed on their lower parts.

Finally, the mechanical and industrial side of cinema comes under scrutiny through the multiplication of gadgets, such as the tape recorder used by Kate as a diary, Joe's voice clock announcing the passing of time minute by minute, multiple photographic and super-8 cameras, and an

early Apple computer complete with a small printer kept by scriptwriter Dennis (Paul Getty III) in a derelict Moorish palace on the Sintra outskirts, one of Gordon's neglected properties reminiscent of his former financial glory, where the scriptwriter succumbs to smoking and drinking himself to numbness. The documenting of these mechanical gadgets in connection with the process of filmmaking highlights their impassive materiality which remains untransferable to the film itself.

Unable to reach Gordon by phone, Fritz decides to fly to Los Angeles where he finds him running away from his creditors in a mobile home. His attempt at renewing their friendship ends up with both being shot dead after affectionately hugging and kissing each other. Both cinema and love have indeed become impossible, but Fritz's super-8 camera continues to roll autonomously for a few seconds after his death, finally capturing reality mechanically as it is, free from any subjective will: an incomprehensible blur.

Modern Non-cinema

Rather than a new phenomenon, the championing of presentational over representational aesthetics in *The State of Things* responds to a long modernist tradition in political art whose agenda draws on its own rejection as art. Alain Badiou provides us with a useful summary of this tradition, which he addresses in terms of 'inaesthetics'. This refers to the saturation of the three schemata which, in his view, have attempted to define a philosophy of art: didacticism, romanticism and classicism, corresponding respectively to Marxism, Heideggerian hermeneutics and psychoanalysis. For Badiou (2005: 8), modernity is moved by both the didactic and the romantic impulses in its thrust to debunk classicism:

> The avant-gardes were didactic in their desire to put an end to art, in their condemnation of its alienated and inauthentic character. But they were also romantic in their conviction that art must be reborn immediately as absolute – as the undivided awareness of its operations or as its own immediately legible truth.

The State of Things follows the same romantic impetus to salvage modern art from its own mistrust in representation. As far as cinema is concerned, Badiou's (82) privileged case study is no other than a Wenders film, *The Wrong Movement* (*Falsche Bewegung,* 1975), an adaptation of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*), in which

'[t]he allusive quotation of the other arts, which is constitutive of cinema, wrests these arts away from themselves'. In *The State of Things*, Kate's failed attempts at reproducing the Real in her drawings and paintings resonate with Badiou's formulation on the avant-gardes' didacticism, in that they draw the viewer's attention to the artwork's representational operations in order to disqualify the copy to the benefit of the thing itself. But they are also romantic in their aspiration for an art that is not distinguishable from its object. Non-cinema may be seen as an offspring of this at once modernist and romantic tradition of self-negation, at the core of which lies the political and ethical aspiration for a legible truth.

Badiou (2005: 10) further observes that '[a] truth is an infinite multiplicity', whereas a 'work of art is essentially finite'. In *The State of Things*, human presence (as represented by artists attempting to capture objective reality) and truth seem to be mutually exclusive. Martin Lefebvre (2011: 70), citing Simon Schama, states that 'nature may exist without us [...] it doesn't need us, whereas landscape requires some degree of human presence and affect'. Kant (1914) also famously distinguished between the 'beautiful' and the 'sublime', noting that the former refers to the object's form and is limited, whereas the latter derives from a formless, unlimited object, and for this reason human sensibility and imagination are insufficient to fully comprehend phenomena happening in the realm of the sublime. In *The State of Things,* nature is equally defined as a formless, uncontainable mass, akin to the ineffability of the sublime. This is repeatedly signified through the representation of the act of photographing by imprinting the camera viewfinder on the objects framed so as to demonstrate the photographer's inability to apprehend an object in its overflowing totality (Figure 1.3). Even the monumental, deserted hotel, half-sunk into the sea, where cast and crew are staying, both in the film and in actuality, is posited as a kind of 'frame' destroyed by the force of the nature it attempts to contain (Figure 1.4). The place is in reality the Hotel Arribas, which has now been entirely restored and brought back to its original glory. At the time of the shoot, however, its courtyard, including a magnificent 100m swimming pool made of a section of the sea, was half-submerged in the Atlantic, with its walls partially demolished by the force of the waves.

Nonetheless, if film, together with all the arts and media at its base, is unable to open up a passage to the Real, the realisation of this fact reveals the unquestionable reality of all these expressive mediums, as well as the actual artistic skills of the agents at their helm. Most notably, it is through photography, i.e. by eliciting a sense of stasis and failure and recognising film's inability to capture nature as a whole, that *The State of Things* gains

Figure 1.3 *The State of Things*: the camera viewfinder imprinted on the objects framed demonstrates the photographer's inability to apprehend an object in its overflowing totality.

Figure 1.4 *The State of Things:* the swimming pool in the monumental hotel, half-sunk into the sea, is another kind of 'frame' destroyed by the force of the nature it attempts to contain.

in artistry. It is also in this kind of anti-cinematic stasis that Adorno (1991) saw a way out for cinema, thereby taking issue with Sigfried Kracauer (1997: 33-34), who distinguishes cinema from photography on the basis of movement: the camera movement, the movement of the objects in front of the camera and the movement introduced by montage. Adorno (1991: 180) contends that the centrality of movement in cinema is 'both provocatively denied and yet preserved, in negative form, in the static character of films

like Antonioni's *La Notte*'. He says: 'Whatever "uncinematic" in this film gives it the power to express, as if with hollow eyes, the emptiness of time'. Adorno's defence of uncinematic stasis is based on its power to neutralise the unavoidable ideological residues of the culture industry, as symbolised by the quarrel between technology and artistic technique, or, in this case, between Hollywood commerce and auteurist creativity. As Miriam Hansen (2012: 218) reminds us, Adorno attributed to cinema a leading role in modern art, but only insofar as it rebelled against its own status as art through self-awareness of its technological origin.

A cinema that gains in artistry by losing its cinematic properties could also be seen as the purpose of Bazin's realist proposal, although here politics decidedly takes a back seat with relation to aesthetics. Bazin's rejection of montage and defence of the long take and the long shot favour the presence in the final film of residues of unexpected phenomena that tend to obstruct narrative progression and are usually removed in the editing process, something that Lyotard (1986b: 349) would later formulate in terms of 'acinema'. Bazin is also keen, like Adorno, on 'uncinematic' empty moments, as can be seen in his famous analysis of the coffee-grinding scene in *Humberto D* (Vittorio de Sica, 1952), in which, according to him, 'nothing happens' (2005: 81-82). In particular, Bazin's concept of 'impure cinema' (1967) dismisses cinema's pretence to medium specificity, highlighting instead its inherent dependence on the other arts.

With its focus on stagnation, endless waiting, lovelessness and inconsequential artistic and medial exercises, *The State of Thing* constitutes, to an extent, an early candidate for the label of 'slow cinema', popularised in the 2000s in reference to a large 'socio-cultural movement whose aim is to rescue extended temporal structures from the accelerated tempo of late capitalism' (de Luca and Jorge 2016: 3). Indeed, in *The State of Things*, the sense that 'nothing happens', as formulated by Bazin, prevails thanks to the slow editing pace and prodigal use of long takes and long shots. However, things – trivial though they might be – happen all the time in the film, which relies on a montage of suture that weaves together plot and subplot in a seamless chronological progression, climaxing rather conventionally with the protagonist's death. Waiting, as the characters do in this auteurist piece, is also a classical recourse for the construction of suspense, and indeed suspense builds up in particular in the latter part of the film, set in Los Angeles, by means of persecution, spying and even a car chase. Granted, all these elements are metacommentaries on their use in American movies, in which they are aimed at eliciting spectatorial immersion and commercial success. An example is the car chase scene, which contains no speed, crashes

or dashboard-mounted subjective cameras to enhance the sense of peril. Instead, an extremely high, distant camera captures in a single long shot/ long take combination a car weaving slowly through and around carparks, until it manages to confound and lose its follower, to the delight of the driver. The whole is overlaid with the minimalist score by Jürgen Knieper, whose jazzy beat is here just slightly accelerated, imparting the reassuring sense of a minor event.

The highly accomplished quality of such scenes, and the dazzling images and sounds of the film as a whole, certainly contributed to it being awarded the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival in 1982, among a host of other festival prizes. Rather than confirming its own predictions of doom and the end of cinema, it boosted Wim Wenders's career, not just in Europe but also in the United States, where he went on to shoot the highly-acclaimed and Cannes Palme D'Or winning *Paris, Texas* (1984). These developments expose the limits of categories of modernity and postmodernity, as history went on both in cinema and in general without any traumatic break. Thus the idea of non-cinema, as a periodical wake-up call to film's constitutive dilemma between representation and presentation of reality, may offer a more productive way of situating *The State of Things.*

Non-cinema as Ruin

What can and should be taken more seriously than the modern-postmodern divide is the way *The State of Things* sums up the cinematic challenges and opportunities of its time, and in so doing prefigures not only the 'slow cinema' but also the 'essay film' genre of today, or what Bazin (2005: 97) had called the '*film à thèse*'. As Mitchell (1983: 50) states, '*The State of Things* is like a fictional film essay of self-assessment'. From the outset, the derelict Hotel Arribas introduces a 'thesis' that cuts across the entire film: the oxymoronic nature of capitalist progress, including its entertainment and tourist industry, whose staleness is constitutive of the novelty it advertises – a fact alarmingly confirmed by the now archaic electronic gadgets littering the film, including a pioneering Apple computer, which is just a little more than a word processer, but displayed in the film as next-generation technology. Invariably and inevitably, the products of these gadgets turn out to be disappointing simulacra. The static and descriptive framings used to produce such an effect constantly bring to the fore cinema's photographic stillness and reinforce the sense of death through stasis, which is corroborated by numerous shots of cinemas in ruins on the streets of Sintra and Lisbon

and, towards the end, Los Angeles, where a cinema advertising John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956) is clearly surviving out of past glories. On a similarly metaphorical level, the hotel increasingly engulfed by the sea is recurrently likened to a sinking ship. The character of Robert (Geoffrey Carey) points to a plastic Earth globe and comments: 'Lisbon is really right at the edge, the far-western corner of Europe, indeed there's water right in front of my window'. The metaphor of a sinking ship recurs in the characters' lines, for example, when Fritz reads aloud, to himself, from Alan Le May's book *The Searchers* (at the origin of Ford's film), about 'the terrible sense of inevitable doom that overpowered him every time he encountered this ship'.

Even more in the spirit of a thesis is the post-catastrophe footage of *The Survivors*, which could be read as the synthesis of Bazin and Deleuze's vision of modern cinema. Cityscapes in ruins, as epitomised by Berlin in the neorealist film *Germany Year Zero* (*Germania anno zero,* Roberto Rossellini, 1947), were hailed by Bazin (2005b: 98; 2011: 58-60) as the non-anthropocentric symbol of cinematic modernity. Deleuze (2005: 124), like Bazin, dates modern cinema from the end of the Second World War, describing typical postwar film locations as 'any-space-whatevers', made of 'demolished towns [...] vast unused places, docks, warehouses, hips of girders and scrap iron', all of which can be found in the fragment of *The Survivors* at the beginning of *The State of Things*. The magnitude of the Second World War, for Deleuze, caused the time-image, typical of modernity, to interfere with and disrupt the action-image he attributes to classical Hollywood and montage cinema in general, creating characters who are observers or 'seers' rather than agents, in a world that overwhelms their comprehension.

Given the recurrence of war in human history, however, there is scope to investigate the combination of ruins and cinema before the Second World War. Indeed, Johannes von Moltke identifies ruins at the very birth of cinema, for example, in the Lumière brothers' *The Demolition of a Wall* (*Démolition d'un mur,* 1895), which shows the destruction of a wall and its immediate reconstruction achieved with the simple trick of running the film backwards. For von Moltke (2010: 396), 'this little episode from 1895 might serve as a cinematic epigraph for the broader aesthetic, ontological, and epistemological imbrications of cinema and ruin in modernity'.

In any case, Deleuze's definition of a 'time out of joint' and 'in pure state' is entirely applicable to the representation of Portugal in *The State of Things*, as it makes use of the country's location at the westernmost end of Europe, that is, at the periphery of Europe's self-attributed modernity, so as to configure it as a kind of space-time hiatus, or a 'time in pure state', that offers a distanced viewpoint to worldly phenomena. Seen in this light,

the modern and postmodern categories become irrelevant, as they fail to provide reliable indicators of progressive politics. As Jacques Rancière (2009: 51) has pointed out:

> If there is a political question in contemporary art, it will not be grasped in terms of a modern/postmodern opposition. It will be grasped through an analysis of the metamorphoses of the political 'third', the politics founded on the play of exchanges and displacements between the art world and that of non-art.

Caught in this dilemma, *The State of Things* resolves it via non-cinema, that is, by surrendering to film's irresistible drive towards material reality.

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2   Jafar Panahi's Forbidden Tetralogy

This Is Not a Film, Closed Curtain, Taxi Tehran, Three Faces

Abstract

Chapter 2 brings a reflection on Jafar Panahi's forbidden tetralogy, *This Is Not a Film* (co-directed by Mojtaba Mirtahmasb, 2011), *Closed Curtain* (*Pardeh,* co-directed by Kambuzia Partovi, 2013), *Taxi Tehran* (*Taxi,* 2015) and *Three Faces* (*Se rokh,* 2018), all of which have come into being despite (or as a result of) the 20-year ban from making films imposed on him by the Iranian authorities. Forcibly shot in enclosed spaces, these films are marked by a relentless scrutiny of their restrained locations and of the director himself, turned into reluctant protagonist of his non-films. In such restrictive circumstances, Panahi's irrepressible creative vein is channelled towards bringing to the fore, with radical realism, film's inherent conundrum between its recording and artistic properties.

Keywords: Non-cinema; Jafar Panahi; *This Is Not a Film; Closed Curtain; Taxi Tehran; Three Faces*

This chapter will address cinema's constitutive dilemma between presentation and representation of reality by means of a reflection on Jafar Panahi's forbidden tetralogy, *This Is Not a Film* (*In film nist,* co-directed by Mojtaba Mirtahmasb, 2011), *Closed Curtain* (*Pardeh,* co-directed by Kambuzia Partovi, 2013), *Taxi Tehran* (*Taxi,* 2015) and *Three Faces* (*Se rokh,* 2018), all of which have come into being despite (or rather as a result of) the ban from making films imposed on him by the Iranian authorities.

Though the documentary genre has never featured prominently in Panahi's portfolio, throughout his career he has applied himself to an unrelenting realist programme that eventually cost him his freedom of movement and his own ability to make films, despite the international acclaim bestowed on his oeuvre. By means of typical realist devices – a prolific use of long takes, location shooting, non-professional acting and

focus on contemporary issues – his fiction films have repeatedly exposed the plight of women, immigrants, children, animals and artists under the oppressive Iranian regime. His attempt, in collaboration with director Mohammad Rasoulof, to document on film the demonstrations against the fraudulent reelection of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in June 2009 eventually led to his imprisonment in March 2010, together with a number of his supporters and family members. Though these were soon released, Panahi remained in custody for several months and was only freed after staging hunger strike and paying a hefty bail. He was subsequently banned from writing screenplays, shooting films, giving interviews and leaving his country for a period of 20 years, combined with a six-year prison sentence yet to be enforced at the moment of writing.

Despite the gravity of these threats and penalties, Panahi remains ready to pay for the ethics of his artistry with his life if necessary, and this is why the subject of suicide haunts his forbidden tetralogy, itself a collection of secretive and abortive attempts at fully-fledged fiction films. As he states in the documentary *Où êtes vous, Jafar Panahi?* (2016), surreptitiously shot on the occasion of a major retrospective of his work at the Centre Pompidou, in Paris in 2016, his main judge is his mirror, meaning that he can only make films that are sanctioned by his own conscience, albeit at odds with his censors' code of practice. Thus he is forced to work in semi-isolation and to anonymise most of his collaborators so as to protect them from persecution. Some of them have indeed been penalised, such as Mojtaba Mirtahmasb, the co-director of *This Is Not a Film,* Kambuzia Partovi, actor and co-director of *Closed Curtain,* and Maryam Moghadam, actress in the same film, all of whom had their passports confiscated and were prevented from promoting these films abroad.

Forcibly shot in enclosed spaces – his own apartment in *This Is Not a Film,* his leisure home at the Caspian Sea in *Closed Curtain,* inside a car in *Taxi Tehran,* and mostly inside a car again in *Three Faces,* as Panahi travels to the remote Iranian Azerbaijan – the forbidden tetralogy is marked by a relentless scrutiny of these restrained locations and of the director himself, turned into reluctant protagonist of his non-films. Incipient plots are commented on, but remain undeveloped amidst the register of the frustrated filmmaker's daily routine and conversations with occasional interlocutors. In such restrictive circumstances, Panahi's irrepressible creative vein is channelled towards bringing to the fore, with radical realism, film's inherent conundrum between its recording and artistic properties.

Kracauer (1997: 40) famously remarked that, 'due to its fixed meaning, the concept of art does not, and cannot, cover truly "cinematic" films – films,

that is, which incorporate aspects of physical reality with a view to making us experience them'. For Bazin (1967:12), in turn, film's ontological nature has 'freed the plastic arts from their obsession with likeness'. Along the same lines, Lev Manovich (2016: 21) observes that, whereas the other arts can deliver themselves to abstraction, cinema is irredeemably tied to real-life mimesis due to its photographic basis. He says:

> Behind even the most stylized cinematic images we can discern the bluntness, the sterility, the banality of early 19th-century photographs. No matter how complex its stylistic innovations, the cinema has found its base in these deposits of reality, these samples obtained by a methodical and prosaic process [...] Cinema is the art of the index; it is an attempt to make art out of a footprint.

But then, of course, as Manovich and so many others contend, everything has changed with the advent of digital technology, which allows for the generation of images and sounds on computer, without the need of camera or lenses or any objective reality. This has ushered in what is now being referred to as the post-cinema age (see, for example, Denson and Leyda 2016), in which, Manovich (2016: 29) tells us, the emphasis has shifted from the mode of production of a film, where the profilmic event plays a major role and manipulation is negligible in comparison, to the mode of postproduction, where shot footage 'is just the raw material to be manipulated in a computer where the real construction of a scene will take place'.

Although some scholars have, regretfully or joyously, accepted the victory of manipulation over the index, and posited the digital as the final nail in the coffin of cinema as we used to know it, the fact remains that many film-makers, such as Panahi, continue to valorise production over postproduction regardless of the technology at play. Indeed, one of the most remarkable consequences of the digital revolution is to have enabled filmmakers from the most disparate areas of the globe to embark on otherwise unthinkable realist ventures. Panahi is the first to welcome this development, saying: 'Fortunately, digital cameras and other facilities offered by digital technology allow you to film without the need to ask the authorities, discreetly and cheaply' (Chéroux and Frodon 2016: 24). This is how he has been able, over the years, to tell the world about the dire conditions of filmmaking in Iran.

Thus in this chapter I propose to reverse track and test the concept of 'non-cinema' as post-cinema's fiercest nemesis. My approach may diverge from views such as William Brown's (2016: 105), my fellow advocate of non-cinema, which he defines as an intrinsic component of cinema

brought about with crystalline clarity by digital technology. As I have explained elsewhere (Nagib 2016), my own view of non-cinema refers to works which, throughout film history and geography, have overflown the boundaries of the medium in order to merge with other artforms or life itself, resulting in transformative politics. Needless to say, non-cinema is utopia, for indexical as it may be, cinema is first and foremost manipulation, from the moment a camera frames and decontextualises a chunk of objective reality. Striving for non-cinema therefore becomes a mise-en-abyme exercise in self-reflexivity and self-denunciation – as I hope to have demonstrated, in Chapter 1, in a completely different context, about *The State of Things* – curtailing and unveiling manipulation as soon as it takes place, and coming close to but never really ceasing to be cinema in the conventional sense, as my analysis of the forbidden tetralogy will hopefully demonstrate.

In what follows, I shall first lay out the theoretical underpinnings for my non-cinema concept, moving on to conduct a detailed analysis of Panahi's forbidden tetralogy as a subset of realist cinema, where emphasis is placed on production rather than postproduction and the index reigns sovereign.

The Politics of Self-negation

Although particularly notable, and unavoidably so, in the forbidden tetralogy, Panahi's self-negating method can be observed across his entire oeuvre, a clear example being his early film *The Mirror* (*Ayneh,* 1997), in which the filmmaking process is disrupted halfway through by the child protagonist who decides to step down from her role; from then on the film abandons the plot to document the child's seemingly non-staged progress across the streets of Tehran. In so doing Panahi's films could be seen as a late bloomer of a long modernist tradition in political art whose agenda draws on its own rejection as art.

As we have seen in Chapter 1, Alain Badiou addresses this tradition in terms of 'inaesthetics', an understanding that concludes with a reproach levelled at the revolutionary avant-gardes which, according to him (2005: 8), were incapable of maintaining their alliances with either the didactic or the romantic currents in their rejection of classicism. Badiou (8) explains:

> In empirical terms: Just like the fascism of Marinetti and the Futurists, the communism of Breton and the Surrealists remained merely allegorical.

> The avant-gardes did not achieve their conscious objective: to lead a united front against classicism. Revolutionary didactics condemned them on the grounds of their romantic traits: the leftism of total destruction and of a self-consciousness fashioned ex nihilo, an incapacity for action on a grand scale, a fragmentation into small groups.

This rather sombre view of the avant-gardes' heritage is common currency among Marxist European philosophers. It can be found, for example, at the basis of Habermas's (2002: 10) famous rejection of the idea of a 'postmodern' era, which for him is nothing but the continuation of a yet-to-be-completed modern project. Habermas's definition of the latter is negative, because, in modernity, 'art had become a critical mirror, showing the irreconcilable nature of the aesthetic and the social worlds' (10). Like Badiou, Habermas rates the surrealist movement as the most radical anti-aesthetic experiment for attempting 'to blow up the autarkical sphere of art and to force a reconciliation of art and life'. However, for him, the surrealist radical negation of art ended up, ironically, sanctioning the same aesthetic categories established by the Enlightenment and, in so doing, illuminating 'even more glaringly those structures of art they were meant to destroy' (Habermas 2002: 10-11).

The reference to the avant-gardes and to the surrealists in particular is relevant here, because the self-denying title of the first instalment of Panahi's forbidden tetralogy, *This Is Not a Film*, is a clear allusion to René Magritte's famous surrealist quip, *'Ceci n'est pas une pipe'*, or 'this is not a pipe', a handwritten caption appended to a faithful, even hyperrealist depiction of a pipe, in his 1929 drawing *La Trahison des images* (*The Treachery of Images*). Magritte's playful attack on naïve realism is fitting to both Badiou's and Habermas's negative definitions of modernism insofar as it draws the viewer's attention to an artwork's representational operations in order to disqualify the copy to the benefit of the thing itself, while continuing to be romantic in its aspiration for an art that is not distinguishable from its object. Brown (2018: 214), however, notes a crucial difference between Panahi's film and the surrealist painting:

> Magritte does not call, or even write on, his painting *This Is Not a Painting;* the words that he uses refer instead to the supposed content of the painting, the pipe. Panahi, meanwhile, does not deny the contents of his film. Rather, he says that the film as a whole is not a film. Where Margritte refers to content (pipe), Panahi contrastingly refers to form (film).

This difference might be reason enough to distinguish Panahi's from the modernist project, or rather from what Badiou and Habermas consider its 'failure', in particular as concerns the 'forced reconciliation between art and life'. My argument here shall be that, with his forbidden tetralogy, Panahi has come as close as anyone can ever get to realising this romantic utopia.

As for Badiou's category of modernist 'didacticism', his main reference is Brecht, whose legacy is still alive and well, despite the philosopher's damming conclusions. This can be easily verified in the art theory developed thereafter, in particular in film studies. As is well known, Brecht, writing in the 1930s, proposed an epic theatre based on alienation effects with the aim to disrupt narrative illusionism and bring the reality of the medium, and its corresponding ideology, to the audience's awareness. Brecht's negative method, described by Badiou (2005: 6) as the 'reactivation of Plato's antitheatrical measures', relies primarily on the so-called 'breaking of the fourth wall', which is nothing but the removal of the boundary that separates fiction from real life. Badiou posits Plato's *Republic* as the philosophical foundation of didacticism, which can be verified in the allegory of the cave, which in the *Republic* is explained by Socrates to Plato's brother, Glaucon. A defence of education, the allegory concerns a situation in which prisoners chained to the wall of a cave take for real the shadows of objects projected on the opposite wall by a firelight behind them. Socrates compares the philosopher to a prisoner who has freed himself from the cave and accessed reality beyond its treacherous shadows.

Given its obvious analogy with the process of making and showing films, the allegory of the cave – together with its antidote, alienation effects – has been tremendously influential on the study of cinema. In the late 1960s, film theorist Jean-Louis Baudry went back to it in order to formulate his groundbreaking concept of the basic cinematographic apparatus and ensuing ideological effects on the spectator. For Baudry, a liberating cinema is possible, but only if it goes against itself by means of what Freud had defined as 'the return of the repressed', that is, by revealing the illusion-making instruments at its base. A privileged example for Baudry (1986: 295-296) is Dziga Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera*, a documentary which lays bare the processes of shooting, editing and projecting.

The modernist anti-aesthetic programme, in turn, inspired a variety of philosophical trends, notably the thought of postmodern philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, who in the 1970s proposed 'acinema', that is, a cinema that rejects the process of selection and elimination, resulting from the

necessary framing and montage, and instead accepts 'what is fortuitous, dirty, confused, unsteady, unclear, poorly framed, overexposed' (Lyotard 1986: 349). He places the intensity of these incongruous elements, which undermine cinema's property of movement, in opposition to the law of value, which states 'that the *object*, in this case the movement, is valuable only insofar as it is exchangeable for other objects and in terms of equal quantities of a definable unity (for example, quantities of money)' (350). Instead of a law which governs cinema on the basis of a political economy aimed at productivity and consumption, Lyotard proposes acinema, that is, the enjoyment of sterile moments that 'give rise to perversion and not solely to propagation' (351). Citing Adorno (the defender of the 'uncinematic' in narrative film, discussed in Chapter 1), Lyotard goes on to define the 'only truly great art' as 'pyrotechnics', which 'simulate perfectly the sterile consumption of energies in jouissance' (351).

But if cinema is to self-consume in 'sterile moments', then something must remain 'after finitude', to quote the title of Quentin Meillassoux's (2016) philosophical breakthrough, which gave rise to what became known today as 'speculative realism' (or 'speculative materialism' or 'object-oriented ontology', shortened to 'OOO'). Praised by Badiou (2016: vii) as 'a new path in the history of philosophy', this current opens up to an environmentally-minded and non-anthropocentric approach to the arts. Speculative realism is fundamentally non-correlationist, i.e. it defies the Kantian tradition, predominant in modern philosophy, according to which knowledge of the world is dependent on how it relates to us. It was developed on the basis of Meillassoux's idea of 'object-worlds' consisting of an 'absolute outside' which is not relative to us and exists 'whether we are thinking of it or not' (2016: 7). One exponent of this current, Graham Harman (2005: 74), goes as far as identifying a 'weirdness' in objects that exist 'in and of themselves' and which 'perception or sheer causation can never adequately measure'. Speculative realism and its trust in science posits itself as a helpful alternative to psychoanalytic and phenomenological approaches which have allowed for a narcissistic subject, that is to say, an idealised or embodied spectator, to gain a disproportionate weight in film studies in recent years.

Combined, these currents illuminate the political and aesthetic aims of the 'non-cinema' tetralogy studied in this chapter, insofar as they help to understand a realism at production point that commits crew and cast to the truth of the profilmic event, imposing on them the utopian, but politically effective, task to unveil and neutralise cinema's intrinsic manipulative nature.

The Self-made Film

This Is Not a Film's claim to indexical truth is posited from the outset through the figure of the autonomous camera. It opens with a long take focusing on Panahi seated for breakfast at a small table, apparently alone, and helping himself to bread, cheese and jam. On his mobile phone on speaker mode, he calls cinematographer Mojtaba Mirtahmasb and urges him to come to his home immediately. Fearing that his phone might be tapped, he refrains from explaining the reason for his call, which is later revealed to be that Mirtahmasb would register on camera his reading of the script of what would have been his next film. But if Mirtahmasb is not there yet and Panahi is by himself, who is filming the breakfast scene?

   A partial explanation comes soon thereafter. The breakfast scene cuts to the credits over black background, followed by a take of Panahi's empty bedroom and unmade bed. The fax-phone set on the bedside table rings and, because nobody answers it, the caller, his wife, leaves a message on the answering machine. Having finished her message, she passes the phone on to their son, who says that he had left a camera rolling on a chair in the bedroom, but that the battery was low. At that point Panahi emerges from the ensuite bathroom in his underwear, finishes dressing, collects his cigarette pack and spectacles from the bedside table and finally the camera from the chair, putting an end to another long take of around two minutes. The bedroom scene is thus an automatically generated footage, after someone turned on a camera and left the premises (Figures 2.1, 2.2). In hindsight, then, one is led to believe that this was also the case with the breakfast scene, shot with an unmanned camera, though here it could only have been Panahi himself setting it up.

   The role of the autonomous camera in both cases seems to be to produce a faithful and neutral register of Panahi's daily routine and trivial incidents. However, Panahi's visible effort not to look at the camera while eating and speaking on the phone introduces the first indicator that acting is at play. Manipulation is also identifiable in the temporal organisation of these two long takes, as the breakfast could only have taken place *after* the bedroom scene, once Panahi took the camera with him to the kitchen, despite it being shown *before* anything else. Indeed, the staging behind these ostensibly spontaneous actions are soon openly addressed by Panahi himself, in a sudden break of the fourth wall which will be discussed extensively in the next section. First, let us consider the rationale behind the attempt at having an autonomous camera shoot a purported slice of life as it happens.

Figures 2.1, 2.2 The bedroom scene, in *This Is not a Film,* is an automatically generated footage, after someone turned on a camera and left the premises.

The figure of the self-made film, in Panahi's forbidden tetralogy, has a primary, utilitarian function to shield the filmmaker from accusations of making films despite his ban. It is a kind of farce that includes Panahi pretending not to be the film director. In *This Is Not a Film,* Mirtahmasb soon takes up the directorial role by accepting to film Panahi's staging, in his living room, of what would have been his next film. Mirtahmasb also decides about lighting and framing when Panahi declares his own presumed technical inability; Mirtahmasb even refuses to cut when told to do so. Panahi subjects himself to all this because, as he declares to the

camera, he is prohibited from shooting films, writing scripts, leaving the country and giving interviews for the next 20 years; however he is *not* prohibited from reading a script and being an actor. In so doing, Panahi, as James Harvey-Davitt (2014: 95) points out, citing Rancière, does not simply 'break the law':

> Rather he shows up the contingency of law, not by making a film but by making 'not a film'. In other words, Panahi rejects his sentence yet manages to do so within the terms of the sentence.

A similar subterfuge is staged in *Taxi Tehran,* in which the autonomous camera takes on a more prominent role. Here, Panahi subverts his filming ban by playing a taxi driver collecting passengers in the streets of Tehran. These soon notice (or pretend to notice for the first time) that they are being filmed by a dashboard-mounted camera left rolling on its own, with occasional adjustments by driver Panahi. The automatic capture of street scenes through the vehicle's windscreen is constantly resorted to, most crucially when Panahi and one of his passengers, his pre-adolescent niece, leave the taxi to return a lost purse to a previous passenger. The dashboard camera, turned to the outside, continues to film as the couple walk away from the empty car. Meanwhile, a pair of apparent thugs approach on a motorbike, the backseat passenger gets off and we hear the noise of his breaking into Panahi's taxi and fiddling with the camera that goes blank, though sound recording continues and his voice is captured saying to his companion, 'He's coming back!' and the other answering, 'No memory stick?', to which the former retorts: 'We'll come back'. This indicates that the pair of thieves might in fact be spies from the regime, keeping track of Panahi's moves and interested in obtaining not so much the camera as the film he is shooting.

A stark contrast is to be observed between this kind of procedure and similar genres such as the fly-on-the-wall documentary, whose aim is to camouflage the camera so as to not disturb the natural flow of events. Here instead, acting is what must be camouflaged so as to efface the intention of making a film. All responsibility must be brought onto the camera, which comes to the spectator's awareness by featuring in the dialogue and even in the image when captured by another camera. The autonomous camera is thus posited as an instrument of political resistance whose product can survive beyond the life of the filmmaker. Indeed, in *Taxi Tehran,* Panahi's mobile phone is suggestively used to register the will of a gravely injured passenger – in a scene, incidentally, in which staging is obvious, even histrionic.

The posthumous film is even more openly proposed in the second instalment of the non-cinema tetralogy, *Closed Curtain,* an openly fictitious, though equally self-reflexive, tale of a runaway scriptwriter who hides in a seaside leisure home with his dog. The house is invaded by a suspicious pair of siblings, claiming to be fugitives like their host, one of whom soon disappears leaving behind his sister. This woman then turns out to be a secret governmental agent who had reported on the scriptwriter and unleashed his persecution. A victim of suicidal instincts, she later disappears into the sea, as registered by the camera of a mobile phone left rolling on its own on the first-floor balcony. Director Panahi then breaks into the fictitious story to reveal the leisure home as his own retreat by the Caspian Sea, complete with European posters of his films on all walls which he uncovers. He finds the phone on the balcony and views the shot footage. Soon after, he follows in the secret agent's footsteps by walking into the sea himself in an apparent suicide attempt, an act shown in the film in a similar kind of mobile-phone footage which is then rewound to indicate his change of heart (Figures 2.3, 2.4). This situation parallels Panahi's own, who fell into a depressive and suicidal state as a result of his situation as a pariah (Rizov 2014; Kohn 2013). All is political about the idea of the self-made film, whose unselective output, like that of a CCTV, falls short of the status of film as much as of authorial art. Most poignantly, it is a camera that captures the near-death of a filmmaker unable to use it at will, but which subsequently brings him back to life thanks to a typical cinematic trick.

Suicide as the only way out of a situation of forced confinement is in fact recurrent in Panahi's work in general, and in the forbidden tetralogy in particular, reflecting not only his current situation but the long-lasting conditions of Iranians in general. In *This Is Not a Film,* the censored and unrealised film script he wishes to read to Mirtahmasb's camera concerns a young woman in a rural village, who contemplates suicide after being locked up at home by her conservative parents in order to stop her from taking up an arts degree. Seven years later, *Three Faces* starts precisely by staging this (apparent) suicide. It opens with a shaky, grainy mobile-phone footage in which we see a young woman, Marziyeh (Marziyeh Rezaei), meandering inside a rock cave while recording a farewell message to a famous Iranian actress, Behnaz Jafari (played in the film by herself), which she hopes will be relayed to her by her best friend, Maedeh (Maedeh Erteghaei). Marziyeh has decided to commit suicide because she passed the extremely competitive test for an acting degree at the Tehran Conservatoire, but has been prevented by her family from taking it up. Her hope was that Jafari could intervene in her favour and revert her parents' decision, but having failed to contact the
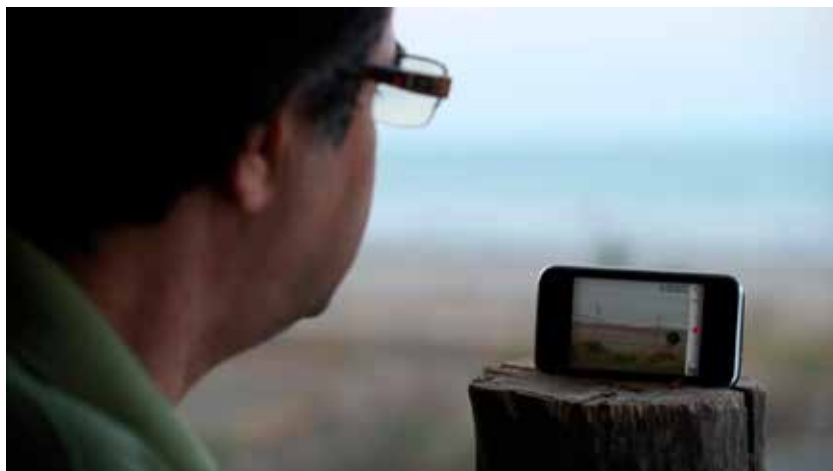
Figures 2.3, 2.4 In *Closed Curtain,* Panahi finds the phone on the balcony with the images of the woman's suicide and follows in her footsteps by walking into the sea himself.

actress she was now ready to die. After recording this message, Marziyeh proceeds to insert her head into the noose of a hanging rope and to, presumably, jump to her death. At this point, the mobile phone footage relays a crashing sound and goes blurry. One could therefore understand Panahi's own imagined death by suicide, a copycat of those of oppressed women in his films, as an act of solidarity to them as objectively and unequivocally captured by an unmanned camera, even if, at that point, all it can produced are undistinguished sounds and images.

Though fully explored in Panahi's forbidden tetralogy, the autonomous camera is not new in Iranian cinema and can be traced back to Panahi's

mentor, Abbas Kiarostami, who in his lifetime repeatedly experimented with films that come into being regardless of human agency. As has been often observed, the third instalment of the tetralogy, *Taxi Tehran,* is strongly reminiscent of Kiarostami's films shot inside moving vehicles such as *Ten* (*Dah,* 2004) and *The Taste of Cherry* (*Ta'm e guilass,* 1997). But it is in *Five* (*Panj,* 2003)*,* by Kiarostami and other collaborators, including Panahi himself, where the utopia of the autonomous camera is explored in full. For the composition of one of its episodes entitled 'Dogs', lasting for c. 16 minutes in an apparent single take, the camera was set on a beach at dawn and left rolling while the filmmaker reportedly slept. The resulting footage reveals the sound of breaking waves and some shapes in the far background that very slowly turn out to be a pack of dogs interacting with each other as the light increasingly floods the frame, finally bleaching it out completely. It is known that there was a sizeable amount of manipulation in the production and postproduction stages of this instalment, including food being placed to attract dogs to that particular spot and special effects added to the sound and lighting in post-production (see Andrew 2005: 74). These however do not efface the indexical power of this radical attempt at capturing life as it happens without the intervention of a human being.

Like Panahi in the opening shots of *This Is Not a Film,* in *Five* Kiarostami certainly partakes of the modernist proposal of self-negation in search of a tangible, objective truth, in the sense promoted by Badiou. Though safely removed from the engaged politics that have endangered Panahi's life, his method is nonetheless political in that it brings into filmmaking the uncinematic stasis praised by Adorno as contrary to the aims of the cultural industry. It is also in tune with Bazin's realist tenet of the prevalence of the objective over the subjective world as enabled by the camera's automatic objectivity (see Chapter 1). From an early film such as *Close-up* (*Nema-yet nazdik,* 1990), Kiarostami had shown a propensity to abandon human beings in order to focus, for example, on an empty can rolling down the tarmac, or, as in *Five,* to spend nearly ten minutes exclusively observing a piece of driftwood bobbing back and forth on the seashore, in the episode 'Wood' that opens the film. This attitude would resonate with the aforementioned speculative realism's non-correlationist stance, which awards relevance to phenomena unrelated to the human will or control, and recognises 'agency' and 'intention' on the part of inanimate objects.

Transported back to the Iranian situation, 'object-oriented ontology' (as speculative realism is equally defined) also serves Panahi as a political tool. His focus on animal rights allows for episodes of black humour in *Closed Curtain,* whose plot revolves around a dog called Boy, taken away

Figure 2.5 In *Closed Curtain,* Partovi and his dog are forced spectators of a blind horizon.

by his owner – the scriptwriter played by the film's co-director Kambuzia Partovi – hidden in a travel bag to escape the systematic slaughter of dogs and other pets, which are considered impure by Iranian Islamic law. In an attempt to save Boy from death the scriptwriter locks himself up with him in his seaside leisure home, covering all windows with back cloth for protection. The female fugitive who invades the house turns out to be the one who had reported on him and his dog. In a similar procedure to the autonomous camera and resonating with Kiarostami's own focus on dogs in *Five*, Boy is able, all by himself, to turn on the TV set and tune it to the news channel broadcasting the slaughter of dogs. While Boy sits in all tranquillity on the sofa to watch the carnage of his species, his owner rushes to mute the TV and remove the batteries from the remote control. Any kind of screening and viewing is prohibited in this allegorical piece of non-cinema, where Partovi and his dog are forced spectators of a blind horizon (Figure 2.5).

Despite the autonomy of inanimate objects and animals in the non-cinema tetralogy, however, Panahi continues to be a humanist in the neorealist sense, as rightly observed by Kenward (2018). Luchino Visconti (1979), in his 1943 neorealist manifesto 'Anthropomorphic Cinema', famously states that 'I could make a film of a wall, if I knew how to retrieve the traces of true humanity of the men standing in front of this bare prop: retrieve them and retell them'. Panahi's bedroom scene, in *This Is Not a Film*, shot by a camera left on its own, only makes sense once the human figure irrupts into the frame, a person whose socially-committed humanity is under imminent threat.

The Self-reflexive Mise-en-abyme

What follows the bedroom scene, in *This Is Not a Film,* reiterates Panahi's desperate attempt to denounce and reject cinema's inherent manipulative processes, like a dog incessantly chasing its own tail. After leaving his bedroom with the camera, we see him making tea (an act that recurs in *Closed Curtain*), feeding Igi (his daughter's pet lizard) and talking to his lawyer on the phone, again on speaker mode, as if he continued to be by himself in front of a camera rolling on its own. Then he suddenly stops, looks at the camera and announces that the time has come to 'remove his cast'. This sudden break of the fourth wall reveals that Mirtahmasb is already there and in fact operating the camera, and that tea was actually being made to welcome him. As for 'removing the cast', the reference is to the character in the aforementioned early Panahi film, *The Mirror*, in which nine-year-old star Mina suddenly decides (or appears to decide) to abandon the shoot. She throws away the cast from around her arm, which was part of her character, changes into her normal clothes, leaves the bus in which they were shooting and sets out to find her way back home by herself on foot. The film then cuts to the extract of *The Mirror* where this happens, which is shown on Panahi's TV set. As the camera turns back on him, Panahi confesses to his feeling that he had been pretending and lying in his own staging in his home, turning the self-denying effect of *The Mirror* into a specular mise-en-abyme.

As noted by Chéroux and Frodon (2016: 13), this kind of set up brings both the documentary and the fiction genres 'into a crisis through an interrogation of the truths and lies of representation', and they go on to describe this self-reflexive procedure as a genre pervading Iranian film history from its early days. But once again here Kiarostami is Panahi's closest predecessor, with his foundational film, *Close-Up*, about a jobless man, Ali Sabzian, who tries to pass as the famous filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf. This mockumentary, based on a real-life story and utilising the actual characters involved in it, is essentially about filmmakers as pretenders. Facts are enacted and reenacted with the semblance of happening there and then, but with plenty of real consequences to the lives of all involved; for example, Sabzian is actually acquitted in his trial, which was nonetheless staged for the sake of the camera in the real courtroom and including a real judge. Even Sabzian's riveting encounter with the real Makhmalbaf was the object of a trick, for example, when both go on a motorbike ride and a sound loss occurs, ostensibly due to a malfunctioning mike, but in fact resulting from deliberate suppression in postproduction. This precedent,

coupled with Panahi's history as Kiarostami's assistant, suggests that a similar occurrence observed in *The Mirror* might also have been obtained in postproduction, namely when the crew following Mina, as she tries to find her way back home in Tehran, occasionally loses the signal of the mike attached to her clothes.

In a perspicacious study of Panahi's first feature-length films *The White Balloon* (*Badkonade sefid,* 1995) and *The Mirror,* James Kenward (2018), citing Currie (1995) and Walton (2008), elaborates on how the metaphor of the mirror lies at the heart of debates on cinematic realism and transparency, which attribute to photography the power to present, as well as represent, reality. In the case of Panahi, the 'mirror' is posited as life imitating film, in that Mina, after giving up acting, does exactly what would be expected of her in the fictional section of the film, namely finding her way back home through a chaotic Tehran by herself, after her mother fails to pick her up at school. Kenward (2018) subscribes to the view that Mina's sudden break with representation, in *The Mirror,* is entirely staged, drawing on Cardullo, who quotes Panahi as saying that he had been 'toying with this idea all along, but did not commit to it until the first little girl he had cast actually did refuse to continue in her role and had to be replaced with Mina Mohammad-Khani' (Cardullo 2003: 70). Although Cardullo fails to mention the name of this other little girl and the source of Panahi's statement, I am equally inclined to believe in a considerable amount of staging in this celebrated and much discussed 'spontaneous' break of the fourth wall in *The Mirror,* not least because it is captured, yet again, by the expedient of a second, and apparently 'unmanned', camera that registers Mina's sudden decision to leave the film. As Kenward (2018) has pointed out, the image produced by this second camera is more grainy and unstable, but this camera is also more mobile and adequate to follow the character around in her romp. However, no information is provided on who is behind this second camera and why it happens to be there and rolling. Granted, it is usual practice to have parallel crews in charge of making-ofs, alongside the main film crew, but the lack of information suggests that manipulation is being covered up. Nonetheless, the trick of the second camera didactically lays out to the spectator the self-denying mechanisms through which a film comes into being.

In short, we are dealing here with 'a desire to put an end to art for its alienated and inauthentic character', as Badiou has defined the avant-gardes' 'inaesthetics', combined with the romantic conviction 'that art must be re-born immediately [...] as its own immediately legible truth'. Badiou criticises this schema as 'saturated' for its exhausted goal of debunking classicism.

However, in the case of Panahi's non-cinema project, a truth procedure is verifiable not through the debunking of previous styles, but through the life-saving need for non-films to draw attention to the filmmaker's endangered condition, which is undoubtedly real. Panahi's conversation with his lawyer on the phone, in the film, reveals that a national and international exposure of his situation might help him to obtain a reduction of his penalties, a fact that explains the film's very raison d'être and dependence on the real world and the viewers' own humanity for its completion. Indeed, it is probably thanks to that exposure, achieved through the smuggling of the film out of Iran to the Cannes film festival (in a memory stick hidden in a cake, as the legend goes) that his jail sentence has not yet been carried out, given the outcry it would certainly unleash in Iran and abroad.

Context thus proves to be as important as text in non-cinema experiments such as this. *This Is Not a Film* requires the viewer to know the circumstances in which the film was made for its completion, thus extending its politics before and beyond the screen. This includes all his previous oeuvre as inseparable from the filmmaker's life, hence the way Panahi presents Mina's rebellion as comparable to the spontaneous acting of the non-professional lead in another of his films, *Crimson Gold* (*Talayeh sorkh,* 2003), and to the pillars encircling a female character at a bus station, reproducing the prison she has just escaped from in his *The Circle* (*Dayereh,* 2000), both of which are briefly shown on his TV set. Asserting auteurism as a continuous indexical trace cutting across his entire oeuvre, Panahi testifies to the impossibility of keeping the unpredictable contingent away from the camera frame even at its most manipulative moments.

The Frame as Confinement

As much as in the cases examined above, the questions of who holds the camera(s) and who makes the film are explicitly and self-reflexively laid out in *Three Faces,* a film whose subject is ultimately the making of films. Film directing and acting are the subject of discussion by way of the cast's own biographies and respective roles: Panahi plays the film director he actually is; real celebrity actress Behnaz Jafari appear as herself; another myth of pre-revolutionary Iranian cinema, Shahrzad (whose real name is Kobra Saeedi), though not seen in person, is heard reading one of her own poems, and her biography is also a subject in the film; the centre of interest, Marziyeh, is in real life an aspiring star whom Panahi spotted in one of the three villages where the film was shot and immediately recognised as made

for the part of a wannabe actress. To that extent the film avows itself as film, so as to presumably preserve an authenticity verified in all its other elements, most notably its real locations in Iranian Azerbaijan, in the Northwest of the country, from where Panahi and his ancestors hail, which allowed him to communicate in the Turkic language Azeri with the local population turned into actors, some of whom, such as Marziyeh's fictional brother, bearing the same Panahi surname. This comes with the narrow winding dirt road (now disused, but still existing) leading to the remote locations, where Panahi's own car winds its way up the mountains, the animals, costumes, daily routines, the unfailing tea-serving tradition and everything else in the film. But all is also manipulation, as openly suggested from the very beginning of the film. As mentioned above, before presumably committing suicide, Marziyeh records a farewell message on her mobile, which is sent to her best friend, Maedeh, and somehow gets through to Jafari. This much can be understood from seeing Jafari watching this footage on her own mobile. It is also comprehensible that she would abandon her own work on a location shoot, driving her director to despair – as we learn through a mobile call from the latter – and travel by night to a remote village in order to get to the bottom of this suicide story. But the reason why she is travelling with director Panahi remains unexplained and constitutes the first sign of the whole story being a farce.

Jafari struggles with guilt for not having responded to the girl's previous attempts at contacting her and presses Panahi to establish whether the footage of the girl's jumping to her death in the cave could have been tricked. Panahi confirms its authenticity, suggesting that only a professional filmmaker could have tricked it so perfectly. At that point Jafari confronts Panahi about his own unrealised project of a film about a young woman who commits suicide for being barred from taking an arts degree. By remaining silent, Panahi again appeals to the spectator's previous knowledge of his own circumstances and, not least, his previous films, in particular *This Is Not a Film,* which is precisely an attempt to stage this very same suicide story by the director himself in his apartment.

More poignantly, the need to access reality beyond the inevitable manipulation of cinema is signified in *Three Faces* by the trope of confinement, not least that imposed by the camera on its subjects. Activating once again the mirror effect of his previous films, here Panahi multiplies it threefold, with stories of confinement across three generations of oppressed women, thus punished for embracing the all-too-visible metier of film and TV acting. Marziyeh is imprisoned in her home by the male members of her family, then in a cave in her staged suicide attempt, and finally in Sharzahd's hide-out, in

the village outskirts, a tiny thatched hut where the erstwhile famous actress now absconds from her fellow-villagers' hostility. Confinement reigns in the village itself. The narrow road leading to it, carved at the edge of a precipice, holds only one vehicle at a time; an old woman lies in her tight future grave, in the cemetery, waiting for death; Marziyeh's ranting brother is locked up in a stuffy room by his mother, and so on. Within this context, the camera frame constitutes yet another prison: the narrow vertical framing of the mobile phone conveying Marziyeh's grainy suicidal message; the tight close-up of Jafari, taken by night apparently with a dashboard-mounted camera, in the passenger's seat of Panahi's car, itself a claustrophobic space out of which Panahi is only rarely allowed. Indeed, during his trip he politely declines offers of accommodation from the villagers, preferring to sleep in his own car and to refresh himself at roadside fountains. He even keeps himself away from Shahrzad's small abode out of respect, being satisfied with looking at the distant shadow on the hut's window of the three women dancing to music and with listening in his car, from a CD, to Shahrzad's recitation of one of her poems. These are all indices of the confinement of cinema in Iran, but also of the ways in which cinema confines a Real that overflows its frame.

This is best exemplified, once again, by the figure of the autonomous camera, a desire perfectly materialised through the selfie stick which Marziyeh uses to record her suicide message. Nothing better than a selfie stick to convey the utopian disappearance of the cinematographer into a camera that works by itself, in this case capturing images and sounds even after its subject is gone. The footage produced by this mobile phone mounted on a stick is necessarily grainy, often out of focus and, at the end, blurry, producing what Laura Marks (2006) has defined as 'glitch aesthetics', which is political by definition. She finds glitch, for example, in low resolution footage, 'when movies shot with consumer equipment or mobile phones are screened on platforms for high-definition video', which is exactly the effect of Marzieh's recording as it appears in a standard-format film such as *Three Faces.* Marks (2006: 251) further defines glitch thus:

> Glitch is the surge of the disorderly world into the orderly transmission of electronic signals, resulting from a sudden change in voltage in an electric circuit. Ideally transmission is perfect, but in fact it almost never is. Glitch reminds us of the analog roots of digital information in the disorderly behaviour of electrons [...] Glitch interrupts the intended message with a more urgent one.

This 'material base' within the glitch, as Marks sees it, is none other than the indexical reality at the base of any film, digital or otherwise. This reality here is that of death, hovering over the women in the film, over Panahi constantly driving next to the abyss, over the archaic and utterly flawed male order in focus, as represented, among other things, by the injured bull obstructing the road, a reproductive champion now in its twilight. At the end of the film, Panahi becomes the unwitting bearer of the preserved foreskin of one of the sons of an old villager. Given Panahi's record of staunch defender of women's rights, this nonsensical tradition of securing male dominance is certain to be obstructed.

Realism as Non-cinema

As evidenced above, the forbidden tetralogy is entirely and necessarily rooted in actual context, in its non-cinematic approach that confounds it with real life. For this reason, it is endowed with an immediate pedagogical character. By watching it, one becomes fully informed of the characters' eating, bathing and sleeping habits, as well as on the process of making tea for visitors in double-decker teapots, as extensively demonstrated in *This Is Not a Film* and *Closed Curtain*. In *Taxi Theran* we learn about how Iranians get hold of foreign films by way of bootleg DVD sellers such as the man who embarks on Panahi's taxi; this man also informs us that Panahi's son (the same who left a camera rolling in *This Is Not a Film* and is second camera operator in *Three Faces*) is an apprentice filmmaker and, for this reason, his regular customer. We hear of how Iranians go about their New Year celebrations, or Nowrooz, starting with the fireworks that make up the background soundscape in *This Is Not a Film*, and indeed, the sound of a rocket similar to a gunshot is the first noise we hear in the film, when Panahi starts his breakfast. Later in the film, we are told that fireworks and bonfires have been prohibited by the Iranian authorities and offenders are being persecuted, giving support to the impression of gunshots.

But didacticism in the Platonic sense, evoked by Badiou under the banner of 'inaesthetics' and practiced by Brecht in his epic theatre, concerns the revelation of the inner workings of the medium, and here the tetralogy gives us abundant lessons. *This Is Not a Film* offers the viewer, in minute detail, all the steps for manufacturing a film, thus fulfilling Baudry's recipe for the liberating cinema that reveals the illusion-making instruments at its base. In this film, Panahi exposes to Mirtahmasb's camera the process of location scouting for what would have been his next fiction film, the first he

intended to shoot indoors given the problems with censorship he previously experienced with shooting in the streets. Starting by reading from the film script, Panahi goes on to demarcate with strips of tape on the carpet in his living room the area of the character's bedroom, moving on to show on his mobile phone the footage of a house in Isfahan he had found for the setting. Continuing to read the script from a chair placed under the fictitious rope set up for the girl's suicide, Panahi suddenly falls into a depressed silence for not being able to actually make this film.

Lessons on filmmaking in Iran are again a prominent subject in *Taxi Tehran.* Here, we are taken through all the requisites to make 'distributable films' through the voice of Panahi's little niece, another passenger in his taxi, who has been assigned at school to shoot a film. She reads out loud, from her school notes, the relevant rules to that end, which are precisely those imposed on any adult Iranian filmmaker, including: respect for the Islamic headscarf; no contact between men and women; no violence; no discussion of political or economic issues; self-censoring of any problematical issues; and, in particular, no 'sordid realism'. The latter seems to be an unsurmountable hurdle for the girl, who is unable to find any suitable scenes around her for her own film. *Taxi Tehran,* however, is showing us precisely those unsuitable scenes, including that of a pre-teen rubbish-collector who keeps for himself a banknote dropped in the street by a wedding couple. Panahi's niece attempts to make him go back and return the money to the owners for the sake of her camera, but the boy fails to draw the couple's attention and perform the good deed. As a result, both the girl's film and *Taxi Tehran* become tainted with sordid realism and enlisted as non-distributable, i.e. non-films.

Fortunately, despite these negative conditions, Panahi has continued to record the fruit of his uncompromising artistic imagination. *This Is Not a Film* ends literally with the 'pyrotechnics' Adorno and Lyotard describe as the 'only truly great art', as the director observes the defiant Nowrooz bonfire and fireworks from behind the gate of his building where he and his film are confined. A self-consuming film is thus brought to light whose burning energy prevails over the filmmaker's and his cinema's demise.

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3   Film as Death

The Act of Killing

Abstract

Chapter 3 focuses on *The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer, Christine Cynn and anonymous)*,* a film that opens up uncharted territory on which to recast the tenets of documentary, world cinema and filmmaking in general. It required the crew to put their lives at risk in the name of a project they hoped would change the way we experience cinema and reality with it. The film's realist commitment emerges from where it is least expected, namely from Hollywood genres, such as the musical, the film noir and the western, which are used *as* documentary, or a fantasy realm where perpetrators can confess to their crimes without restraints or fear of punishment, but which retains the evidentiary weight of the recording medium.

Keywords: *The Act of Killing*; Joshua Oppenheimer; Christine Cynn; Documentary; Genre

Since its release in 2012, *The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer, Christine Cynn and anonymous) has amassed a great number of fervent admirers and fierce detractors worldwide. Both sides would however agree that the film opens up uncharted territory on which to recast the tenets of documentary, world cinema and filmmaking in general. An evidence of this is a poll with critics and filmmakers conducted in 2014 by *Sight and Sound* magazine (2014) which enshrines *The Act of Killing* among the most important documentaries ever made. In every respect, the film challenges and innovates, first of all through its focus on unrepentant murderers involved in the massacre of more than a million so-called communists in Indonesia in the mid-1960s, who reenact their most gruesome crimes in the style of their favourite Hollywood genres.

The labyrinthine controversies caused by this unusual documentary method have mainly centred on the crew's intimate dealings with the

perpetrators during the eight years the film took to be completed.[1] Most of
the reviews and essays, however, fail to acknowledge the fact that the entire
crew put their own lives at risk in the name of a project they hoped would
change the way we experience cinema and reality with it. Ethical issues
undoubtedly pervade the whole endeavour, given not only the unrevealed
agreements between crew and cast that necessarily took place before such
a film could be made, but also the obvious exploitation of its subjects,
despicable though they might be. And it is indeed ethics which will be at the
core of my approach, but one which I have elsewhere defined as an 'ethics
of realism' (Nagib 2011). I hold the view that *The Act of Killing*'s greatest
political contribution is the rejection of simplistic dualisms which place
criminals as radical others to human beings, positing instead filmmakers
and film subjects as stakeholders in the same humanity capable of causing
catastrophe as well as regeneration. In this, it resonates with Alain Badiou
(2002: 25), when he claims in his book on ethics:

> In the context of a system of thought that is both a-religious and genuinely
> contemporary with the truths of our time, the whole ethical predica-
> tion based upon recognition of the other should be purely and simply
> abandoned. For the real question – and it is an extraordinarily difficult
> one – is much more that of *recognizing the Same*.

I argue furthermore that ethics in this film refers to the physical com-
mitment on the part of crew and cast to the truth of the unpredictable
events unfolding before the camera, an understanding which is tributary
to André Bazin's (1967) realist formula that combines faithfulness to the
profilmic phenomena with a belief in the inherent honesty of the film
medium (Rancière 2006: 2). But an ethics of the real is also detectable in the
film's allegiance to Brecht (1964: 91ff) and his championing of the unmasking
of representational artifice as the only possible realist method. In what
follows, I will examine how this ethical realist programme operates on
three key cinematic arenas: genre, authorship and spectatorship.

As far as genre is concerned, the film's realist commitment emerges
from where it is least expected, namely from Hollywood genres, such as the
musical, the film noir and the western, which are used *as* documentary,
that is to say, as a fantasy realm where perpetrators can confess to their

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1   For readers interested in gaining an insight into this literature, a good way to start are two
special issues devoted to the film, in respectively *Film Quarterly,* Winter, Vol. 67, N. 2, and *Critical
Asian Studies,* Vol. 46, N. 1.

crimes without restraints or fear of punishment, but which nonetheless retains the evidentiary weight of the audiovisual medium. Authorship, in turn, translates as Oppenheimer's unmistakable auteur signature through his role of self-confessed spy, or 'infiltrator', as he defines it, who disguises as a sympathiser of the criminals in order to gain first-hand access to the full picture of their acts. Authorship is felt precisely in Oppenheimer's authoritative recourse to ruse in order to conduct a clinical, even ruthless manipulation of his subjects. One of them, the protagonist Anwar Congo, is clearly affected by post-traumatic stress disorder, and his repetitive reliving of his killings is made to flare up in front of the camera so as to bring back the dead to the present time in their material reality, through his own body, including a harrowing scene of the actor's unpredictable and uncontrollable retching as he reenacts the killing of his victims through strangulation. Finally, as the concluding section will aim to demonstrate, it is in the realm of spectatorship where oppositional binaries are radically abolished. The usual process of illusionistic identification on the part of the spectator is turned on its head by means of disguising these criminals as amateur filmmakers, led to shoot, act within, and then watch their own film within the film so as to force them to experience beyond any illusion the suffering they had caused, a point at which the act of filmmaking changes into the experience of death.

   Addressing each of these concepts in turn, I will attempt to indicate ways in which scholarly thought on cinema can progress on the basis of the extraordinary political impact of this film.

Genre

What is *The Act of Killing*? It is, no doubt, in the first place, a film, but one uncomfortably sitting within the boundaries of the medium and permanently straddling other forms of discourse, not least the category 'non-cinema', expanded on at length in the previous chapters as a form which challenges the separation between cinema and real life. Let us see how. The film was primarily conceived as a core output from the AHRC-funded project 'Genocide and Genre', led by Joram ten Brink, a Professor of Film at the University of Westminster. The study of genre is hence at the very origin of the film, itself part and parcel of a wide-encompassing research project, including other outputs such as the anthology *Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory and the Performance of Violence* (2012), edited by ten Brink and Oppenheimer himself. Oppenheimer's participation in the 'Genocide

and Genre' project, in turn, fits naturally within an academic trajectory which started with his first degree in film at Harvard University, under the supervision of the radical Serbian filmmaker Dušan Makavejev, and continued with his practice-based PhD at Central Saint Martins University of the Arts, in London. This was followed by his relocation to Copenhagen, where, in 2002, with his collaborator Christine Cynn, he took up a project to film oil plantation workers on the outskirts of Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia, as a pilot study on the effects of globalisation on agriculture worldwide. This resulted in *The Globalisation Tapes,* a collective film which brought the crew in contact with the victims and survivors of the 1965 genocide of over a million of so-called 'communists' in Indonesia. The film contains the germs of what was to become *The Act of Killing,* as it features Oppenheimer's encounter with Sharman Sinaga, one of the perpetrators of the 1965 massacre who boastfully describes to the camera his killing techniques. Having found a number of other perpetrators all-too eager to recount their deeds onscreen, the directors then decided to devote an entire feature-length film to such accounts.

This gives us an overall idea of the combined academic and practical developments through which the film came to existence, becoming the corollary of the research project 'Genocide and Genre'. How exactly these two terms combine in the film requires, however, further elaboration. In their introduction to the book *Killer Images,* ten Brink and Oppenheimer explain that their research project is not 'a study of the history of screen violence or the genres of film violence', but rather an investigation of 'cinema's engagement with the performance of violence' (2012: 4). Accordingly, *The Act of Killing* is structured upon the principle that murder and, in this case, genocide are performative acts, reliant on social endorsement and empathetic spectatorship. Indeed the most astonishing aspect of *The Act of Killing* is to have found perpetrators who were willing to reenact their murderous deeds in the style of their favourite Hollywood genres, in particular the two protagonists, Anwar Congo, an executioner in the 1965 massacre, and Herman Koto, a gangster and paramilitary leader, as well as Anwar's sidekick. Benedict Anderson (2012), an authority on Indonesian twentieth-century history, presents an interesting explanation for the phenomenon, arguing that the Medan gangsters, given their distance from the central power of Jakarta, probably felt 'a lack of national-level recognition for their role in the massacres' of 1965 (281). Anderson (283) continues:

[Oppenheimer's] camera offers them the possibility of commemoration, and transcendence of age, routine and death [...] They have a

commemorative idea about film, actually Hollywood films which they loved from their teens. The Lone Ranger, Batman, Patton, Shane, Samson, MacArthur and Rambo – all real or imaginary men – are figures of im-mortality for killers who are heroic patriots, not grand gangsters [...] Oppenheimer thus comes to them as a kind of providential 'Hollywood' ally.

In the film, Anwar corroborates this hypothesis by stating in a conversation with Herman that 'whether this ends up on the big screen or only on TV, it doesn't matter, we have to show that this is who we are, this is our story, so in the future people will remember'. There is also the additional coincidence that Anwar and his accomplices used to work in the film exhibition sector and that, at the height of its power, the communist regime in Indonesia had demanded a ban on American films, badly affecting their business and giving them a further pretext to participate in the massacre of communists following their defeat by the Suharto army.

Does this however suffice to establish a direct connection between genocide and genre? Cinematic genres, like all genres, are a combination of repetition and variation that provides captive audiences with the reassuring recognition of a pattern whilst endowing each new product with a fresh attraction. Genre has also been seen in the light of the structure of the myth, that is, as a cultural ritual capable of ironing out differences and conflicts in a community (Stam 2000: 127), leading to general catharsis and reconciliation. Repetition and variation are equally discernible in genocide, which can by the same token be associated to forms of cultural rituals. But there is a fundamental barrier between the virtual realm in which any cinematic genre, including the documentary, takes place, and the real-life context of genocide. *The Act of Killing* seems intent on breaking this very separation, by forcing the conception of genre out of the safe haven of film and into the reality of life. As regards the spheres in which this film operates, David Martin-Jones engages in an interesting discussion with Slavoj Žižek, who has analysed the *The Act of Killing* from the perspective of global capitalism. For Žižek, what the Indonesian perpetrators are doing, when they publicly and boastfully re-stage their past crimes for the camera, is not breaking out of the private sphere, but expanding it to the point of obliterating the public sphere, replicating today's social networking phenomenon. In so doing, Žižek continues, the film exposes 'the ruthless egotism of each of the individuals pursuing his or her private interest'. For Martin-Jones (2019: 165), however, 'the past that the film provides us with an encounter with is [...] not one of the privatisation of

the public space, […] but the suspension of the laws that normally govern such a space'. He says:

> The gangsters' way of remembering and memorialising the historical moment of the exceptional 'non-place' is by recreating a time when their movie fantasies could be lived out, and when they became heroes for it. (164)

The problem about the recreation of a lawless 'non-space', where real crimes are enacted in the style of film genres, is, of course, that genres cannot be the subject of the same moral indictment applicable to genocide. Consequently, in proposing to equate the two, the film is either being excessive in its charge on cinema and genre, or too light with regard to genocide, and this apparent ambiguity has been the source of many of the ethical objections levelled against the film (see, for example, Fraser 2013).

The fact however is that neither genre nor genocide is the actual focus of the film, whose primary project is to document the mental and emotional processes of those who have seen death with their own eyes and caused it with their own hands. Its greatest achievement is, in my view, that the distorted, grotesque and horrifying imagery resulting from this process exudes a kind of realism that no cinematic genre, not even documentary, could ever produce. This is the reason why nothing we see in the film even remotely resembles a cinematic genre of any kind, despite all the genre paraphernalia deployed to convey the perpetrators' fantasies. An apt illustration of this effect can be found right at the beginning. The film opens with an image that has become emblematic and features in all its publicity: a giant rusty-coloured carcass, in the shape of a carp, against the backdrop of purple clouds, a blue lake and blue mountains, all obviously digitally enhanced (Figure 3.1). The sound is a mixture of wind, birds, cars passing, which are gradually taken over by incidental music, a mellow female choir over keyboard notes setting the pace for six female dancers who exit the giant fish's mouth one by one onto a suspended catwalk, holding the train of their strapless dresses. The music carries on to the next shot of a waterfall occupying the whole frame, whilst the camera slowly tilts down to capture the raised hands and then the full body of Anwar and Herman. The camera then recedes in order to include in the frame another group of female dancers, with tight shiny red tops, long white skirts and false feather headdresses swaying in front of the waterfall. By now the music has been replaced by an off-screen voice on a loudspeaker, urging the characters to convey joy, happiness and peace. Anwar, in a priestly

Figure 3.1 The disconcerting opening of *The Act of Killing*.

cassock, smiles beatifically. Herman looks like a pregnant woman, with his huge stomach squeezed in a flashy blue dress (one of the many drag costumes he will sport throughout the film), a large-brim white hat with a blue lace and clownish make up. The off-screen voice shouts 'cut' and helpers enter the scene to hand out towels to the cast drenched by the waterfall spray. The complete opacity and apparent absurdity of the whole sequence will be partially unravelled as the film evolves. However, thanks to its implausibility as a realm of fantasy, this overture brings home to the viewer the all-too material and puzzling reality of the actors, the location and the cinematic apparatus.

Let me explain by resorting to Bertolt Brecht, whose epic theatre is usually described as promoting anti-realism insofar as it is aimed at disrupting narrative continuity and verisimilitude. This opening, and indeed *The Act of Killing* as a whole, is the living proof of the vital reality principle inherent in Brecht's anti-illusionistic method. Brechtian to the root, the film is entirely structured on the principle of systematically preventing the formation of a plausible fictional or narrative world in the name of the reality of the profilmic event. Peter Wollen (1985: 501ff) defined as 'narrative intransitivity' the Brechtian disruption of the fable as applied, for example, by Godard to his films. In *The Act of Killing,* this and other procedures prescribed by Brecht, such as the disconnect between the scenes and the opacity of the characters who become 'objects of enquiry' rather than 'taken for granted' (Brecht 1964: 37), are followed to the letter in order to conjure up the material reality of the fiction-making apparatus, rather than the

impression of reality of the fictional world. Thus the prelude with the giant carp and dancers, rather than enabling the recognition of a genre pattern, elicits estrangement for the real-life quality of the dirty, rusty carcass that prevails over the artificial colours around it, as well as that of the dancers who fall out of sync with each other revealing their life-like amateurism. The jump-cut to the waterfall scene further enhances the sense of realism, as it shows more clumsy dancers and amateur actors ill at ease in their roles, one of whom, the obese Herman, even spits to the side in the middle of his performance. As a result, the spectators are driven away from the 'natural beauty' the voice in the loudspeaker refers to and instead presented with the unpalatable reality that inhabits it, even before they are told of the thousand people Anwar has killed with his own hands, assisted by the likes of Herman. This is how, in this film, disrupted fiction prevents the formation of cinematic genres, in this case, the musical, by means of the repulsive reality at its origin.

In the scenes that follow, other cinematic genres, such as the gangster film and the western, will be played out and equally deconstructed through the interference of the realism of the medium, which places the 1960s genocide as the constant and unavoidable backdrop to all performances. Making genre emerge from the spectre of death is not, however, a recognisable feature of the documentary genre, but the result of a strong authorial signature, that of Joshua Oppenheimer, which I will now address.

Authorship

As an intellectual straddling both filmmaking and film studies, Oppenheimer seems acutely aware of the place he wants to occupy in the auteur pantheon. His statements are strewn with references to directors devoted to documentarian activism focusing on crimes against humanity and human rights, such as Errol Morris, Jean Rouch, Rithy Pahn, Claude Lanzman, Werner Herzog and other filmmakers he aspires not only to compare with but even perhaps to surpass. In tune with this noble lineage of filmmakers, all of them celebrated for their risk-taking approach and fearless engagement with their subjects, Oppenheimer devised an 'infiltrative method' which led him to penetrate right-wing militias, white-supremacist groups, UFO abductee groups, and cults as if he were one of them, a daring venture for a Jewish homosexual like him, resulting in his two American films of the 1990s, *These Places We've Learned to Call Home* (1996) and *The Entire History of the Louisiana Purchase* (1997).

The Act of Killing also benefits from this kind of approach in a seemingly collaborative dynamics through which Oppenheimer gains intimacy with and the confidence of mass murderers to the point of having them reenact their crimes onscreen in the manner of their Hollywood idols. A similar collaborative method had been employed, for example, by Jean Rouch, whose ideas of 'shared anthropology' and 'ethnodialogue' (Sayad 2013: 80ff) had been put to the test in films such as *Moi, un noir* (1958), in which Niger migrant workers in Abidjan tell their life stories under the guise of Hollywood and European stars such as Edward G. Robinson and Eddie Constantine, and here too a gruesome story of killings emerges through this seemingly playful method. Another of Oppenheimer's sources is said to have been the 'Theatre of the Oppressed' (Lusztig 2013: 51), developed by Augusto Boal on the basis of his experience with deprived communities in different parts of the world. Key to Boal's method was the turning of passive spectators into active participants who directly intervene in the theatrical performance in order to change it into political action. In line with this kind of shared authorship and collaborative work, as practised by democratic ethnographers and politicised dramatists, in *The Act of Killing* parts of screen writing, directing, shooting and acting were also delegated to the film subjects, as explained in the initial titles:

> *In 1965 the Indonesian government was overthrown by the military. Anybody opposed to the military dictatorship could be accused of being a communist: union members, landless farmers, intellectuals and the ethnic Chinese. In less than a year and with the direct aid of western governments, over one million 'communists' were murdered. The army used paramilitaries and gangsters to carry out the killings. These men have been in power – and have persecuted their opponents – ever since. When we met the killers, they proudly told us stories about what they did. To understand why, we asked them to create scenes about the killings in whatever ways they wished. This film follows that process and documents its consequences.*

Equally collaborative was the overall directorial work, shared between Oppenheimer, Christine Cynn and an Indonesian co-director who had to remain anonymous for security reasons. Oppenheimer's position at the helm of the decision-making process remains, however, abundantly apparent. His authorial voice and signature are clearly noticeable in every aspect of the film, providing a seamless continuation to the infiltrative work he had been consistently pursuing from the beginning of his filmmaking career. Indeed, *The Act of Killing* is Oppenheimer's most daring infiltrative film, as

it required him to stay for eight years in close contact with utterly dangerous and powerful criminals, including the Vice-President of Indonesia, Jusuf Kalla, himself a member of the Pancasila paramilitary militia who supported the killings and continues to crush opposing voices to this day. (The other documentary made by Oppenheimer in Indonesia, *The Look of Silence,* shot before *The Act of Killing* but only released in 2014, cannot be considered 'infiltrative', for it focuses mainly on the survivors of the 1960s atrocities.)

The risk of such an enterprise was obvious, given that the director is the exact opposite of the kind of providential 'Hollywood ally' those criminals expected him to be, as suggested by Benedict Anderson. Every single shot of the film is aimed, not at fulfilling, but at undermining his subjects' hopes of gaining recognition and glorification for their acts. That his subjects have no say in the final product of the film becomes clear from the start. We know that the film was eight years in the making, and whichever version we are able to see today, be it the theatrical feature or the director's cut, is only a small and highly edited fraction of what was actually shot. In any case, this end product certainly does not correspond to any film the protagonists themselves had in mind, although several passages indicate that they were expecting their own edited version of it to be produced. There is, for example, a reasonably lengthy discussion between Anwar and Herman about whether a scene, in which the former is beheaded, should come at the beginning of the film and initiate a flash-back, or at the end. The beheading scene, together with its replay on a TV set, is part of the finished version of *The Act of Killing*, however we never see the film these two actors are talking about. The only possible conclusion from this procedure is that the film actors are being duped into believing they have a say on the final product.

Anwar, Herman and his friends seem to be dreaming of a film full of action, beautiful scenery and enjoyable music, but everything shown in *The Act of Killing* is visually and aurally revolting, as well as morally repugnant. Particularly disgusting is the appearance of the perpetrators themselves. Herman is not just overweight, but constantly exposing his gigantic belly (Figure 3.2), spitting and intimidating children and women. Anwar is repeatedly captured in the act of removing his false teeth and then clicking them back in place (Figure 3.3). Gangsters and Pancasila paramilitary refer to women in the most offensive terms, telling how much they enjoy raping 14-year-olds and similarly appalling stories. All these scenes and conversations are obviously shot and edited under the director's direct command and surveillance, regardless of what his supposed actors and collaborators think of them.

Figure 3.2 *The Act of Killing*: Herman is constantly exposing his gigantic belly.

Figure 3.3 *The Act of Killing*: Anwar is repeatedly captured in the act of removing his false teeth and then clicking them back in place.

Oppenheimer might well be wary of the public's immediate perception of this betrayal, when he states, in the production notes:

Anwar is the bravest and most honest character in *The Act of Killing*. He may or may not 'like' the result, but I have tried to honour his courage and his openness by presenting him as honestly, and with as much compassion, as I could, while still deferring to the unspeakable acts that he committed.

As always, critics must be cautious when dealing with an artist's self-assessment, difficult though it is to resist Oppenheimer's compelling written and spoken prose. Rather than his personal statements, it is more enlightening to look at his authorial persona within the film itself in order to understand what is actually at stake. Oppenheimer's presence in *The Act of Killing* is subtle and camouflaged. He never appears on camera and his voice as an interviewer, in fluent Indonesian, is only occasionally heard, mostly when there are immediate ethical issues at play. For example, when Anwar calls his two pre-teen grandsons to watch footage of him re-enacting his strangulation methods and the director, off-screen, objects that the scenes are too violent for them – though the children end up watching the footage anyway. But a sense of the director's ubiquitous presence is rendered precisely for his absence, that is, for his refusal to help make sense of the chaotic spectacle those despicable criminals are trying to put together for the benefit of the camera. Because they are no professional actors and are entirely foreign to movie making, their 'Hollywood' film within the main film turns them into grotesque and involuntary parodies of themselves and their acts. There is no attempt, on the part of the main film crew, at improving or polishing their imagined scenes, leaving the gangsters unmasked and exposed in their naïve enjoyment of their dreadful performances. Here again it is the reality of the medium that prevails, not just because the spectator is presented with all the discussions and preparations for the scenes, but because the theatrical performance fails to configure itself as such, leaving intact the deadly acts at their base as well as the authorial power of the non-intrusive director.

Alongside the infiltrative method, another clear authorial feature is the choice of Anwar Congo as the main protagonist. We are given no reasons for Anwar being singled out to monopolise the attention of the camera, but we soon realise that he is moved by a persistent obsession with death by the throat, through strangling, gagging or beheading. Despite the claim that he alone was responsible for a thousand deaths, no firearms or weapons of any kind other than primitive methods of compression or severing of the throat are suggested. This provides the film with the unifying imagery of the violated throat running through its entire length, determining its editing structure as well as visual and aural mise-en-scène. Variations of the motif of death by the throat multiply. In one of the most gruesome moments of the film, Anwar distributes hats to a handful of real gangsters, including Herman, in the style of his favourite Al Pacino gangster films and John Wayne westerns. He goes on to describe how he used to place the leg of a table on the neck of a victim and sit together with his accomplices on the table, who would shake their bodies to the rhythm of songs until their

victim's throat was completely crushed; so all his fellow actor-gangsters sit with him on the table, singing 'Hello, Bandung', to support him in the demonstration of this killing method.

The garrotte, made with a wire wound around the victim's neck and pulled with the help of a wooden handle, an idea which Anwar claims to have drawn from mafia movies, is played out as a leitmotiv. Anwar gives several demonstrations of the use of this weapon, whose main advantage he describes as being the little waste of blood. This is in fact the missing information which, towards the end of the film, completes the meaning of the opening musical sequence, in the form of a sequel. The waterfall scenario from the opening is replayed, now to the music track of the 1966 British film drama *Born Free* providing the backdrop to the swaying dancers, Anwar in his cassock and Herman in his drag costume. This time, however, two of Anwar's victims also appear, their faces smeared with white make-up to indicate their afterlife status. They ceremoniously remove from their neck the wire with which Anwar had strangled them. One of the victims then takes a ribbon with a medal out of his pocket and hangs it on Anwar's neck, declaring: 'For executing me and sending me to heaven I thank you a thousand times'. Anwar seems elated when re-watching this scene on a TV set in his home, little realising his status as guinea pig in the hands of his psychoanalyst director, interested in tracking down to the very bottom his obsession with the garrotte. This goes as far as a shot of weird erotic overtones, in which Anwar, in one of his reenactments, lies under a table, holding the ends of a wire wrapped around the neck of his victim on the table, and as he pulls the wire a sound emerges from his throat like an orgasm, following which he relaxes as his victim is now presumably dead.

Indeed, a particularly striking aspect of *The Act of Killing* is its sexual symbolism, most blatant in the figure of Herman, who appears in extravagant drag characterisations throughout the film. Saskia E. Wieringa (2014: 198) explains that his depiction is modelled after a popular and rather aged transvestite TV actor and comedian, Tessy (full name, Kabul Basuki), typically portrayed with heavy make-up, thick protruding lips, and glittering jewellery, a type harking back to the *srimulat*, a humorous, low-brow Javanese form of theatre. Anderson (2012) suggests that, in donning such a disguise, Herman is trying to depict communists as cruel homosexuals, but there is another important element at play here. Herman's characterisation, in fact, parallels anti-communist propaganda stories of 'wildly singing and dancing women, seducing and then castrating the army's top brass, the nation's symbol of masculinity', leading the entire nation 'to associate the PKI [Indonesian Communist Party] with depravity,

Figure 3.4 Reenacting cannibalism in *The Act of Killing.*

as the evil to be ripped out of society' (Wieringa 2014: 198). Cinema was
a privileged medium to spread such beliefs, as was notably the case of
Treachery of G30S/PKI (*Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI,* Arifin C. Noer, 1984), an
anti-communist propaganda film and compulsory viewing in Indonesian
schools, which is littered with such motifs. Wieringa's insider's view (2014:
195-96) gives us the clue to some scenes in *The Act of Killing* which would
otherwise remain opaque. An example is the moment when Anwar is
playing an anti-communist fighter, called Arsan, who is slaughtered by
Herman again in drag, in the role of 'a sexually depraved communist
woman called Aminah', mouth smeared with the red juice of some berries
(Figure 3.4).

> Aminah laughs loudly, madly, and eats a piece of raw liver, shouting it is
> Arsan's liver that she had just ripped out. Next she produces an oblong
> piece of stuffed cloth, approximately twenty centimetres in length, also
> dripping with berry juice and proceeds to stuff that into the mouth of
> Arsan (who, though dead, is gagging). 'This is your penis, eat it', Aminah
> shouts. (Wieringa 2014: 198)

The editor of the *Medan Post*, Ibrahim Sinik, mentions, in another scene,
that he played a similar role in a 1965 film, whose function was to instil
hate against the PKI, and it is the same Sinik who, according to Wieringa
(196), wrote the script for this cannibalistic scene. It is fitting that the
perpetrators would be performing the roles of their own victims, as this

scene mirrors the acts of cannibalism they themselves committed at the time, as they confess to Oppenheimer, with chilling honesty, in *The Look of Silence,* in which they even describe the habit, among them, to drink a glass of their victims' blood as an antidote to recurrent nightmares of their crimes.

In *The Act of Killing,* the insistence on the drag characterisation goes beyond the ridicule of the enemy, exposing instead some deep-seated desire or fantasy in its raw state, in tune with Anwar's sexually infused obsession with the garrotte and the neck. Ivone Margulies (2003: 217-218) has described as the aim of reenactment films to 'conflate repetition with moral revision', providing a 'symmetry between traumatic ordeal and social redemption'. By collaborating in the making of *The Act of Killing*, Anwar seems to be avidly seeking solace for his trauma through the reenactment of his crimes. But the film firmly denies him such relief by exposing his and his comrades' ill-directed sexual drives and by piling up evidence to the enormity of their acts through their very reenactments.

The extraordinary procedure Oppenheimer devised in order to achieve this effect was to resort to one of the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from which Anwar is clearly suffering, which is presentification. Sufferers from this condition are haunted by the feeling that the traumatic event continues to happen in the present. This is obviously the case of Anwar, who reiterates, in the film, that he continues to be assailed by recurrent nightmares of the crimes he committed more than 50 years ago. Alongside the reliving of the traumatic events, other defining symptoms of PTSD are vivid flashbacks, intrusive memories and images, and physical sensations such as nausea, which is at the core of a key scene I will return to in the next section.

As Homay King (2013: 31) reminds us a propos of *The Act of Killing*, Freud was the first to identify the symptoms of PTSD, which he described as 'repetition compulsion' in patients suffering from traumatic neuroses, many of whom were war veterans. Moved by the aim of unveiling a horrific past, *The Act of Killing* attempts to bring back the dead from their graves and have them play a role in the present through the very trauma their death has caused. Anwar is nothing but an instrument to that end, stupendously devised by auteur Oppenheimer, who gives free rein to his own imagination in order to attach audiovisual figuration to Anwar's ghosts. These appear, for example, as a noisy swarm of nocturnal bats following a shot of Anwar sleeping, as if they had directly emerged from his nightmares. Or in the shape of a group of monkeys, who descend from the trees to feast on the red berries used to represent blood in the reenactment of the attack on a village, suggesting

cannibalism (which is literally represented in the drag scene above) as well as animal automatism, in a parable to the human murderous instinct.

In the process of presentification and documentation of traumatic symptoms lies the extreme originality of the reenactment procedure utilised in this film, which rather than resorting to archive photos or footage, conflates the past with the present through the repetition of the act whose freshness and material reality is preserved in the traumatic symptoms and abject bodies of their perpetrators. Oppenheimer's auteurist role as an infiltrator and treacherous ally is that of removing the mask of his subjects as well as his own, in front and behind the camera, so as to attach the seal of material truth to the irreparable act of killing.

Spectatorship

The injection of realism into the realm of spectatorship is one of the film's central aims and greatest achievements. Anwar, Herman and other perpetrators, sometimes accompanied by members of their families, are made to watch the footage of their re-enactments, in scenes which are then interspersed with the re-enactments themselves. They react by suggesting here and there an improvement to their costumes or make up. Mostly, however, they seem enthusiastic about what they see and convinced of the merit of their own stories, and this is clearly the reason why they continue to collaborate with Oppenheimer during the course of eight years. Anwar and Herman's spectatorial naivety could even be seen as providing credit to psychoanalytic theories that characterise the film spectator as passive and regressive, absorbed as they are in illusionistic voyeurism and ready for cathartic identification with themselves as actors.

It is not surprising that they should rejoice in recognising themselves in the skin of their imagined heroes, but it is positively baffling to see them incarnating, with apparent naturalness, both victims and perpetrators in their reenactments, which results, for the spectators of Oppenheimer's film, in the experience of the unbearable reality of their illusion. In a particularly bizarre scene, both Anwar and Adi, his fellow executioner in 1965, play the role of interrogators but with their faces made up in lacerated flesh, as if they themselves had been tortured by the very interrogators they impersonate. It is as if the death mask described by Bazin as comparable to cinema's ontological link to the material world had become alive and were being applied to the faces of those pretending to be the killers, making the past reemerge in the present in its *durée*.

Vivian Sobchack (2004: 59) called 'interobjectivity' the process of '*subjective* realisation of our own *objectivity,* in the passion of our *own* material', and the film is undoubtedly pushing its subjects to experience themselves as objects. Viveiros de Castro, along similar lines, resorted to the concept of 'perspectivism' to address an ethos among the anthropophagic Tupi-Guarani, which he defines as 'the ability to look at oneself as the Other – a point of view from which one arguably obtains the ideal view of oneself' (2005: 5). It is not a coincidence that cannibalism is part of the horrors staged in *The Act of Killing*, in the carnivalesque sequence described above, in which Herman in drag bites on a liver and pushes a cut-off penis into the mouth of the severed head of his victim, the latter being no other than Anwar himself. By blurring the boundaries between filmmakers and film spectators, through a psychoanalytic procedure that turns cathartic identification into the reality of acting, *The Act of Killing* renders palpable the agony of victims for those who were, at once, agents and privileged spectators of their killing.

In the hands of Oppenheimer, Anwar becomes the ideal ground for this radical experiment that turns narrative illusionism on its head, that is, the reality of life. Two scenes placed at the beginning and the end of the film leave no doubt of the director's intention to force perpetrators into the skin of their victims so as to give them a physical sense of the plights they had caused. In the first one, Anwar, in a cheerful mood, visits a rooftop terrace that had been the site of many of his thousand murders, in order to demonstrate the use of the garrotte. In the second scene, Anwar revisits the same spot, but now, as the film leads us to believe, after having gone through various re-enactments of his crimes and sporting a more appropriate outfit for the occasion, a yellow suit instead of the white trousers and flowery shirt of the previous scene, and in a more sombre mood. As he attempts to convey the same description of the use of the garrotte, Anwar retches uncontrollably, as if he himself were being strangled and, at the same time, regurgitating, though alas only symbolically, the bodies of his victims. Adding a decisive difference to the second sequence from the first is the use of a single long take. Were it a cinema of montage, the retching could have been edited out, and Oppenheimer suggests that Anwar continued to perform, despite his sickness, probably in the hope that this would be the case. The decision to preserve the long take in its integrity is hence a political one, and simultaneously Oppenheimer's ultimate betrayal of his subject, negating cinema in order to let reality speak for itself.

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4 The Blind Spot of History

Colonialism in *Tabu*

Abstract

Chapter 4 studies Miguel Gomes's *Tabu* (2012), another eloquent example of the negative use of cinema for realist ends. As is the case with the *The Act of Killing, Tabu* addresses a nation's tainted historical past by means of a relentless questioning of the film medium and its representational properties. Though similar in their self-reflexive method, the two films differ greatly in their approach. Whereas the former tracks down perpetrators of genocide in Indonesia in order to obtain the evidence of their crimes, in the latter, the horrors of Portuguese colonialism in Africa remain conspicuous by their absence. Both in Mozambique and Lisbon, where the film was shot, the sombre legacy of colonialism makes itself felt by resisting representation.

Keywords: *Tabu;* Miguel Gomes; Portuguese Cinema; Colonialism

> 'We've lost a soldier and gained an artist'. (*Foi-se o militar, ficou o artista.*)
> Spoken line in *Tabu*

This chapter looks at the film *Tabu* (by Portuguese director Miguel Gomes, 2012) as another eloquent example of the negative use of cinema for realist ends. As was the case with the *The Act of Killing,* examined in the previous chapter, *Tabu* addresses a nation's tainted historical past by means of a relentless questioning of the film medium and its representational properties. Though similar in their self-reflexive method, the two films differ greatly in their approach. Whereas the former tracks down perpetrators of genocide in Indonesia in order to obtain the evidence of their crimes, in the latter, the horrors of Portuguese colonialism in Africa – the main issue at stake – remain conspicuous by their absence. Indeed, *Tabu* gravitates

around an irresistible, all-consuming black hole, where the sombre legacy of colonialism makes itself felt by resisting representation.

An analogy may help to clarify this assumption. In the most ferocious days of the military dictatorship in Brazil, in the 1970s, more than a thousand articles were censored in one of Brazil's biggest newspapers, *O Estado de São Paulo.* Because the censored sections were not allowed to remain blank, they were filled with cooking recipes and, more notably, with long sections of the sixteenth-century epic poem, *The Lusiads,* by Portugal's foundational poet, Luís Vaz de Camões. These ersatz texts, though distant in time and space from the country's current troubles, were all the more political for the discrepancy they presented with the unpublished original, evidencing as they did the violent suppression of the truth. Watching *Tabu* gives a similar impression of a film with scores of blank pages, filled up with playful ersatz where political statements should have been.

Nonetheless, the subject of Portuguese colonialism in Africa becomes clear from the outset. The film's tripartite structure involves a short prologue in which a Portuguese explorer's adventures in an unidentified part of Africa, among 'cannibals' and 'wild beasts', are related in voiceover commentary. This is followed by Part One: A Lost Paradise, in which Africa features again, this time in the person of Santa, the Cape Verdean maid of semi-senile and openly racist Aurora, who lives next door to the episode's third protagonist, Pilar, in present-day Lisbon. Finally, Part Two: Paradise, the longest episode in the film, is a flashback to Aurora's youth, entirely set in Africa. In all three parts the unequal relationship between colonisers and colonised is of the essence, and yet colonialism itself is never touched upon. Instead, whenever verging on that territory, the story is drawn back to the characters' private realm. Thus, for example, the explorer's expedition in Africa is explained as motivated by the loss of his beloved wife, rather than by any mission of conquest. In particular, Aurora's long-winded life story, told in flashback in minute detail in Part Two, involving love affairs, hunting, gambling and a pet crocodile, all evidently connected with her position as a European settler in Africa, precludes this very fact.

This notwithstanding, the view that *Tabu* is a brilliant film is widespread and corroborated by the host of prizes and critical accolades it has collected since its release in 2012. But in order to understand where the film's qualities actually lie, it is first necessary to ask: why does it refuse to call colonialism by name? What is the prohibition, or 'taboo', referred to in the film's very title? Needless to say, there were no bans on the subject of colonial conflicts, as was the case with the censored Brazilian newspaper. On the contrary, unveiling the real facts behind the colonial propaganda in

Portugal, particularly strong during the New-State dictatorship of António de Oliveira Salazar, between 1932 and 1968, has become the mission of a great number of Lusophone artists and scholars in recent times. A film such as *The Murmuring Coast* (*A costa dos murmúrios,* Margarida Cardoso, 2004, an adaptation of Lídia Jorge's eponymous novel), focusing on the Portuguese colonial wars in Mozambique – which also provides the main locations for *Tabu* – is an eloquent example of this investigative tendency which culminates, in Cardoso's film, in the discovery of harrowing evidence of atrocities. In the Portuguese artworld, the study of archival images, from both official and private origin, has elicited highly innovative artworks by the likes of Daniel Barroca and Filipa César, authors respectively of the installations *Circular Body* (2015) and *Luta ca caba inda* (2017), which conduct a careful scrutiny of the artists' own subjectivities and complex family and affective ties with previous colonisers and perpetrators. This kind of research also informs Cardoso's *The Murmuring Coast,* which opens precisely with domestic footage of Portuguese families leisurely interacting with locals, in Mozambique, in the days leading to the independence wars. These artworks and films come alongside groundbreaking research, such as contained in the book *(Re)imagining African Independence: Film, Visual Arts and the Fall of the Portuguese Empire,* edited by Maria do Carmo Piçarra and Teresa Castro (2017), which looks at how colonialism has been abundantly and variously 'imagined' in film and photography in both Portugal and its former colonies. *Tabu* also plays with the idea of home movies as indexical evidence of historical facts, which are simulated in Part Two as a pastime activity among idle European settlers, but again here colonial issues are averted. As Sally Faulkner (2015: 342) puts it:

> With both wit and lightness of touch, Gomes explores [the characters'] memories, qualities that are often missing in more earnest cinematic treatments of the weighty subject of remembering a traumatic past (for example socio-realist treatments). None the less, Gomes also turns the tables on the viewer. Not only must we fill in a fifty-year narrative lacuna 1961–2011 (the period of decolonization and shift from dictatorship to democracy in Portugal), colour in the black-and-white image track and sonorize the silent dialogue, but also recognize that other experiences in the film remain taboo.

Taken at face value, the tone of playful parody and irony adopted in the film's purposely incoherent storylines, combined with its systematic diversions towards trivial personal fabulations whenever a social issue is at stake,

would verge on the frivolous. In his favour, however, co-writer (with Mariana Ricardo) and director Miguel Gomes explains that he had never been to Africa before shooting *Tabu,* hence his and his film's inability to represent colonialism as lived experience, but only as 'film', or rather cinephilia. 'In *Tabu*', states Gomes, 'there is this invented Africa, which is based on a kind of fake memory of Africa, for which we can thank classical American cinema' (Prouvèze n.d.), adding elsewhere: 'My memory of Africa is *Tarzan*, it's *Hatari!*, it's *Out of Africa*' (Wigon 2012).

And yet this phony fantasy elicits a sense of foreboding, of an ominous truth lurking underground, whose form and content remain unknown, but whose historical reality is unequivocal. This effect is obtained, this chapter argues, thanks to the employment of indexical and medium realisms. The entire action is set on real locations, in Mozambique, in the prologue and Part Two, and in Lisbon, in Part One. Though the protagonist roles were given to renowned professional actors, such as Teresa Madruga (Pilar), Laura Soveral (Aurora) and Carloto Cotta (Gian Luca Ventura), others are simply playing themselves, such as the Mozambican villagers and workers in the prologue and Part Two, and the Polish young woman Maya Kosa, called by her own name Maya in the film. Improvisation is also visible on the part of both non-professional and experienced actors, all at the mercy of Gomes's usual working method of a loose script complemented haphazardly by chance events. There is even an attempt, in Part One, at identifying the film with the course of real life by means of the diary form, with title cards indicating day, month and year of each scene, which coincide exactly with the period the film was being shot, around Christmas and New Year in 2011-2012. The film also displays extensive ethnographic material, consisting of documentary footage of local rituals, habits and farming routines in Mozambique, in the prologue and Part Two. Finally, long takes, aimed at preserving the integrity of phenomenological time and space, are employed in some key scenes as will be analysed below.

As for medium realism, as noted by Faulkner in the quote above, *Tabu* promotes a systematic dismantling of cinema's constitutive devices. Colour, sound, music, montage, dialogue, acting and storytelling are denaturalised order to expose the manipulation they produce. The exclusive use of black and white highlights the absence of colour; discontinuous storytelling triggers the awareness of montage; muted dialogues evidence the need of sound; and acting is often glaringly artificial. Medium realism is furthermore apparent in the film's cinephilic fabric, made of countless nods to other films, starting with Murnau's classic *Tabu* (1931), which gives title to the film (see Owen (2016) and Faulkner (2015) for other myriad citations). The use

of the now obsolete 35mm gauge for Part One, set in present-day Portugal, and of the archaic 16mm for the prologue and the African flashback in Part Two, is a cinephilic choice that drives the film's visuals away from contemporary digital virtuality and back to its early haptic materiality. Black and white stock has long been a cinephile's *pièce de résistance*, particularly prominent during the 1980s postmodern nostalgia for Hollywood film noir. Wim Wenders' *The State of Things,* discussed in Chapter 1, is programmatic in this respect, with both the characters of film director Fritz Munro and his DoP Joe Corby fervently defending it because, as Fritz explains to his Hollywood producer Gordon, 'The world is in colour, but black and white is more realistic'. Turning his back on Hollywood's artificial colouring, in a film also coincidentally shot in Portugal, Fritz Munro – whose name combines Fritz Lang and Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, and who is himself a cinephile – helps us to understand how Gomes at once reveres and subverts the tricks of conventional cinema.

In what follows, I shall analyse these two opposite but complementary movements in the film: on the one hand, the foreclosure of history, and, on the other, the grounding of the story in the reality of both the objective world and the medium itself. The aim will be to define a possible truth procedure, as defined by Badiou (2002; 2007), contained in the film's self-defeating fantasy.

The Historical Black Hole

Tabu's first abrupt diversion from the subject of colonialism occurs already in the prologue, before Part One is announced. Though presented as the introduction to the plot, this prologue turns out to bear no relation whatsoever with what follows, except for a vague analogy between a man-eating crocodile here and a pet crocodile featuring later on in Part Two: Paradise.

It starts by presenting a dejected-looking bearded man, standing in a wooded area, facing the camera, sporting a pith helmet and a water canteen strapped across his chest, while semi-naked black natives walk past him carrying spears, trunks and animal cages. A voiceover commentary, uttered by director Gomes himself and often at odds with the images, defines this character as an 'intrepid explorer', crossing the 'heart of the black continent', whom 'neither wild beasts nor cannibals seem to frighten'. Natives continue to be shown, clearing the vegetation with their machetes under the explorer's apathetic gaze. According to the voiceover, he is there at the service of the King of Portugal and, above him, God. However – and here comes the first

radical diversion from the subject of colonialism – the actual reason for his expedition is his heart, 'the most insolent muscle in all anatomy', that made him leave the land where his beloved wife had died. The deceased then appears to the explorer, in 'the garments that hugged her body when she returned to dust', to declare that far as he may travel, 'he will never escape his fate'. Following this, he throws himself in the river and is presumably devoured by a crocodile. However, this is not shown to the viewer. Instead, we see a group of native dancers lined-up in a semi-circle who, following the off-screen sound of a fall in the water and the blow of a whistle by one of them, start to sing and dance accompanied by drummers shown in an interspersed shot. The voiceover goes on to say: 'Night falls on the savannah, as will a thousand and one nights more', and from then on, a crocodile, 'accompanied by a lady of yore', became a regular apparition in the jungle. The camera then pans along a living crocodile and up the figure of the explorer's deceased wife sitting next to it.

According to Gomes (Martins 2012), the character of the explorer is loosely inspired by the life of nineteenth-century Scottish explorer David Livingstone, who lost his wife to malaria in Africa, which is of little help in explaining this character or anything else in this prologue. Of course, this tale is there to be discredited, and so is the voiceover commentary, a curious mixture of official discourses from colonial times and children's adventure books. It includes a nod to Gomes' own *Thousand and One Nights* (or *Arabian Nights*), the film in three volumes he would shoot thereafter and had already been working on then, loosely based on the famous collection of folk tales that lends its sprawling portmanteau narrative style to *Tabu*'s Part Two.

Then comes Part One: A Lost Paradise, with the image of a solitary middle-aged woman, later revealed as Pilar, sitting in an otherwise empty cinema, intently looking through her reading glasses (an odd accessory in a cinema) on the tip of her nose at what must be the credit roll at the end of a film. Thanks to the prologue's continuing music track, we are led to believe that the film she is watching is the story of the 'intrepid explorer' just shown. Thus, as history turns into a film and this into the reality of a present-day cinema, Pilar is introduced as a cinephilic alter-ego of Gomes himself, who until now was the primary spectator and voiceover narrator of the implausible explorer's tale. Given that in this section the film is set in present-day Lisbon, Pilar may well have watched a Portuguese version (or parody) of a Hollywood adventure in the jungle. Hillary Owen (2016: 64ff) suggests this could be something like *O Tarzan do 5º Esquerdo* (Augusto Fraga, 1958), in which a newly-wed working-class hero, struggling to make ends meet in Lisbon, dreams of being Tarzan in a tropical jungle. In Fraga's

film, the dream shows the hero in a pond infested with crocodiles and other beasts, in a similar situation to Gomes' intrepid explorer. Another parallel between the two films refers to the music track. Brazilian tunes are played both during the jungle scene in Fraga's *Tarzan* and in the prologue of *Tabu*. In the former, we hear a noisy samba tune, a reminder of the jingoistic 'lusotropicalism' that animated Portuguese filmmaking in the colonial days. *Tabu*'s prologue, in turn, features a piano version of 'Insensatez' ('How Insensitive'), a bossa nova classic by Tom Jobim and Vinícius de Moraes, here performed by Joana Sá, with the title 'Variações pindéricas sobre a Insensatez' (or 'Playful Variations on Insensatez'). With its excessive flourishes, mixing Debussy-like turns of phrase and improvised piano-bar music, this piano version of the song emphasises the prologue's general parodic tone. Moreover, given that the song lyrics, absent in this version, refer to a lovelorn man talking to his own foolish heart, the informed spectator may find in it an echo of the melancholic explorer's 'insolent heart muscle'.

Though the prologue's story is self-contained, it resonates formally with Part Two: Paradise, dedicated to a flashback of Aurora's youth in Africa. Shot on the same black and white 16mm stock, Part Two is also narrated in voiceover, here provided by Aurora's former lover, Gian Luca Ventura. An apparent pun combining the forename of Jean-Luc Godard and the hero of Pedro Costa's Fontaínhas trilogy, the Cape Verdean Ventura,[1] Gian Luca is discovered by Pilar in a care home in Lisbon and brought to see Aurora on her deathbed, but they arrive too late. So he retells Aurora's story to Pilar and Santa in a shopping-mall café, after her funeral, and Part Two evolves to his voiceover narration.

Not only this voiceover, but the soundtrack as a whole is in fact what provides a connection between the prologue and the subsequent film parts. The song 'Insensatez', dating from the early 1960s, finds a parallel with two songs from the Ronettes 1964 album 'Presenting the Fabulous Ronettes Featuring Veronica' played in the other two parts, and in so doing introducing a clear reference to a historical period. The first of them, 'Be My Baby', features in Part One, when Pilar is found yet again in the cinema, now on New Year's Eve, in the company of her painter friend deep asleep next to her; she weeps uncontrollably as the song plays out loud in some unidentified film. The second Ronettes song, 'Baby I Love You', is performed in Part Two by Mario, Gian Luca and their band, by the side of a derelict

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1   The Fontaínhas Trilogy is director's Pedro Costa monumental work on the lives of African immigrants in Lisbon, including: *In Vanda's Room* (*No quarto de Vanda,* 2000), *Colossal Youth* (*Juventude em marcha,* 2006) and *Horse Money* (*Cavalo dinheiro,* 2014).

swimming-pool at the party of a decadent settler in Africa, where the band covers for the authentic Ronettes performing in the soundtrack. The choice is not accidental, for the early 1960s mark the beginning of the African independence wars. In Mozambique, the conflict started in 1964, the same year the Ronettes album was released. The group's musical simplicity and the naivety of their lyrics stand in stark contrast to the 'socialist revolution' taking place in the country, which would eventually wipe out Mario's fortune, as old Gian Luca's voiceover retells. In turn, Pilar's weeping to the sound of the Ronettes suggests her implication in the same tainted past of those European settlers in Africa, including her neighbour Aurora.

As in the prologue, the characters are silent in Part Two, though all other ambient sounds remain audible. Or rather, the characters' conversations, of which there are plenty, are muted and must be guessed from their exaggerated lip movements and gestures, while their story continues to be told by Ventura's voiceover. Owen (2016: 64ff) makes the interesting suggestion that Part Two could be understood as a 'silenced' rather than 'silent' film, citing as a possible inspiration for it another cinephile source, the film *Feitiço do Império* (António Lopes Ribeiro, 1940), a unique product of the Agência Geral das Colónias, created by the New State regime and intended to document the lives of Portuguese settlers in Africa. *Feitiço do Império* shows Portuguese characters involved in hunting adventures and love conquests in Africa, but most of the film's soundtrack has been lost; the surviving fragments of the film kept at the Cinemateca Portuguesa are most likely the version seen by Miguel Gomes and his cinephile circle. By inserting the false handicap of the inaudible dialogue into his own new film, Gomes again attempts to divert the viewer's attention from the history of colonialism to the reality of the medium, all the while candidly exposing the gap in personal historical experience.

As Ferreira (2014: 42) reminds us, such strategies of self-reflexivity and anti-illusionism 'could easily be described in the tradition of Brecht as alienating, or in the tradition of the "essay film" as trying to activate the spectators in order to make them evaluate the characters and the issues at stake. But this would only be half the story'. The other half is, in my view, the film's structuring aim to convey the reality of the black hole at its core. As Carvalho (2014: 125) puts it, '*Tabu* asks us to think without telling us what to think', resorting to Lacan's *objet petit a* in order to explain and justify its false stories. The fundamental lack Carvalho (122) identifies in it is, in his words, 'the residue of what Lacan calls the Real, that part of the Real which exceeds our narcissistic perception of reality [...] that residue, that otherness, which signifies a lack in our perception of the world'. Along the

same lines, Faulkner (2015: 357ff) refers to something 'unrepresentable' in the untold backstory of *Tabu*'s characters, and indeed there would be scope to invoke, a propos of the film, Emmanuel Lévinas's (1991: 121) defence of, and respect for, what he calls 'the infinite alterity of the other', an ethics that would justify turning the focus away from the immeasurable plight lived by the victims of colonialism and towards an interrogation of the self.

On the other hand, and in tune with the director's avowed lack of experience in Africa and consequently of the colonial atrocities, the protagonists in the episode of *Tabu* set in the present day, in Part One, are all women, Pilar, Aurora and Santa, all of whom had presumably been kept away from and misinformed about the wars waged by their male counterparts. The only man in Part One interacting with these female characters is Pilar's old painter friend, who explains to her that he was discharged from the war effort in Africa, in his youth, because of his varicose veins – a disease far more common in women than men. As much as Pilar, who rolls her eyes at this explanation, the spectator should take this as yet another of the film's infamous detours, which ends with this pathetic comment by the painter: 'We've lost a soldier and gained an artist'. Given the dubious quality, as well as sinister appearance, of the painter's work shown in the film, it could certainly be taken as the makeshift figuration of some unexplained historical guilt.

In Part Two: Paradise, however, there are at least three important male characters: Aurora's husband, her lover Ventura and the latter's friend, Mario. But they all gravitate around Aurora, an autocratic woman notable for her unbeatable hunting skills. Aurora's husband is regularly away on business, leaving her free to enjoy sex with Ventura, even while she is pregnant with her husband's child, in complete oblivion to the convulsive political situation in the land. Mario, in turn, Ventura's best friend and crooner of their band, soon becomes close to Aurora's husband, to the point of Owen (2016: 67ff) identifying an implicit homosexual link across these three male characters. Indeed, Aurora eventually kills Mario when he gets in the way of her eloping with Ventura. Again, here, the characters' lack of direct experience of the colonial conflict is suggested by Ventura's voiceover, which says that he and Aurora 'met in secret while the others played their wars', thus justifying the film's recurrent diversions from the crucial subject of colonialism.

The Non-story and the Index

However, if blank pages covered with phony stories is the path chosen by Miguel Gomes, this is certainly not the only one available for those

filmmakers lacking in direct experience of history. A film such as Margarida Cardoso's *The Murmuring Coast,* which bears a number of interesting parallels with *Tabu,* takes an entirely different course. Here, the gruesome history of colonialism *is* knowable and representable, even if the point of view is provided by women who had no direct experience of it. In a similar way to Part Two of *Tabu,* in *The Murmuring Coast* the Portuguese women in colonial Africa are left behind in complete idleness, locked up in their houses or hotels, while their husbands are busy crushing independence movements in the hinterlands. Their ignorance of the goings-on is maintained by force, through mendacious radio broadcasts and printed news, fabricated reports from the front conveyed by the military authorities and most effectively by physical violence on the part of their husbands. However, Evita, the heroine married to the more liberal Second Lieutenant Luís, embarks, in his absence, on an investigative journey that culminates with her discovering a photograph of her husband planting a stick with the severed head of a black rebel on the roof of a village hut. Estela Vieira (2013: 80), drawing on Sabine and others, enlightens us that this photograph 'is in fact the superimposed figure of the actor on what is a real photograph from the Portuguese colonial wars'. Even if partially tricked, the image provides an indexical climax to the film, filling the gap in fiction with the piercing Barthesian punctum of documentary truth.

Nothing as explicit as that is to be found in *Tabu.* Nonetheless, its choice to locate the characters in real contemporary Lisbon, in Part One, should at least partially account for the revelatory power critics almost unanimously seem to recognise in it. Despite the stellar cast including Teresa Madruga and Laura Soveral, some of Portugal's most prominent actors, Part One is a quasi-documentary account of Lisbon, with its actual roads, airports, shopping malls and casinos. Some obviously improvised scenes show us Gomes back to his usual exercise in staying true to life by focusing on 'non-stories', without any beginning, end or purpose, that happen to common people as they go about their daily business. An example is Pilar and her painter friend's tour to Lisbon's Roman Galleries (a vast underground network built by the Romans and first discovered in 1771, during the reconstruction of the city after the earthquake of 1755). At a certain point the tour guide, looking straight at the camera, declares: 'For 23 years I performed my duty respectfully and with care. I buried 280 corpses. If there are any others around, I'm ready to do my job'. At this, we hear Pilar bursting with laughter and then the camera turns to her and her friend, who protests: 'Man, do you talk nothing but nonsense?' The whole episode defies logical explanation, but is left there as a sudden burst of real life, in the figure of an actual

gravedigger the film crew stumbled on and let evolve in front of the camera whilst documenting the real location of the Roman Galleries, a rare sight given that it only opens to the public once a year.

The same kind of procedure is at play in the episode of Maya, a Polish backpacker and a member of the Taizé sect, who is expected to spend Christmas time in Pilar's flat. She meets her at the airport, but, surprisingly, the girl pretends not to be Maya, but Maya's friend, in charge of informing Pilar that Maya is not coming anymore. Her Polish friends, waiting nearby, then call her by the name 'Maya', and the girl disappears with them. One more nonsensical tale, with no other apparent function than to give an authentic Polish girl the opportunity to improvise before the camera, in a life-like, hesitant way, including her repetitive utterances. Both Maya and the Roman Galleries episodes evidence not only indexical but also medium realism, by defying cinema's narrative rules and aligning the film to what Lyotard (1986) calls 'acinema', discussed in Chapter 2, which 'rejects the process of selection and elimination' and accepts 'what is fortuitous and unstable' (349).

Thus, systematically, fantasy is made to spring up from the phenomenological real, for example, in the scene of Aurora's introduction to the spectator. She has gambled her last penny in a casino and phones up Santa at home to come to her rescue. Santa appeals to their neighbour Pilar, who has a car and drives with her to the casino. The scene at the real Casino Estoril, the biggest in Europe, 18km away from Lisbon, is recorded with documentary precision. Santa stays in the car, while Pilar joins Aurora for tea at a table placed on a revolving platform, a real feature of one of the casino's cafés. Aurora, in a riveting performance by Soveral, then recounts to Pilar a dream in which her home is found invaded by monkeys, fighting and biting each other. She fears that her estranged daughter might come by and discover that she has been eaten by the monkeys, but then she is suddenly in the house of a friend – already dead for ten years – whose husband also resembles a monkey, but one that speaks. She is disappointed to realise that her friend is betraying her monkey-husband, albeit with other dead souls, some of them foreign celebrities. 'Lucky at gambling, unlucky in love' is the phrase uttered by the friend that persuades her to go gambling again. Captured mostly in one long take lasting for nearly three minutes, a procedure that since Bazin has been deemed the realistic device par excellence, Aurora's simian fantasy gives flesh and bone, in a convoluted way, to her prejudices against Africans, in particular Santa, who Aurora believes is plotting her death. On the formal level, the casino scene is Hollywood back to front in that the sliding backdrop behind Aurora and Pilar grounds in the reality of the casino the mechanism of the rear projection, a trick employed in the old days of American cinema to

simulate movement in standstill, and whose clumsy artificiality is so evident that Laura Mulvey (2012: 208) once described it as 'smuggling something of modernity' into the classical form. Here, instead, it is the classical fantasy that is smuggled into the modern realist procedure of the long take, and deconstructed through its superimposition onto reality.

On the level of the fable, what characters such as Aurora are trying to do is to tame reality by means of fantasy, as can be didactically seen in Part Two, when Aurora and her lover Ventura play at finding animal shapes in the clouds in Africa, and sketches of these animals – a monkey, a crocodile and a lamb – are superimposed on the clouds. While these might be the characters' favourite pets in Africa and the object of their domineering drive, the clouds refuse to fit entirely into the superimposed drawings, as much as Africa withdraws itself from the colonisers' (and the film's) idea of it (Figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.3). Steven Shaviro (2014: 71) states, in defence of the current known as 'speculative realism':

> The real as such is nonconceptual, and the difference between the real and our concepts of it cannot itself be conceptualized. Our concepts are always inadequate to the objects that they refer to and that they futilely endeavour to circumscribe.

Figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 *Tabu*: the characters identify images of their favourite pets in Africa in the clouds, but they refuse to fit entirely into the superimposed drawings, as much as Africa withdraws itself from the colonisers' idea of it.

In its figuration of the inadequacy of fantasy to represent the real, *Tabu* is, conceptually, realist.

In fact, in its recurrence, the pet crocodile functions as a cinephilic metaphor of Africa. In Part Two, the baby crocodile offered to Aurora by her husband soon becomes a dangerous big animal that frequently escapes the pond purposely built for it. That it might end up devouring the intrepid explorer, as seen in the prologue, is only to be expected.

Aurora's misguided attempt at applying her fantasies onto reality is further illustrated by her belief that Santa is plotting her death behind her back, a suspicion fuelled by the fumes emanating from Santa's nocturnal activities, described by Aurora as 'macumba' (witchcraft). The realist translation of this persecutory fantasy is however provided in the form of Santa having an innocent cigarette after a meal and reading *Robinson Crusoe* in a children's edition, in order to improve her literacy in the language of the former colonisers. The scene closes with an eloquent still-life composition, comprising the shells from the prawns she has just eaten, the book *Robinson Crusoe* and a pack of Águia cigarettes, complete with the label 'Smoking kills' (*Fumar mata*), implying that, if Santa is risking anyone's life, it is only her own.

Fantasy as Truth Procedure

One could speak of a structural fear in the film that places its core-subject under prohibition or taboo. Pilar, Aurora and Santa are linked to each other through a knowledge they cannot touch upon but which binds them together inextricably. The film provides a vague figuration for it, in the shape of the Mount Tabu, which seems to be (but is not confirmed as such) a hazy peak in the mountain range in the horizon of Aurora's African farm. Old Aurora, in Part One, is constantly assaulted by guilty feelings and claims to have blood on her hands, and in Part Two we learn that she once committed a murder. But Pilar, depicted as a selfless good Samaritan, is strangely supportive of her guilty neighbour, even transgressing a minute of silence, in honour of the refugee victims she works for, to pray out loud to Saint Anthony, at Aurora's request. Aurora, in turn, though dreading Santa, insistently seeks physical contact with her, most touchingly at the end, when on her deathbed she draws the name of Ventura with her finger in Santa's palm. At the same time, these elderly characters are openly rejected by the younger generation. Aurora's daughter born in Africa, at the time she was involved with Ventura, now lives in Canada and cannot spare more than 15 minutes for her mother when visiting Lisbon over Christmas, as we hear from Pilar. Pilar, in turn, is

rejected by the young Maya who pretends to be somebody else in order to spend the Christmas holidays with her friends instead. Finally, old Ventura, now living in Lisbon, has been abandoned in a care home by his nephew (a belligerent-looking type, surrounded by dangerous dogs).

The respect the film demonstrates towards these old characters' silenced knowledge could then perhaps be theorised in terms, not of a fear, but of a courage to face the void, the unknown, the nothingness that nauseated Sartre's characters. Elaborating on Heidegger's phenomenology, Sartre (1992: 17) states, in his magnum opus *Being and Nothingness,* that, even if unknowable, nothingness can be understood:

> There exist [...] numerous attitudes of 'human reality' that imply a 'comprehension' of nothingness: hate, prohibitions, regret, etc. For 'Dasein' there is even the possibility of finding oneself 'face to face' with nothingness and discovering it as a phenomenon: this possibility is anguish.

It is a mixture of hate, prohibition, regret and anguish that forms the atmosphere of *Tabu*, emanating from characters faced with a void they cannot name or explain except through nonsensical fantasy. On the level of the fable, this void could be simply defined as guilt, as expressed by Aurora. On the level of the film as medium, however, it is the unexpected encounter with a truth that presents itself within representation. Badiou's 'regime of truths', at the base of what I have termed an 'ethics of realism' (Nagib 2011), may be of help here too. Badiou (2002: 32) defines truth as an 'incalculable novelty' that bores 'a hole in established knowledge'. Truth in turn is governed by the notion of 'event': 'To be faithful to an event', Badiou (41) says, 'is to move within the situation that this event has supplemented, by *thinking* [...] the situation "according to" the event'. Such notions of 'event' and 'situation' are applicable to *Tabu* if the 'event of truth' is understood as the uncontrollable documentary facts that burst into the 'situation', that is, the film's narrative construction. A situation, according to Badiou (2006: 174), can only occur once all multiple singularities are presented at the same time, constituting a 'state' in the Marxist sense as well as in the common sense of 'status quo' (Hallward 2002: ix). For its representational character, the situation is thus endowed with a normative element which does not hold any truths in itself,

> precisely because a truth, in its invention, is the only thing that is *for all,* so it can actually be achieved only *against* dominant opinions, since these always work for the benefit of some rather than all. (Badiou 2002: 32)

Therefore a truth, says Badiou (2007: xii) elsewhere, 'is solely constituted by rupturing with the order which supports it, never as an effect of that order', that is to say, by the emergence of the unpredictable event. The ethical subject, in turn, is characterised by 'an active fidelity to the event of truth' (xiii), which Badiou (2002: 35), echoing Sartre, derives from a choice, 'the same choice that divides [...] the courage of truths from nihilism'. The libertarian tone of Badiou's statement reverberates throughout *Tabu*. Beyond any particular political orientation it may embrace, the film is actively committed to the truth of the profilmic event, that part that cannot and will not be controlled by the cinematic apparatus, or by pre-existing cinephilia or by any a priori knowledge on the part of the filmmaker.

A perfect illustration is the ritual performed by the group of African musicians and dancers after the death of the 'explorer', mentioned at the start of this chapter. Edited as if the performers were reacting to his death, in mourning or celebration, this documentary scene, shot in ethnographic style, with didactic close-ups of beating hands and stamping feet, is flagrantly disconnected from whatever fiction it is edited within. Beyond any parody, these men and women, performing solely for the sake of the camera (and not of the fiction), reveal themselves as totally unknowable others, hence as an event of truth that dismantles the faux legend of the Portuguese explorer sacrificing himself for love.

In conclusion, I would say that in *Tabu* all is laughable, but there is no reason to laugh, given the enormity of the task it places in front of our eyes: thousands of blank pages to be filled out, not with our imagination, but with historical truth.

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Part II

Intermedial Passages

5 The *Geidōmono* Genre and Intermedial Acting in Ozu and Mizoguchi

Abstract

Chapter 5 revisits the work of two cinematic giants, Kenji Mizoguchi and Yasujirō Ozu, and their recourse to theatre in *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* (*Zangiku monogatari*, 1939) and *Floating Weeds* (*Ukigusa,* 1959) respectively. In them, the mediums of theatre and film are scrutinised through the self-reflexive genre of *geidōmono*, encompassing films in which the protagonist is a practitioner of one of the traditional Japanese arts. Here, theatre serves both the Mizoguchi and the Ozu films to break down the system at the base of the mediums of theatre and film into their constitutive parts, provide evidence of their reality, and propose a fairer arrangement of them, in particular as regards the ruthless hierarchy embedded in both mediums.

Keywords: Kenji Mizoguchi; Yasujirō Ozu; *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums; Floating Weeds; geidōmono;* Intermediality

This chapter focuses on the use of theatre in film as a passage to physical reality. In the cases analysed here, drawn from the work of two cinematic giants, Kenji Mizoguchi and Yasujirō Ozu, this reality will be of the artistic mediums themselves, or 'the reality of art' as Visconti (1978: 84) once put it (see Chapter 8). I am referring to Mizoguchi's *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* (*Zangiku monogatari*, 1939)[1] and Ozu's *Floating Weeds* (*Ukigusa,* 1959), a remake of his earlier *A Story of Floating Weeds* (*Ukigusa monogatari,* 1934). In both, the mediums of theatre and film are scrutinised through

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1   *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* is the generally adopted translation of this film's title, although alternative translations also exist. The most accurate would be to say, 'The Story of a Late Chrysanthemum', with reference to the protagonist, an actor whose talent takes a long time to bloom. However, for convenience, I will be using *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* in this book.

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the self-reflexive genre of *geidōmono*, encompassing films in which the protagonist, usually male, is a practitioner of one of the traditional Japanese arts, such as kabuki, puppet theatre (*bunraku*) or traditional dance (Satō 2008: 77).

Geidōmono, in Japan, was often resorted to in the 1930s as an alternative to governmental demands for propaganda films as the war efforts escalated. Though the results could be formulaic and contrived, this is not the case of *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums,* a dazzling display of narrative and technical command universally recognised as one of Mizoguchi's greatest masterpieces. A paradigm-setting work and turning point within the filmmaker's career itself, the film continues to fascinate critics, filmmakers and audiences alike to this day for its originality and innovations. *Floating Weeds,* in turn, constitutes a notable departure from Ozu's usual audiovisual tropes and storytelling motifs. Made at a time when there was no external pressure on the director to resort to this already outdated genre, the film evidences Ozu's interest in, and deliberate choice of, *geidōmono* when for once he had the chance to work with the production company Daiei and to stray away from his, and his long-standing employer Shōchiku's, consecrated style. My argument here will be that the *geidōmono* genre offered both filmmakers the ideal tools with which to conduct, with enhanced realism, a self-reflexive and self-critical assessment of the inner workings of both the theatre and the film mediums, including its ruthless hierarchical system, gender inequality and punitive cast structure.

Mine is certainly not the first attempt at assessing these films and filmmakers through the realist lens. In fact, the application of notions of realism has been tested with regard to Japanese cinema since the 1950s, when European critics first became acquainted with them via the works of Mizoguchi and Kurosawa. Emerging in the wake of Italian Neorealism, which revolutionised cinema after the Second World War, their films were immediately compared by European critics to neorealist milestones and read against the backdrop of nineteenth-century European realist literature and patterns of narrative realism as found in the so-called 'classical' Hollywood cinema. Within the Japanese and Anglophone context, social realism took the upper hand in criticism of both directors, in particular as regards their prewar output. The next section will be devoted to historicising these realist readings, which my intermedial approach aims at once to clarify and complement. I shall then move onto film analysis, starting with a consideration of the ways in which both the Mizoguchi and the Ozu films focus on acting as a means to self-comment on their stellar cast, but also to deconstruct the rigid hierarchy informing kabuki and related theatrical forms, which was

akin to the authoritarian system then prevailing within the film studios from which these films emerged. The analysis will continue with the examination of the subversive gender politics at work in these films which unveils to the spectator the gruelling training practices at the base of the Japanese star system, both in theatre and film. It will culminate with an assessment of the reversal of the scopic regime (Metz 1982: 61ff) that takes place in both films, through which actors become the privileged spectators of life as it happens, thereby revealing their all-too human condition behind their masks and changing theatre into a passage to reality.

Japanese Cinema and Realism

Realism in Mizoguchi has been on the agenda since Europe, and the French in particular, discovered him and Kurosawa in the early 1950s. In fact Kurosawa and Mizoguchi functioned as Japanese cinema's port of entry into Europe, thanks in the first place to the Venice Film Festival, which awarded the Golden Lion to Kurosawa's *Rashōmon,* in 1951, the International Director's Prize to Mizoguchi for *The Life of Oharu* (*Saikaku ichidai onna*), in 1952, and the Silver Bear to Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu* (*Ugetsu monogatari*), in 1953. Writing in 1955, André Bazin (2018: 1660) hailed the discovery of Japanese cinema as a landmark in film history in the following terms: 'The revelation of Japanese cinema is certainly the most considerable cinematic event since Italian neorealism', going on in another article (Bazin 2018: 1667) to compare the Japanese films he had seen to foundational neorealist works such as Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* (*Roma, città aperta,* 1945) and *Paisan* (*Paisà*, 1946). Mizoguchi was the most lauded by the French among the newly-discovered Japanese directors thanks, precisely, to what was deemed to be his 'realism'. This distinguished him, in their eyes, from Akira Kurosawa, who was presented by Bazin in mild terms and the rest of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* writers in the strongest terms as Mizoguchi's unworthy rival. Kurosawa, in turn, was embraced as the best of all Japanese directors by the competing film magazine *Positif,* generating a famously acrimonious debate between France's two most important film publications. The result, in the *Cahiers,* was a flurry of heated essays in defence of Mizoguchi by the likes of Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette, Luc Moullet and Alexandre Astruc. As Godard (1986: 70-71) put it in 1958:

> There can be no doubt that any comparison between Mizoguchi and Kuro-
> sawa turns irrefutably to the advantage of the former [...] [Mizoguchi's]

art is to abstain from any solicitation irrelevant to its object, to leave things to present themselves without intervention from the mind except to efface its traces, thus increasing a thousand fold the efficacy of the objects it presents for our admiration. It is, therefore, a realist art, and the mise en scène will be realist.

These sovereign objects Godard identifies in Mizoguchi's films in a way prefigure the autonomous or 'weird' objects that someone like Graham Harman (2005: 74) would describe in the twenty-first century, drawing on speculative realism and its non-correlationist stance (see Chapter 2). Like Godard, Bazin also conceived of realism as the prevalence of the objective over the subjective world, but he went further by recognising in Mizoguchi, and in Japanese cinema as a whole, a seamless interaction between the film medium and the other arts, a cinematic feature he ardently defends in his famous article 'For an Impure Cinema: In Defence of Adaptation' (2009: 107). In the Japanese films he saw, this interaction denoted, for him, a 'marvellous infallibility of taste': 'What I most admire in Japanese cinema is that it fuses, without gaps or concession, with the arts of traditional culture, such as literature, theatre and painting' (Bazin 2018: 1668).

At the same time, however, Mizoguchi's realism is praised by Bazin (1985: 261) for its 'authenticity' and, even more paradoxically, its 'purity', in contrast to Kurosawa's embracing of western influences:

> [Kurosawa] is evidently very much influenced by Western cinema of the thirties, and perhaps even more by American films than by neo-realism. His admiration for John Ford, Fritz Lang and Chaplin in particular is clear enough. [...] But in [*Rashōmon*'s] wake came many other films – notably Mizoguchi's – which have revealed to us a production which, if not more authentic, is at any rate more characteristic and more pure.

Adopting a similar view, Jacques Rivette (1986: 264) defines 'authenticity' in Mizoguchi's films as the 'universal language' of mise en scène brought 'to a degree of purity that our Western cinema has known only rarely'. The concern with 'purity' is in fact almost an obsession among French film critics and thinkers at the time, one which is revived decades later by Gilles Deleuze (1997: 13), this time a propos of Ozu, who he deems to have invented 'pure optical and sound situations', or 'opsigns' and 'sonsigns', and I will return to this. Connected to the same *Cahiers* clique, Jean Douchet (1997: 4-5) is another critic who found 'a passionate preoccupation with realism' in Mizoguchi, which he however attributes to his European realist

literary sources, such as Balzac, Dickens and Dostoevsky, rather than to his Japanese background.

Interestingly, none of the French critics, not even Bazin himself, at the time, ascribed Mizoguchi's realism to his prolific use of the long take and the long shot, the combination of which was famously hailed by Bazin as the realist procedure par excellence. Nonetheless, Mizoguchi may have been the conscious inventor of this cinematic technique, which he drew from the theatrical live action and practised from his 1930 *Mistress of a Foreigner* (*Tojin okiji*) onwards. Dubbed 'one-scene-one-cut' cinematography, it became a systematic procedure in his films precisely with *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums,* according to his faithful scriptwriter Yoshikata Yoda (1997: 63), and I will return to the ways in which this procedure elicits, in this film, a kind of very Bazinian realism, whilst offering cinema a passage to the reality of theatre as much as that of the film medium.

Elsewhere, the Mizoguchi-Kurosawa rivalry was dismissed, for example, by Audi Bock (1990: 35), a Kurosawa specialist and his official translator into English, who highlights the generational gap between the two and the influence of the former on the latter, not least as concerns realism:

> The most obvious influence Kurosawa has felt is Mizoguchi's unflinching realism in the application of the past to the present, the portrayal of personal drama in a broad and fully detailed historical milieu.

As well as in Mizoguchi's meticulous historical reconstitutions, Bock identifies realism in his left-leaning political persuasions and feminist tendencies. 'In the mid-1930s', writes Bock (1990: 40-41), 'Mizoguchi reached a peak of what has been dubbed social realism through his deepening portrayals of women on the screen'.

Striking a similar note, Japanese film critic and historian Tadao Satō (2008: 33ff) sees Mizoguchi's realism or naturalism, as he also calls it, as essentially self-referential and associated with the literary current of the *shishōsetsu,* or the Meiji-period autobiographical 'I-novel' in Japan. For Satō, Mizoguchi's portrayals of sacrificial women are direct transpositions of the director's personal life experiences, citing as an accomplished example, yet again, *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums,* whose sacrificial female protagonist, Otoku, he compares with Mizoguchi's own doting sister, Suzu, who supported him during a long period of his adult life. Satō (2008: 41ff) is in fact the main source for non-Japanese readers when it comes to Mizoguchi's left-wing forays at the base of his prewar social-realist tendencies. Indeed, these can also be detected in *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* in

the detailed portrayal of poverty-stricken travelling actors, sleeping in communal hostels amongst drunkards and even animals, such as the real acting monkeys carried along by one of the boarders.

As for Ozu, Donald Richie (1977: 5-6), an early expert on the director, attributes his prewar acclaim to the social realism he pioneered in Japanese cinema with *I Was Born, But...* (*Umarete wa mita keredo,* 1933). But he also contests critics, such as Imai Iwasaki, who lament the loss of this quality in the director's postwar output, which focuses on well-off rather than working-class characters. For Richie, Ozu's realism goes beyond the mere belief that 'unhappiness is caused solely by social wrongs': 'it is precisely "day-to-day existence" that Ozu so realistically and hence so movingly captured' (Richie 1977: 6). This everyday-life realism is nonetheless achieved with the help of anti-realist procedures which Richie (152ff) equally notes, a case in point being Ozu's disregard for eye-line match, narrative transitions and other rules consecrated by American classical cinema as essential ingredients for the production of an impression of reality. As David Bordwell (2004: 90) explains:

> The classical Hollywood cinema canonized the rule of the '180-degree line' or 'axis of action'. This assumed that characters could be arranged so as to face one another and that various shots of their interactions could be taken from camera positions on one side of that axis. [...] It is easy to see that Ozu typically does not obey these precepts.

Bordwell goes on to cite examples of this break in Ozu's oeuvre from as far back as 1934 and *A Story of Floating Weeds,* remade decades later into *Floating Weeds.*

Ozu, in fact, could be considered in all antipodal to Mizoguchi. The rigid system crystallised over the years in his films comprised: a very low and static camera eliciting the so-called 'tatami-shots'; a 50mm lens that flattens characters in medium close-ups; the 'one line, one shot' procedure, through which shooting is interrupted after each dialogue line; and 'pillow shots' (Burch 1979) or 'curtain shots' (Satō 1987), focusing on objects and landscapes that produce ellipses of time between action scenes. All these techniques stand in stark contrast with the extremely mobile camera, wide-angle lenses, depth of field and the 'one scene, one shot' procedure adopted by Mizoguchi in his films. Nonetheless, the focus on common people, typical of the *shomingeki* genre, in Ozu's prewar films results in the social realism pointed out by Richie and later by Burch (1979: 154ff), Takinami (2018: 134ff) and others, making them comparable, in this respect, to Mizoguchi's prewar left-leaning films.

Bazin and the young *Cahiers* critics were still unaware of Ozu in the 1950s, as until the end of the decade his films were deemed by Shōchiku to be 'too Japanese' for distribution abroad or even for screening at international film festivals. This obstacle was eventually lifted thanks to the efforts of Donald Richie, who in his stint as film curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in the 1960s organised an Ozu retrospective there that initiated his dissemination abroad. International acclaim immediately followed and Ozu was enshrined, alongside Mizoguchi and Kurosawa, in the Japanese cinema pantheon outside Japan. From then on the debate on the possible realism of his films gained track, for example, in Burch's book on Japanese cinema (1979: 222), in which his 'pillow-shots' are compared to Mizoguchi's non-anthropocentric principle already noticed by Godard:

> [Mizoguchi's] characters tend to desert the frame, or the camera to desert the characters in accordance with a de-centering principle which will assume other, less obtrusive forms in his mature work to come. It is, however, already a fully developed element of Mizoguchi's systemics, corresponding to Ozu's pillow-shots and the tradition of 'uninhabited' shots associated with the Japanese cinema throughout the 1930s.

This prefigures Deleuze's (1997: 16) magisterial reading of Ozu's transitional shots of objects and landscapes, which for him 'take on an autonomy which they do not immediately possess even in neo-realism'. In fact, Deleuze (15-16) does the work Bazin and the young *Cahiers* critics might have done of differentiating Ozu from Mizoguchi and Kurosawa for his 'modern' realism:

> In Ozu, there is no universal line which connects moments of decision, and links the dead to the living, as in Mizoguchi; nor is there any breathing space or encompasser to contain a profound question, as in Kurosawa. Ozu's spaces are raised to the state of any-space-whatevers, whether by disconnection, or vacuity.

This generates, for Deleuze, 'instances of pure contemplation', which bring about a symbiosis, 'the identity of the mental and the physical, the real and the imaginary, the subject and the object, the world and the I' (1997: 17). The same applies to Ozu's pillow shots, in which, for Deleuze (17), 'there is becoming, change, passage [...] the bicycle, the vase and the still lifes are pure and direct images of time'. Echoes of Bazin's (2005: 76) definition of realist cinema as 'a cinema of time', drawing on Bergson's notion of *durée,* or

duration, can be heard here, as he resorts to in his famous analysis of Vittorio de Sica's meditative neorealist film *Umberto D* (1952) (Bazin 2005: 79-82).

Time has passed since these critics first attempted to grapple with a cinema whose history and context were hitherto unknown to them, so we can now comfortably leave aside evolutionist, auteurist and biographical aspects of those approaches and make a better-informed assessment of these films that takes into account their cultural context and background. 'Purity', which was combatted by Bazin himself in his defence of 'impure cinema', a precursor of the intermedial method adopted here, is another unhelpful and essentialising concept that imprisons filmmakers in a hypothetical cultural authenticity they themselves wanted to overturn. And there will be no attempt, here or elsewhere in this book, to rank filmmakers according to their 'genius'. My analysis in this chapter will nonetheless draw on all the valuable insights summarised above insofar as they favour the tracing of realism as mode of production in the films in question. I will argue that the *geidōmono* generic demand opens up in them a passage to the reality of film, theatre and the actors behind the characters, a constitutive element of these films that has been hitherto entirely neglected.

In short, this chapter is interested in the self-reflexive realism, not of the auteur, but of the films, resulting from an inward look at the materials available for theatre and film making within the *geidōmono* genre, which my analysis below will attempt to flesh out.

The Reality of Acting for Film and Theatre

Theatre being the very subject of the *geidōmono* genre, it allows for a self-reflexive discussion of an actor's stage skills whilst enabling a fascinating parallel with the cast's screen talent. Indeed, rather than succumbing to the prestige of their celebrated stars, *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* and *Floating Weeds* present for spectatorial awareness and intellectual participation the inner workings of performance through a constant focus on the backstage that unveils the tyranny inherent in kabuki training, as well as the clashes in acting for film and theatre, both of which deny the actors an easy path to glory. In so doing, they subtly subvert the system at the basis of their own stellar cast, whilst exposing their plight within the rigid hierarchy of the Japanese studio system.

As is well known, both Mizoguchi and Ozu subjected their actors to a relentless questioning and deconstruction of their star persona and celebrity status. Both directors worked with the most prestigious actors

of their time. Setsuko Hara, the so-called 'eternal virgin of Japan', and Chishū Ryū, playing the role of the middle-age father since his early 20s, are a constitutive part of Ozu's films. So closely entwined to the Japanese star system is Ozu's work, that it resulted for example in Setsuko Hara's character Noriko lending her name to a celebrated trilogy by the director, the 'Noriko Trilogy', composed of *Late Spring* (1949), *Early Summer* (1951) and *Tōkyō Story* (1953). The name Noriko itself became one of the most popular female names of the early postwar generation (Phillips 2003: 159). The same applies to Kinuyo Tanaka in relation to Mizoguchi's films, her regular casting by the director only thinly veiling a much rumoured (and to all effects platonic) love affair between the two. But this did not secure an easy ride for these celebrated stars, within a rigidly hierarchical studio system on top of which reigned the almighty film director. A quick anecdote illustrates this state of affairs. Tanaka recalls that she had been dieting during the shoot of *Sanshō the Bailiff* (*Sanshō Dayū,* 1954) in order to look haggard in her role. But she decided to have a steak the night before recording her last and minor scene in the film. The next day on the set, Mizoguchi somehow detected the 'clandestine steak' in her voice and exposed her to five hours in the freezing winter weather and numerous exhausting runs of her scene before her voice was 'tuned back' to a level of harshness that chimed with her character (Le Fanu 2005: 42).

Tales along the same lines also abound with relation to Ozu. In *Floating Weeds,* a film exceptionally made with Daiei rather than his home-studio Shōchiku, as noted above, Ozu cast Daiei's top female actor, Machiko Kyō, who had to her credit masterpieces such as *Rashōmon* (Akira Kurosawa, 1950) and *Ugetsu* (Kenji Mizuguchi, 1953), and paired her off with the formidable stage and screen veteran Ganjurō Nakamura. The actors' impressive CV, however, did not stop Ozu from subjecting them to relentless repetitions, in one occasion sending both home with a temperature, after making them perform a row in the rain for a whole day (Richie 1974: 144).

Richie (1974: 146) compares Ozu's method with Robert Bresson's, suggesting that 'both men had a horror of acting as such'. In order to obtain a mechanical delivery completely detached from their star personas, Ozu kept his actors in the dark about his real intentions and obstinately undermined their self-confidence through repeated runs of the same gestures and lines. This is why the extraordinary Chishū Ryū was convinced of his lack of talent, as seen in this statement:

Since my clumsiness was well known at the studio, all the staff used to switch off the lights and go off someplace when my turn came. Ozu and I

> were left alone on the set and he would let me rehearse endlessly [...] until
> somehow I at last managed to do what he wanted. (Richie 1997: 146-147)

And yet, so key to the Ozu style was Ryū, that even when there was no role
for him in a film, he would make a kind of cameo appearance, as in *Floating
Weeds,* where he plays for a few minutes an elusive landlord.

My argument here will be that, unfair and inexcusable though it may be,
such a method was also the way both directors found to cause a crack in
the system through which to criticise this very system. In particular, from
The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums onwards, Mizoguchi established a
novel way of shooting for cinema, drawing heavily on theatre, that affected
not only the length of the shot but also the style of acting. Ozu's work at
Daiei, in turn, gave him freedom to push to the extreme his pursuit of a
new acting style that cast a critical eye on the very act of performing. Let
us see how this procedure worked in the films in focus here.

As already pointed out, *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* is a
geidōmono tale chosen by Mizoguchi to eschew the pressure he was under
to make propaganda films in an increasingly militarised Japan. It is the first
and only remaining film out of four he directed pertaining to this genre.
It was followed by *A Woman of Ōsaka* (*Naniwa onna,* 1940), *The Life of an
Actor* (*Geidō ichidai otoko,* 1941) and *Three Generations of Danjurō* (*Danjurō
sandai,* 1944), all of which are unfortunately lost. Particularly regrettable
is the loss of *A Woman of Ōsaka*, a film scriptwriter Yoda (1997: 28) deems
a masterpiece and which, like *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums,* won
the Ministry of Culture prize of that year. *A Woman of Ōsaka* also marks
the beginning of the collaboration between Mizoguchi and the famous
actress and later film director Kinuyo Tanaka, who according to Yoda (28)
delivers a brilliant performance in it. As critics have reiterated (Andrew
2016; Kirihara 1992: 137ff), *geidōmono* was not an unwelcome imposition
on Mizoguchi, who relished the opportunity to offer faithful, and for some
critics 'realistic', reconstitutions of past events. Indeed, the film is based on
the real story of celebrated kabuki actor Onoe Kikunosuke II, the stepson
of one of kabuki's most famous actors of his time, Onoe Kikugorō V. His
life was the subject of a 1932 novel, *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums,*
which is at the basis of Mizoguchi's screen adaptation.

In the film, acting provides the axis around which the story revolves.
Kikunosuke (played by celebrity *shinpa* actor Shōtarō Hanayagi) is portrayed
as someone living in the shade of his stepfather's power and oblivious of
his own acting shortcomings, surrounded as he is by hypocritical col-
leagues, relatives and geishas. One day, he is unexpectedly confronted by

Otoku (Kakuko Mori), the wet nurse of Kikugorō's legitimate baby son, who candidly reveals to him the damning opinion on his acting held by everyone, including her, and encourages him to work harder. Kikunosuke immediately falls for her, but their romance is fiercely opposed by his step parents. He then elopes with Otoku and starts a life of misery, while continuing to train as an actor in Ōsaka and then with a travelling theatre troupe. Rediscovered by a relative years later, thanks to the intervention of a now consumptive Otoku, Kikunosuke returns to the kabuki stage, triumphing successively in Nagoya, Tōkyō and Ōsaka, while Otoku languishes in poverty and finally dies.

This story connects with reality on many levels. It is in the first place based on the lives of real actors, but it is also a by-product of an extremely popular adaptation of the novel to the *shinpa* stage. *Shinpa* (literally, 'new school') theatre is a variation of kabuki, focusing on more contemporary and realistic stories as opposed to kabuki's *kyūha* (or 'old school'), devoted to historical and heroic dramas. Mizoguchi was a *shinpa* devotee and drew on its style and stars for the conception of *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums*. Despite being much older than his character in the film, Shōtarō Hanayagi was cast for the main role of Kikunosuke thanks to his talent and renown as a *shinpa* actor.

In his endeavour of fidelity to the film's theatrical roots, and in line with his penchant for historical realism pointed out by Bock, Mizoguchi even contemplated the possibility of inviting the legendary kabuki actor Kikugorō VI – the legitimate son of Kikugorō V who is still a baby in the film – to join the cast. In an interview, Mizoguchi relates an interesting meeting with Kikugorō VI:

As regards theatre, I planned to make a film with Rokudaime Kikugorō Onoe [or Kikugorō Onoe VI]; I went to kabuki to watch *Meikō Kakiemon* [*The Famous Artisan Kakiemon,* by Enomoto Torahiko] and went to meet him on the backstage. He told me: 'Today I'll play in a cinematic way, pay close attention'. Seen from the stalls, his recitation seemed really different from his usual style, it was so to say a realistic way of performing, with very natural and essential movements. At the end, he asked me in the backstage: 'How did you like it?', I replied: 'You displayed a cinematic performance, and it was very accomplished, but the other actors around you continued to play in the classical way, so there was a mixture on stage. When you play in my film the other actors will have to mature'. 'You are right, quite right...', said Rokudaime, but he died before making the film, it's a real shame! (Kishi 1980: 143).

Mizoguchi's memory might have betrayed him in this account, as Rokudaime only died in 1949, ten years after the completion of *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums.* Whatever the case, this reminiscence indicates the extent to which he researched into an actor's artistry and its various degrees of naturalness and realism in order to shape up his characters. This can be observed from the astonishing opening of the film, when the protagonist Kikunosuke is introduced to us. It shows a moment of 'bad acting' by Hanayagi impersonating the young Kikunosuke who confronts his father, Kikugorō V, in the role of a samurai, in an elaborate choreography. Let us look at this scene more closely.

Satō reminds us that when Mizoguchi started in the silent film era, using *shinpa* actors in the Nikatsu Mukojima Film Studio, female roles were still played by *onnagata*, or female impersonators. Hence close-up shots were avoided because they could reveal their male features, such as their Adam's apple (Satō 2008: 21). The same principle was applied to Hanayagi in *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums*, who was much older than his character hence unsuitable for close-ups (Kirihara 1992: 139). In this opening scene, however, Hanayagi deserves some of the rare medium close-ups of the film, as if to illustrate Mizoguchi's point about the real Kikugorō's acting for film within a theatre play, cited above, that is to say: Hanayagi's acting seems perfectly accomplished for film, as the close-ups demonstrate, but will be subsequently criticised, first by his irate stepfather then by everybody else, including a woman in love with him, as inadequate for kabuki. Consequently, the film spectators are placed in the disconcerting situation of having to convince themselves that an actor's brilliant performance is in fact bad. Ambiguity of expression, considered by Bazin (1967: 31ff) the quintessence of realist cinema, and consequently spectatorial participation, the main requirement for medium realism, are thus enabled, changing the film spectator into the unexpected judge of an actor's performance for two different mediums.

The play in question is *Ghost Story of Yotsuya* (*Yotsuya kaidan,* by Tsuruya Nanboku VI)*,* a piece full of special effects, including the trick called *toita-gaeshi,* through which actors insert their faces into holes on dummies, in this case, the ghosts of the murdered lovers Oiwa and Kohei (Kirihara 1992: 151). The ghosts are uncovered by the celebrated actor Kikugorō V, in the role of a samurai, who then confronts his stepson, Kikunosuke, onstage, in a choreographed fight. However, as Davis (1996: 114) notes, this crucial moment in the scene 'is elided when the camera pans to show Kiku's entrance':

The trickery really consists in the interplay of theatrical presentation and cinematic representation: filmic techniques are used to distract us

from the central performance (by Kikugorō) to the mediocre posturings
of a peripheral character (Kiku).

In other words, continues Davis (116), 'Kikugorō has been upstaged, so to
speak, by what he excoriates as a miserably incompetent performance'.
The fact, however, remains that what the film fiction shows as 'mediocre
posturings' is in reality excellent acting for film by Hanayagi. This is how,
in *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums,* a fictional story changes into the
diverging realities of acting for film and theatre, and of the rivalry between
the actors working for these different mediums.

Gender Politics and the Subversion of the Star System

Ozu's *Floating Weeds*, with its comedic and derogatory quips directed
towards Japan's theatrical traditions stands, on a first approach, in stark
contrast with *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums*, in which the focus
on acting and performing combines with a highly melodramatic tale of
injustice towards the lower classes and the female gender. In terms of genre
and subject matter, however, the Mizoguchi film is very close to Ozu's,
given that both adhere to the *geidōmono* genre by means of a critical view
of the ruthless hierarchical system that makes the very backbone of kabuki
and related theatrical forms, leaving no room for love or other individual
sentiments.

In *Floating Weeds,* the story is entirely fictional, authored by Ozu himself
and his faithful scriptwriter Kogo Noda. The plot revolves around a modest
travelling-theatre company that stations for a time in a small coastal town
to perform. The troupe's leading actor Komajurō (Ganjirō Nakamura) has
chosen this sleepy location with the secret intention of visiting his former
common-law wife, Oyoshi (Haruko Sugimura), and their son, Kiyoshi
(Hiroshi Kawaguchi), who takes him for his uncle. However, Komajurō's
current lover and the troupe's main actress, Sumiko (Machiko Kyō), soon
discovers his secret and arranges for the young actress Kayō (Ayako Wakao)
to seduce an unsuspecting Kiyoshi, unleashing Komajurō's fury. With their
spectacle failing to attract sufficient audience, the troupe goes bankrupt
and disbands, but Komajurō and Sumiko eventually reconcile and hit the
road together again.

Ozu's films were often some kind of remake of his own previous works,
whether with similar or different titles. However, the choice for this par-
ticular remake is peculiar, given the general absence of *geidōmono* pieces

in the director's filmography. In 1934, it was just natural that a filmmaker would be pushed towards an apolitical genre such as this, with Japan's increasing militarisation and censorship. But as late as 1959, when the country had already surrendered entirely to the spell of American liberal habits and Ozu himself was finally succumbing to the attraction of colour technology, the choice of this old-fashioned genre suggests a particular interest. As stated earlier, *Floating Weeds* is an exceptional piece in Ozu's oeuvre for many reasons, not least the numerous scenes of violence the likes of which are not to be seen in any of his other films. Physical contact of any kind is conspicuously absent in his oeuvre, except in rare and highly melodramatic climaxes, for example, in the famous scene in *Tōkyō Story* (*Tōkyō Monogatari,* 1953), when the poor widow Noriko gives some pocket money to her mother-in-law and, in the process, holds her hand for a moment. It could have been that the different production company, crew, cast and genre gave Ozu the opportunity to offer, through the portrayal of male violence, some kind of implicit (and belated) apology, in the name of his fellow professionals as well as his own, to the appalling treatment devoted to actors in the studio system at the time. The depiction of the troupe's leader, Komajurō, could indeed suggest something along these lines. Despite his endearing attachment to his past lover and son, his leadership over his troupe is enforced through choleric physical and verbal abuse when they act against his will. Even more shocking is the fact that the assaulted characters, Sumiko and Kayō, are played by two of the greatest female celebrities in Japan, respectively Machiko Kyō and Ayako Wakao. Komajurō reacts with equal violence towards his own son, Kiyoshi, who eventually hits back and puts an end to the abuse, sealing the patriarch's demise.

Komajurō's first outburst is unleashed when he discovers that Kayō has been having romantic encounters with Kiyoshi. He calls her to the centre of the theatre where they had previously performed, questions her, slaps her face and when she hesitates to tell the full story, he twists her arm until, under duress, she confesses that she had been paid by Sumiko to seduce the young man. The scene was already present in *A Story of Floating Weeds,* but here it is enhanced with the addition of torture to extract the final confession. Komajurō subsequently summons Sumiko to his presence on the same spot in the theatre and repeatedly beats her for plotting the seduction game. Taking place in an empty theatre, these physical assaults in a way replace the actors' theatrical performances whose full view is denied to the spectator, except on two highly significant occasions, featuring precisely these female stars as explained below. Instead, it is the inner workings of the system – of both theatre and film – which are revealed with the power

of bodily pain and emotional stress on the part of the characters, i.e. with heightened realistic enactment.

By deeming these scenes 'realistic', I am certainly not suggesting that anyone was actually hurt in their delivery. However, the mere reiteration of violence within a style that otherwise continues to be as restrained and economical as usual in Ozu indicates the pointed intention to instil in the spectator a sense of physical pain and moral offence. Combined with the rigours of acting imposed by Ozu, as demonstrated by the example of Nakamura and Kyō exposed to the rain until they fell ill, quoted above, the enactment of violence in *Floating Weeds* must have been a visceral experience for the actors themselves. After spanking and torturing her, Komajurō continues to attack Kayō relentlessly, kicking her in the back, when he finds her sitting on the tatami in their lodgings, and slapping her in the face again when she emerges in Oyoshi's home with Kiyoshi, who now declares his intention to marry her. Komajurō then turns to Kiyoshi, when he tries to protect Kayō, and slaps him in the face three times. Kiyoshi then violently pushes Komajurō, now revealed to be his father, to the floor, declaring that he does not need a father and expelling him from the house. Finally, Komajurō accepts his mistake, apologises to Kayō, asks her future mother-in-law Oyoshi to treat her well, and leaves the place for good.

Going back to what happens on the theatrical side of the story, Komajurō's troupe specialises in a lower, popular form of kabuki called *taishū engeki* (Russell 2011: 29), which at the time of the film was already outmoded, as observed, within the film, by Kiyoshi to Komajurō when they go fishing together. However, this popular theatre form gives Ozu the opportunity to contravene kabuki's treasured tradition of the *onnagata* (male actors in female roles), as well as Japanese cinema's female star system itself, by showing, at the first of the only two short theatrical performances in the film, Machiko Kyō, in her role as actress Sumiko, changing her usual femme-fatale persona for that of a male character, namely the legendary social bandit Chuji Kunisada. Interestingly, the episode focuses on Kunisada already past his prime, as he bids farewell to his fellows at Mount Akagi in a melancholy monologue that prefigures the falling apart of the theatre troupe itself at the end of the film (Figure 5.1). More importantly, Sumiko's power to attract the camera to her transvestite performance of a male warrior that metaphorically mocks the declining Komajurō (whose own performance is never shown), as well as Kayō's victory in taking Komajurō's son away from his family, suggests an upcoming gender power reversal both in Japanese society and in the performing arts. Theatre here is the conduit through which the actress ascends to a commanding position, replacing

Figure 5.1 *Floating Weeds*: Ozu contravenes kabuki's treasured tradition of male actors in female roles, as well as Japanese cinema's female star system, by showing Machiko Kyō changing her femme-fatale persona for that of a male character.

her male counterpart and ridding herself of her own feminine celebrity persona. Knowing how self-referential the film is, the parallel between Komajurō and the film director himself is tempting. His actions, too, are all the more realistic for stemming from a mise en scène entirely aware of its artifice and for this reason all the more effective in the criticism they level against the hierarchical system within Japan's theatrical and cinematic traditions.

As in *Floating Weeds*, in *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* the criticism of the ruthless hierarchy at the heart of kabuki is a structuring element. Physical violence is however not portrayed in the latter, at least not on the part of the tyrannical master, Kikugorō Onoe V, who limits himself to verbally insulting his incompetent stepson and disinheriting him when he asks for permission to marry a servant. However, the innocent and good intentioned Otoku is the subject of physical violence in one, extremely poignant, scene, when she reluctantly refuses to let her unemployed and disgruntled lover Kikunosuke spend the couple's last savings on drinking. He slaps her, but immediately falls into bottomless regret. Like in *Floating Weeds,* here too mistreatment of women is physically presented to the spectator and portrayed as socially ingrained.

Feminism in Mizoguchi has been constantly highlighted as one of his main auteurist traits, but also criticised for double standards when it came to directing his own actresses (see, for example, Bock 1990: 33ff). This could be exemplified with the case of actress Rieko Kitami, originally cast for the role of Otoku in the film, on recommendation from Shōchiku. As Yoda (1997: 75-76) retells:

> She had a sweet and melancholic beauty that suited her character, but she was too accustomed to discontinuous shooting to act in long takes, and Mizoguchi would give no specific instructions to her performance.

After many failed rehearsals, Mizoguchi exploded:

> 'You are not worthy of an actress. We are not shooting a cape-and-sword film! You are playing with Shōtarō Hanayagi, the greatest *shinpa* actor!' (Yoda 1997: 76)

So despite the actress's best efforts, and her name having already been publicised as the lead in the film, she was finally dropped and replaced by Kakuko Mori, a *shingeki* (new theatre) actress and Hanayagi's disciple (Kirihara 1992: 139). Though acknowledging Mori's excellent performance in the film, Yoda (76) still regrets the brutal dismissal of 'poor Mis K.'

Yet, Otoku's portrayal is essentially feminist, as one of film history's most famous long takes in *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* demonstrates. Let us first examine the actions leading to this memorable scene. As mentioned above, the spectator is left puzzled about Kikunosuke's acting skills, as his performance seems excellent in his first on-stage appearance, but is torn to pieces by his stepfather, the great master Kikugorō V. Kikunosuke himself is equally uncertain about his talent, as he is surrounded by a network of secrecy and pretence conveyed, in the film, through the prolific use of props, including platforms, fences, sliding doors and screens. One or more of these props are always placed between Kikunosuke and those who are secretly slighting his acting, in a way that closely resembles the workings of the *odogu* (props) in kabuki. The interesting effect of *odogu* is that it interferes not only with space construction but also with time. As Scott (1999: 153-154) explains, '*Kidō* [a particular arrangement of *odogu*] allows the audience to watch the actions of different people and even the workings of their minds simultaneously. It overcomes time and dimension and enables the onlooker to see through walls'. The scene and long take in question illustrate the effect of *odogu*

Figure 5.2 *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums*: rarely has the fair division of power as the basis for genuine love been so elegantly and powerfully displayed as in this scene, where kabuki explains the camera position below the pavement.

and other theatrical devices combined with the specific properties of the film medium.

   After sensing the disguised mockery behind his back on the part of his theatre colleagues and adulating geishas, Kikunosuke returns home in the small hours to find Otoku, the wet nurse of his little stepbrother, in the street trying to bring the baby back to sleep. A long take of five minutes starts by focusing on Otoku on the pavement as Kikunosuke appears and promptly dismisses his rickshaw to walk along with her the rest of the way. As they walk, Otoku tells Kikunosuke for the first time with all honesty that his acting is inadequate, her daringness making room for a slow kind of ballet in which the two characters swap places ahead of each other as they move forward, Kikunosuke occasionally lowering his head in painful realisation of the truth about his skills, and Otoku bowing politely but unrepentantly. Rarely has the fair division of power as the basis for genuine love been so elegantly and powerfully displayed as in this scene, where the lack of cuts allows the female and male actors to alternately lead the camera forward in a smooth tracking shot. During their walk, a series of unlikely events take place, such as the passing of a peddler selling wind chimes, one of which Kikunosuke buys to distract the baby. As Otoku has just remarked on it

being two in the morning, one wonders how a peddler could be passing by, and he is not the only unlikely creature around: shouts and clapping noises, apparently stemming from other street vendors, are heard, and another street seller rushes past the couple with his trolley, amidst occasional women of the night. This unusual nocturnal crowd serves as information to the viewer of the general demographics in the area at all times, but one which can only be conveyed through disregard to chronology and spatial coherence within the shot.

Thinking along the lines of kabuki, however, clarifies this condensation as analogous to the time and space compression effected by the use of *odogu*. In particular, kabuki explains the camera position below the pavement, which fails to identify with any plausible point of view of an observer within the scene, but would make perfect sense as the point of view of a kabuki play spectator, sitting below the stage (Figure 5.2). Estrangement is thus elicited at every level to bring home to the film viewer the real specificities of both the film and the theatre mediums, as they produce clash and creative crisis, including the possibility of power reversal within both. At the same time, with its temporal continuum, the long take testifies to the reality of acting whilst documenting the exceptional skills of all involved, in a truly Bazinian tour de force.

Theatrical Passages to Reality

As a result of his romance with Otoku, which is forbidden due to the class and hierarchical gulf between them, Kikunosuke is expelled from his stepfather's house. He leaves for Ōsaka and leads a life of utter poverty as a lowly actor, alongside a consumptive Otoku. The drama we see evolve is however constitutive part of Kikunosuke's honing of his art, one that the film at once glorifies and condemns. Towards the end of the film, Kikunosuke, having become an accomplished actor, makes a triumphal return to the kabuki scene, in a performance at the Suehiroza, alongside his relatives and protectors Shikan Nakamura and Fukusuke Nakamura. The film then gives us a long kabuki scene, showing him in the famous female role of Sumizome through a series of long and middle-range shots, allowing the viewer scant access to the actor's facial features and actual performance, thanks to the profuse use of *odogu* props, including screens, barred banisters and other obstacles. In fact, in this most edited section of the film, there seems to be a frantic competition for vantage points to observe the actor's performance on the part of Kikunosuke's family members and helpers from the backstage

and, more crucially, of Otoku, who at a certain point is crouching in a corner of the backstage but entirely visible behind her performing lover.

Despite this hide-and-seek play with the camera, the sense of a real kabuki theatre is imparted in quasi-documentary long shots of the packed auditorium. Once justified, kabuki's artificial acting becomes cinema, but only by also becoming uncinematic. At the same time, cinema's ability to produce scale reversal and the close-up, the main pillar of the star system, is rejected, denying the actor the privilege of individual fame, whilst placing theatre within its social context, that is, its audience, without which it cannot exist.

In fact, the reality of the audience is one that kabuki, or any theatre, cannot escape from, and the fact that only through the look of others can theatre come into being is stressed in *Floating Weeds,* as much as in *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums.* In the Ozu film, theatre acquires reality insofar as actors become the secret spectators of their audiences, thus reversing the standard voyeuristic position, whilst also exposing cinema's scopic regime. Having become suspicious of Komajurō, Sumiko asks her actor colleagues to help her identify his former lover Oyoshi in the audience. Given that the male actors also have their darlings sitting among the spectators, they all conspire in a collective spying on the audience from the backstage through the cracks of the curtain, turning the theatre audience into spectacle and making the film spectators aware of their own voyeurism, a role now usurped by the objects of their gaze (Figure 5.3). In addition, whilst we are given abundant insight into the actors' preparation for the stage, with an insistent focus on the meticulous and protracted process of make-up application, there is precious little in terms of their actual acting, least of all from Komajurō, whose acting is only once hinted at through the off-screen sound of his recitation. This is, however, entirely in tune with the story of 'a man in denial', in Keiko McDonald's (2006: 97) fitting words, whose make up cannot disguise his age and impending demise (Figure 5.4).

Remakes are self-reflexive by definition, but *Floating Weeds* is so imbued with medium awareness, that it seems to be purposely following Brecht's (1964) precepts of alienation effects. Needless to say, Ozu was not the least worried about Brecht, but simply exercising his own kind of 'classical modernism', as defined by Catherine Russell (2011: xiii), including a number of 'uncinematic' (Adorno 1981-1982: 201) devices, starting with the rejection of cinema's key property of movement. Both the camera and the objects placed before it remain mostly static in the famous Ozu-style framing of parallel characters conversing in frozen attitudes, in shot-reverse-shot montage. This is compounded by disruptive devices which are constantly at work in

Figure 5.3 *Floating Weeds*: collective spying on the audience from the backstage through the cracks of the curtain turns the theatre audience into spectacle.

Figure 5.4 *Floating Weeds* gives abundant insight into the actors' preparation for the stage, but precious little in terms of their actual acting.

order to bring any action back to a standstill, including actors with a wooden performance, such as the aforementioned Hiroshi Kawaguchi, in the role of Kiyoshi. Whatever sense of movement is conveyed is to do with theatrical performances, which, as in a musical, disrupt the narrative thread to draw the viewer's attention to the artificiality of the story and the reality of the medium. Colour, a new adventure for Ozu, is exaggerated to the point of becoming an object in its own right, with garish reds and blues that call attention to their pictorial extravagance and unnaturalness.

These artificial procedures also inform the structure of Ozu's famous transitional 'curtain shots' or 'pillow shots', abundantly used in the film. All-too often I have read that these are randomly chosen images aimed at producing ellipses of time and space. For Deleuze (1997: 13ff), as noted above, they are pure optical and sound images. Such assessments, however, overlook their crucial narrative role, which often includes self-commentary and reflexivity. Suffice it to look at the staging of the second theatrical scene in *Floating Weeds*, a song-and-dance piece by the younger actress, Kayō, played by the dazzling Ayako Wakao, accompanied by a child apprentice. The series of transitional shots, or curtain shots, that precede the scene are carefully chosen to radically inflect the narrative, as they show empty spaces and then the makeshift lighting of the venue, indicating the general poverty of the theatre and the calamitous low attendance at the show (Figure 5.5). These shots are entirely in tune with Brecht's recommendations for his own epic theatre that lighting and other theatre equipment should remain visible to the audiences, thus causing a double self-reflexive effect: for the audience within and outside the film. The song-and-dance act then presented is all about breaking the fourth wall and poking fun at the performance itself, with the child actor, expected to perfectly mime the moves of the main dancer, constantly interrupting his performance to collect little packs of money thrown at them by the audience, then bowing reverentially and calling the spectators' attention to the reality of the actor in the play within the story (Figure 5.6).

In conclusion, theatre serves both the Mizoguchi and the Ozu films to break down the system at the base of the mediums of theatre and film into their constitutive parts, provide evidence of their reality, and propose a fairer arrangement of them. As a result, realism becomes closely associated with self-reflexivity, not in autobiographical terms as Satō and Bock would have had it, but as regards the ruthless hierarchy of kabuki and related theatrical forms, which compare to the film directors' demands on the cast themselves and is presented to the viewer through a level of physical violence, most notably in *Floating Weeds,* which finds no parallel in their work.

Figure 5.5 *Floating Weeds*: the makeshift lighting of the venue indicates the general poverty of the theatre.

Figure 5.6 *Floating Weeds*: the song-and-dance act is all about breaking the fourth wall and poking fun at the performance itself, with the child actor interrupting his performance to collect little packs of money thrown by the audience.

Revelatory realism can also be gleaned from these films' distinctive focus on what happens behind the theatre scene, with extended time devoted to the actors being dressed and made up, and to the description of the internal mechanisms of the stage and props. This is the moment where Burch's 'decentred' camerawork, Godard's 'objects that present themselves without the interference from the mind' and Deleuze's 'images of time' become both presentational and representational passages leading to the physical reality of another art within the virtual medium of film. Thus, the theatre spectacles, on the rare occasions they are presented to the spectator, become infused with the reality of life, not just that of the characters on stage, but also of the actual film actors and their real world.

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6   Intermedial History-Telling

Mysteries of Lisbon

Abstract

Chapter 6 is an analysis of Raúl Ruiz's 2011 *Mysteries of Lisbon*, a monumental adaptation of Camilo Castelo Branco's eponymous novel, in which interconnected narrative strands multiply wide and deep across generations. Whilst questioning the medium and its hierarchical position among other media, the film also brings storytelling close to reality and history-telling by creating holes in the narrative mesh through which the spectator can catch a glimpse of the incompleteness and incoherence of real life. In this context, the film's constant intermedial morphings become 'passages' to the real, through which drawings, paintings, sculptures and murals change into live action and vice versa, silently subverting the idea that the story could have one single end, or an end at all.

Keywords: Raúl Ruiz; *Mysteries of Lisbon;* Intermediality; Adaptation

Raúl Ruiz's copious cinematic production has been treated as a single never-ending film due to his notorious disregard for narrative closure. Adrian Martin (2004: 47), for example, muses:

> Where does any one [of Ruiz's films] start or end, and does it make any sense to talk at all of starts and ends – why not, as many commentators do, just plunge into the Ruizian sea (fragments of films, fragments of ideas and principles) and forget the individual works?

One could add to these questions: could these individual works be not films but Ruiz's life itself? For, having to his credit over a hundred feature films and an equal number of theatrical plays and novels, artistic creation did not seem to be, for him, a 'job', but simply a way of life. As well as unceremoniously intruding their maker's life, Ruiz's films opened themselves up to

the invasion of other media (theatre, literature, painting, music, sculpture) and artistic activities the director happened to be engaged with, remaining always only partially 'cinema'.

I however hesitate to look at his magnificent *Mysteries of Lisbon* (*Mistérios de Lisboa*, 2011)*,* under scrutiny here, through a lens that magnifies the auteur figure to such extreme, due to the exceptionality of this piece within Ruiz's oeuvre. In the first place, this is the most overtly commercial of the director's outputs, which remain otherwise the privilege of a niche of select aficionados. Granted, *Mysteries of Lisbon* is the lengthiest film Ruiz ever made, consisting of a monumental adaptation (4h26min as a film, 6h as a TV series) of Camilo Castelo Branco's eponymous novel in three volumes, in which interconnected narrative strands multiply wide and deep across generations.[1] However, all of these strands in the TV series and most of them in the film come to a logical resolution, the whole wrapping up with the romantic novel's traditional closure, i.e. the death of the hero and first-person narrator. Rather than the result of an open-ended work or 'opera aperta', as Umberto Eco (1989) had defined the modern, porous narrative following one's life path and inconstancies, then, the protracted length in *Mysteries of Lisbon* is the result of the chosen genre, the feuilleton, both as adopted in Castelo Branco's nineteenth-century novel and in its more recent development, the televisual soap opera.

Secondly, the film's artistic quality is certainly not the exclusive result of a single genius at its helm, but of the joint efforts of the strong team gathered around him, starting with Carlos Saboga and his masterly adaptation of an extremely complex novel, defined as 'the product of a truculent and incontrollable mind' by Castelo Branco specialist Alexandre Cabral (in Castelo Branco 2010). Art director Isabel Branco is another asset in the film, responsible for the exquisite settings and costumes. Another key element in the film is the dazzling, ballet-like, at times contortionist camerawork by a Ruiz discovery, the then 30-year-old Brazilian cinematographer André Szankowski, coming from the advertising branch. Other style-defining elements include the rapturous orchestral music by Ruiz's faithful composer, Jorge Arriagada, and a host of celebrities in the cast, including Globo TV network's first non-Brazilian soap-opera star, Ricardo Pereira, and a special appearance by the screen sensation Léa Seydoux.

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1   The film was simultaneously commissioned and shot in both TV and theatrical formats, with the producers requesting differences between the two, leading to the inclusion and exclusion of a few scenes across the two versions, and the double shooting and editing of the entire work.

On the other hand, it would be mistaken to discard the auteurist approach entirely, given Ruiz's spellbinding trademark gimmicks strewn all over *Mysteries of Lisbon*. Here we find again the static characters that move around through invisible sliding or rotating stage devices and postproduction tricks, as seen in Ruiz's *Time Regained* (*Le Temps retrouvé, d'après l'oeuvre de Marcel Proust,* 1999); the feverish, distorted visions which account for the otherworldly quality of *Thee Crowns of the Sailor* (*Les Trois couronnes du matelot,* 1983); the paintings whose characters take on life then freeze back into artworks, which make up the core of *The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting* (*L'Hypothèse du tableau volé,* 1978), all of which, Isabel Branco confirms (Nagib 2017), were devised by Ruiz in the first place. Though all these stylistic procedures contribute to move the various plots and subplots forward to a coherent conclusion, they also serve as distractions, even disruptive elements, disturbing the sense of narrative progression and calling attention to the reality of the medium and, not least, that of the author(s). My hypothesis here will be that these self-reflexive procedures, whilst questioning the medium and its hierarchical position among other media, also bring storytelling close to reality and history-telling by creating holes in the narrative mesh through which the spectator can catch a glimpse of the incompleteness and incoherence of real life. In this context, the film's constant intermedial morphings become 'passages' to the real, through which drawings, paintings, sculptures and murals change into live action and vice versa, silently subverting the idea that the story could have one single end, or an end at all. Indeed, the term 'passage' has often been utilised to signify Ruiz's most prominent authorial trait, featuring even in the title of a book in his honour, *Raúl Ruiz: Images of Passage* (Bandis, Martin & McDonald 2004). I wish to claim that this feature purposely denies human beings a privileged place within the world order, by infusing inanimate objects with a kind of magical autonomous agency whilst also abolishing any teleology across the different periods in world and film history.

Intermedial passages, in *Mysteries of Lisbon,* admirably resonate with the feuilleton or soap-opera genres thanks to the extraneous media at play in them. As Gardner (2014: 290-291) observes, serial novels, in their nineteenth-century form, cannot be reduced to plot devices or characterisation:

> What united them was the unique practice and pleasures of serial pro-duction and consumption, which invited an ongoing and interactive relationship with readers and required the consumption of the serial novel in conjunction with a range of periodical paratexts around a series of scheduled deferrals and interruptions. Alongside the serial novels were

always other features, equally important to the reading experience, includ-ing illustrations, historical essays, and editorial columns—all of which necessarily affected the experience of reading the serialized fiction [...] The serial novel, that is, was always a messy, interactive, and cacophonous affair.

One could say that Ruiz's never-ending storytelling through a continu-ous chain of open-ended films finally found an ideal home in this 'messy, interactive, and cacophonous affair', i.e. the polymorphic romantic feuilleton novel as practiced by Camilo Castelo Branco in the nineteenth century. The perfect fit between Ruiz's creative penchant and the feuilleton genre was in fact cleverly intuited by producer Paulo Branco, who first proposed to him the adaptation of *Mysteries of Lisbon*.

On the other hand, the episodic narrative harks much further back than the nineteenth century, being found most notably in *The Thousand and One Nights* (or *Arabian Nights*)*,* a compilation of multicultural tales from ancient and medieval times Ruiz time and again goes back to in order to describe his own style. He also compares *The Thousand and One Nights'* spiralling structure with that of *Mysteries of Lisbon* (Goddard 2013: 173), and both with the telenovela genre, in that 'the destiny of the characters does not depend on the structure, it depends like in life on chance; curiously they are more realistic because they are completely unbelievable' (Goddard 2013: 172).[2] Jorge Luis Borges, whose 'postmodern baroque' style bears striking similarities to that of Ruiz (Goddard 2013: 6), dates the birth of romanticism from the moment *The Thousand and One Nights* was first translated into French by Antoine Galland in 1704, introducing freedom into 'the rational France of Louis XIV' (Borges 1980). The tales contained in this collection could never end, because narrator Scheherazade's own life, which informs the frame story, hinged on their continuation so as to indefinitely postpone her impending death at the hands of her husband-ruler Shahryar. The possibility of indefinite storytelling coinciding with one's life span was a source of fascination for Borges (1980), who states:

I want to pause over the title. It is one of the most beautiful in the world [...] I think its beauty lies in the fact that for us the word *thousand* is almost

2   Interesting to note here is the attraction of the never-ending narrative style of *The Thousand and One Nights* in recent Portuguese cinema, with the notorious example of Miguel Gomes' *Arabian Nights* volumes 1, 2 and 3 (2015), a faux adaptation stretching for six hours of open-ended storytelling, intermingled with long non-narrative episodes. See also Chapter 4, on Miguel Gomes' *Tabu.*

synonymous with *infinite*. To say *a thousand nights* is to say infinite nights, countless nights, endless nights. To say *a thousand and one nights* is to add one to infinity.

Like Borges, Ruiz had a particular appetite for the idea of infinity as a mathematical model, albeit only as a creative tool devoid of any pretence to scientific accuracy. He often quoted a mathematician friend, Emilio Del Solar (see Martin 2004: 50; Ciment 2011), with whom he regularly discussed Abraham Robinson's 'infinitesimals theory', derived from Leibniz, who believed in ideal numbers, a fiction useful for the art of mathematical invention:

> [Leibniz] maintained that a system of numbers including the real numbers and the ideal infinite and infinitesimal ones could be devised that could be governed by the same laws as the ordinary numbers. In 1961, Robinson showed that a nonstandard model of the formal theory of analysis provided such a system of hyperreal numbers and rigorous foundations for many of the intuitive correct uses of infinitesimals in mathematics. Soon after Robinson's discovery, it became clear that the method could be applied with equal success to mathematical structures other than the real- and complex-number systems. (Stroyan and Luxemburg 1976: 3)

Ruiz seemed to find an equivalent of the infinitesimals theory in the soap-opera structure, and consequently also in *Mysteries of Lisbon,* in that it provided a model more open to chance than the conventional three-act narrative. Though the irruption of chance is not at all obvious in the meticulously planned visual and aural fabric of the film, be it the TV series or the cinema version, the tentacular plot and, most interestingly, the autonomy awarded to inanimate objects on set might give us the clue to the unique kind of timeless, historical realism emanating from this piece. In what follows, I shall examine how intermedial passages in the film repeatedly attempt to anchor it in the physical real, and how the 'messy' multimedia nature of the feuilleton and the soap-opera genres here serve to change storytelling into atemporal history-telling.

Intermedial Passages

As much as *The Thousand and One Nights, Mysteries of Lisbon* is made of a frame story enveloping multiple stories within stories. The frame story starts

in the mid-nineteenth century, guided by the voiceover of João, a 14-year-old boy who at that point is still unaware of his origin and surname, and lives at a boarding school under the protection of Father Dinis. The victim of constant bullying by the other pupils due to his unknown origin, João suffers a seizure and is taken ill, prompting the visit of his estranged mother, Ângela de Lima (the Countess of Santa Bárbara), first in a feverish dream, then in reality. Ângela's apparition unleashes an avalanche of subplots that reveal João's actual identity to be Pedro da Silva, and Father Dinis himself to be the orphan Sebastião Melo, adopted successively by Italian and French aristocrats, then turned soldier under Napoleon and finally a priest, with intermittent periods as the gypsy Sabrino Cabra. Despite the temporal zigzags, involving a myriad characters and generations, both the TV series and the film are remarkably easy to follow, with suspense created and sustained throughout by means of romance, intrigue, crime, jealousy and all the customary ingredients of the mystery novel. And although the long take – a key element in so-called 'slow cinema' – is liberally used, the sense of speed and dynamism is secured through an extremely mobile camera, uninterrupted music and a quick succession of highly dramatic events.

But there is no denying the complexity of the inter-generational relations, multiple identities and plot twists, to the point that art director Isabel Branco had to draw an elaborate map of the characters with a corresponding timeline to orient her through her work on the film (Figure 6.1). An eloquent illustration of how transparency and opacity seamlessly combine in the film's narrative construction is a scene involving a mysterious 'Brazilian' (played by Portuguese film and TV star Ricardo Pereira, in a nod to the actor's work in Brazilian soap operas). The 'Brazilian' is a former hitman once going by the name of 'Knife-Eater', who amassed a formidable fortune through slave trade and piracy, turning consecutively into Leopoldo Saavedra in Paris, Tobias Navarro in Brussels and finally his current self, Alberto de Magalhães, now residing in Lisbon. In the scene, which takes place in Lisbon's opera house (Teatro São Carlos), the Duchess of Cliton drops a message on the floor in front of Alberto de Magalhães (her former lover) and his current wife, Eugênia. Magalhães quickly tears the message in pieces, while the camera captures the bits of paper by means of the trick of being placed under what seems to be a glass floor. Some other attendees then try to piece the note together, though its content is left for the viewer to guess. The way in which a transparent glass floor still maintains the opacity of the message lying on it perfectly illustrates the dialectics informing the film's aesthetic organisation as a whole (Figure 6.2).

In an analysis of *Mysteries of Lisbon*'s film version, Marshall Deutelbaum (2014: 241) has found an interesting way of reducing the film's 'labyrinthine
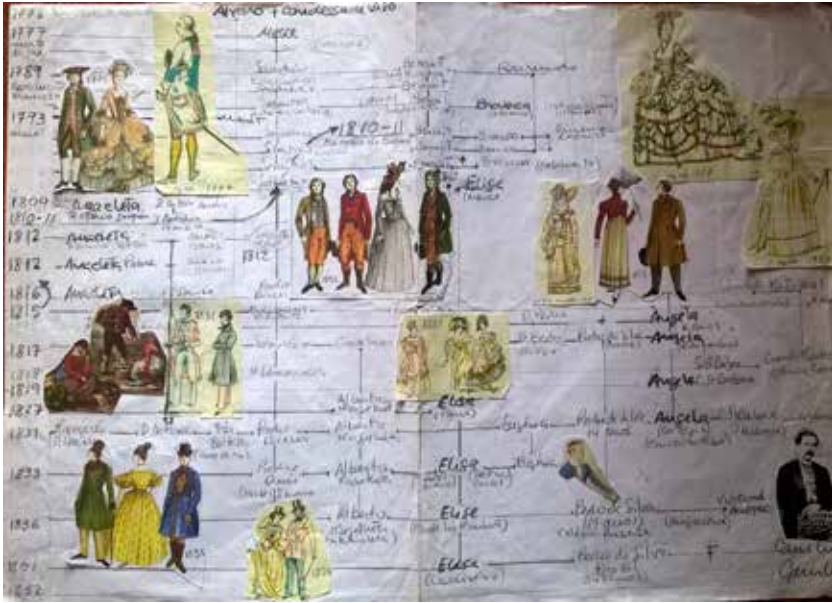
Figure 6.1 *Mysteries of Lisbon*: due to the plot's complexity, art director Isabel Branco had to draw a map of the characters with a corresponding timeline to orient her.

neo-baroque' mode of storytelling to what he calls a 'remarkably simple' structure (252). To that end, he resorts to the Russian formalist distinction between *fabula* and *syuzhet* as adopted by David Bordwell in his book *Narration in the Fiction Film,* the former corresponding to the chronology of the events and the latter to the order in which they are presented. Deutelbaum (241) argues that, whereas, in *Mysteries of Lisbon,* the *fabula* is extremely intricate, the *syuzhet* is clearly organised in non-chronological but mirroring events across Parts I and II of the film, inviting viewers 'to reconstruct mentally its events into their correct chronological order'. This goes in hand with the decomposition of the film medium into the elements involved in its making, creating intermedial and historical passages that cast suspicion upon the film's linear, finite storytelling. This strategy can be gleaned from the outset, as the film opens with sets of traditional Portuguese tiles of Moorish origin, called *azulejos*, as a backdrop to the initial credits. Because the tiles represent scenes later enacted by live characters in the film, it soon becomes clear that they cannot possibly be real pre-existing *azulejos.* Indeed, a closer look reveals them to be fragments of the film's storyboard, artfully painted then tricked into the appearance of traditional tiles – the frieze with floral motif around each set of tiles are actually the only real *azulejos* in those images, as explained by Isabel Branco (Nagib 2017).

Figure 6.2 *Mysteries of Lisbon*: a transparent glass floor still maintains the opacity of the message lying on it, illustrating the dialectics informing the film's aesthetic organisation.

The first set of tiles shows a living room with a macaw on a perch and a man in his morning robe sitting and holding a teacup close to his lips; two men formally dressed are standing in the background (Figure 6.3). More than an hour into the film, this scene is replicated in an eighteenth-century Hans Christian Andersen-style toy theatre, which in turn precedes its live re-enactment through the modern medium of film (Figures 6.4 and 6.5). This consecutive display of artistic mediums from different eras finds a parallel in the film's historical context, describing a world in transition in which the feudal European aristocracy struggles to remain in power after the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars and the ascent of the merchant bourgeoisie, and in so doing confirming Deutelbaum's description of the *syuzhet*'s neat organisation into mirroring historical events. The scene's protagonist is the aforementioned Alberto de Magalhães, who summarily dismisses the seconds of nobleman Dom Martinho de Almeida sent in to challenge him to an honour duel, a ritual turned meaningless for this representative of the ascending merchant class. Curiously, however, the three human characters are pushed to the background by the magnified presence of the blue-and-yellow macaw in the foreground. This piece of undisguised, uncontrollable living reality is the surprising, but entirely coherent, end result of the previous intermedial and historical passages, a bird typical of Brazil, a former Portuguese colony, and now an endangered species, that squawks painfully from time to time to remind us of its captive condition. Though placed seamlessly within the narrative flow, the way this scene is preceded by the *azulejos* and the toy theatre draws attention to the many artforms at the base of the film

Figures 6.3, 6.4, 6.5 Animating the inanimate in *Mysteries of Lisbon*: a scene is first represented on a set of tiles, then in a toy theatre and finally with live actors.

medium and the various eras contained in the present moment. Most notably, the magnified macaw, whose squawks distract the attention of one of the standing men, opens up for, and gives prevalence to, chance events, whose capture is an exclusive indexical property of recording media such as film.

Waldo Rojas (2004: 14), a prominent Chilean poet and Ruiz's close collaborator, states that:

> Since its inception, the cinema has taken the novel's mode of narration and its recurrent conventions as a model. Despite everything, cinematic narration has pushed the novel's limits to the place where reality and fiction meet [...] What is seen, what is offered to the look, dulls the force of the story's 'argument', and finally devours it. Ruiz pushes this potentiality of the poetic imaginary to a critical point.

One could say that the macaw sits precisely at this critical boundary between fact and fiction, its visual and aural impact superseding the fable and imposing itself as irreducible reality. In his book about animals in film, Jonathan Burt (2002: 92) states that:

> The animal image is a form of rupture in the field of representation [...] The fact that the animal image can so readily point beyond its significance on screen to questions about its general treatment or fate in terms of welfare, suggests that the boundaries of film art [...] cannot easily delimit the meaning of the animal within its fictions.

Along the same lines, de Luca (2016: 221), citing Bazin, states that, 'because of their unawareness of recording', animals are 'the dynamic and embodied evidence of an intractable reality surplus within the filmic image'. This inscrutable excess of reality chimes with Shaviro's (2014: 71) understanding of a non-conceptual real at the core of currents akin to speculative realism.

Intermedial interludes of realist aim such as this proliferate in the film to further effect, an example being a scene that has already been the subject of my previous attention (Nagib 2014). In it, Father Dinis, his assisting nun Dona Antónia and Pedro's mother Ângela are in conversation, unaware that Pedro is watching and overhearing them through his bedroom window. The priest is urging Ângela to travel to Santarém in order to bestow forgiveness on her tyrannical husband, currently lying on his deathbed. Placed in the position of a film spectator and unable to

Figure 6.6 *Mysteries of Lisbon*: live characters are changed into cardboard cut-out miniatures whom Pedro flips down with mere finger flicks.

interfere, Pedro is radically opposed to this plan that, he rightly fears, will tear him apart from his mother once again. At that moment, the technological medium of film reverts back to the earlier artisanal form of toy theatre, with the characters of Ângela, Father Dinis and Dona Antónia changed into cardboard cut-out miniatures whom Pedro flips down with mere finger flicks (Figures 6.6).

Ágnes Pethő (2009: 50) observes, about the intermedial procedures in *The Gleaners and I* (*Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*, Agnès Varda, 2000), that:

> Collages always bear the physical marks of manual craftsmanship: by assembling bits and pieces, the materiality of the medium of expression is shown up as integral part of a palpable reality.

The toy theatre here, as much as the fake *azulejos* at the film's beginning, is a material testament to the human craftsmanship that precedes and constitutes cinema. Its intended self-reflexive effect is evident in that spectatorial participation within the scene is enabled through scale reversal, which turns powerful, flesh and blood characters into cardboard miniatures that Pedro, the onlooker, can then defeat.

As I have highlighted elsewhere (Nagib 2014), manipulation of scale and proportion that magnifies or shrinks figures at will is a fundamental property of photography and cinema, with the close-up being the most radical distortion of the real enabled by these media. The effect of such distortions on the spectator is one that Mary Ann Doane (2009: 63) directly connects with the growth of capitalism, as the subject is situated as 'epistemologically

inadequate' and 'incapable of ever actually mapping or understanding the totality of social forces that determine his or her position'. She says: 'Although the miniature appears completely intelligible and knowable, the gigantic [...] exceeds the viewer's grasp and incarnates the limited possibility of partial knowledge' (63). Deleuze (2005: 145) has also focused on scale dialectics in the cinema in terms of the emphasis on large or small forms as found in montage or action ('classical') cinema, examples ranging from Eisenstein for the large form to Chaplin for the small form. In *Mysteries of Lisbon*, the breaking down of the film medium into its different artistic components, combined with the manipulative act of scale reversal, intervenes self-reflexively to reveal genre as genre, fiction as fiction, but also playfully, appealing to the spectator's intelligence without detracting from their enjoyment of the film's exquisite artistry and excellent acting. For Pethő (2009: 50), moreover, the paradoxes derived from the acknowledgement of mediation are 'a defining feature of modernist aesthetics'. In the case of *Mysteries of Lisbon,* the combination of self-reflexivity and genre, by means of intermediality, could be called Brecht against the grain, or modernity undone through its own means, though the question would rather be whether categories of classical, modern or postmodern, or any teleological understanding of history, may apply to such an unclassifiable mode of storytelling, which will be the subject of the next section.

Atemporal History-Telling

Raúl Ruiz was no stranger to academia, having taught at Harvard University in the late 1980s and gathered high-profile devotees within the American filmmaking and film studies scene, including the likes of James Schamus and David Bordwell. He is also the author of a two-volume collection of essays on film, *Poetics of Cinema 1* and *2* (2005; 2007), resulting from a stint at Duke University in 1994, on invitation by Fredric Jameson and Alberto Moreiras. His films are usually surrounded by prolific writings and interviews by him, and *Mysteries of Lisbon* is no exception, being accompanied by a 'preface' (Ruiz 2011) which starts by quoting, and actually challenging, what he refers to as 'the David Bordwell paradigm':

> The American professor David Bordwell considered that all narrative strategies that can be applied to modern films are based on a cer-
> tain notion of verisimilitude (or narrative evidence) [...] In modern
> drama, structure and construction dominate, even beyond the poetic

incoherence or the irrelevant facts it supposes [...] But what happens if
we apply these sacrosanct rules to the film adaptation of the novellas
that constitute *Mysteries of Lisbon*? From the hundred or so characters
that find and lose each other in Castelo Branco's Lisbon, not a single
one of them is capable of explaining the why of his actions; actions
that are almost imperceptible, with impalpable consequences and an
indecipherable future.

A blatant confusion immediately catches the eye in this quote, in that
Bordwell's theory of causality refers to what he defined as *classical* Hol-
lywood cinema and not at all to *modern* cinema. In a blog entry entitled
'Ruiz, Realism and... me?', Bordwell (2011), who had repeatedly written about
Mysteries of Lisbon, graciously tried to dispel this misunderstanding, stating:

> I don't know what Bordwell's Paradigm is, so how can anybody else? I
> suspect the label has to do with my characterization of classical Hol-
> lywood cinema, but who knows? [...] I think that Ruiz and I might disagree
> about how much *Mysteries* owes to psychological causation, and about
> whether labyrinthine trails can converge, let alone become highways.
> Both of us use metaphors of linearity, so maybe our disagreements are
> basically about whether the detours and paths are truly dead ends. Maybe
> I think his plotting is tighter than he does. Still, I expect that we'd agree
> that much of the pleasure of the film is its delight in apparently capricious
> digression.

Elsewhere Bordwell (2010) reminisces on Ruiz's disregard of evolutionary
models as applied to film and art in general in the following terms:

> Ruiz's appetite for narrative is almost gluttonous [...] He once told me that
> he thought that Postmodernism was simply a revival of the Baroque in
> modern dress. From *Mysteries of Lisbon*, it's clear that he sees in many older
> narrative traditions affinities with our tastes today. Network narratives?
> They've been done, and maybe better, centuries ago.

Considering that for Bordwell network narratives, as practiced in films
such as *Short Cuts* (Robert Altman, 1993) or *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino,
1994), are the prototype of postmodern cinema, Ruiz's style could be said
to be at once postmodern in its self-reflexive take on fiction and baroque
in its timeless and cosmogonic embrace of storytelling – let alone its total
artwork endeavour encompassing a flurry of intermedial relations.

Nothing could be more appropriate to such a style than Camilo Castelo Branco's labyrinthine feuilleton narrative as deployed in his three-volume novel *Mistérios de Lisboa*. As prolific as Ruiz, the nineteenth-century writer (1825-1890) was the author of c. 260 books, including novels, plays and essays partaking of and transcending the romantic style of his time. *Mistérios de Lisboa* (1854), which unfortunately remains untranslated in English, is a sweeping conflation of past and contemporaneous novels and styles, all nominally cited and mocked by the author in a visionary anticipation of the postmodern sense of the end of history and storytelling. The title reference to 'mysteries' parodies a genre inaugurated by Ann Radcliffe and her sprawling gothic novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, published in 1794, as well as the Udolpho spin-offs, starting with Eugène Sue's *The Mysteries of Paris* (1842-1843)*, which established the feuilleton novelistic genre and launched the 'city mysteries' fashion that subsequently spread around the world. Whilst borrowing from them, Castelo Branco, in fact, mistrusts novelists in general, from the Renaissance to his own time, from Honoré d'Urfé to James Fenimore Cooper and Alphonse de Lamartine, not just because, according to him, it is 'impossible to be peninsular and novelist', referring to his particular Portuguese context, but also because novels are just 'a pack of lies' (2010: 17). For this reason, *Mistérios de Lisboa,* he states, is not a novel but 'a diary of suffering, true, authentic and justified' (17), a phrase which is picked up as an epigraph for the film *Mysteries of Lisbon* as follows: 'This story is not my child, nor my godchild. It is not a work of fiction: it is a diary of suffering...' As we know, the diary – here in the form of Pedro da Silva's 'black book' – is one of the most traditional literary genres, and Castelo Branco himself does not hesitate to unveil its artifice. Halfway through the book, he introduces a 'Note', in which he intervenes with his writer's voice to observe an inconsistency in the continuation of the narrative beyond the death of the novel's first-person narrator. He ascribes this procedure to the freedom now enjoyed by the modern writer, in the following terms:

> Meaning no offence to art or truth, I continued the novel and refrained from attributing to the gentleman who had died in Rio de Janeiro what was mine in form, though his in substance. These two entities (substance and form), with which scholastic philosophy in the Middle Age was deeply concerned, will hopefully not disturb the current order of modern literature. (Castelo Branco 2010: 301)[3]

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3   In the original: 'Sem ofender a arte, nem a verdade, continuámos o romance, e abstivemo-nos de atribuir ao cavalheiro que morreu no Rio de Janeiro o que era nosso na forma, conquanto

Needless to say, 'modern literature' for Castelo Branco, here, simply refers to the literature of his time, bearing no historical relation to literary modernity as it became known in the twentieth century. In fact, Castelo Branco's sense that it is impossible to be 'peninsular and novelist' leads him to promote a temporal and geographic bracketing of his literature in view of Portugal's marginal situation with relation to Europe. This condition was also interestingly favourable to Ruiz's filmmaking. Portugal is famous for its highly original and uncompromising auteurist cinema, being a forerunner and committed supporter of what has become known in our day as 'slow cinema'. Ruiz shot some ten feature-length films in this safe cinematic haven (see Chapter 1 in this respect), even though this atemporal refuge was for him, as much as for Castelo Branco (2010: 160), the place of doomed characters and inevitable catastrophe, as announced in this passage of the novel:

> Everything will fall apart in Portugal. The day is not far off when life here will become, for many, boring and disgusting. Principles are overturned, civil war is not satiated with a small tribute of blood, there are no losers or winners; anarchy, after the war, will break into the government, whichever it is, and the foundations of a new edifice will be the corpses and ruins of many fortunes. Lucky those able to watch from afar as the motherland falls into the vulture's claws.[4]

Like the literary original, *Mysteries of Lisbon* as a film and TV series is also a story of doomed characters, but one that fits like a glove the soap-opera genre. Thus, though postmodern in its irreverence and virtuoso cannibalism of arts of all forms and periods, the film is also, and not least, in its extended breadth, aimed primarily to entertain, having become Ruiz's greatest commercial success and demonstrating that for him modernity is embedded in the classical form and vice versa.

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dele na substância. Estas duas entidades (substância e forma), que deram muito que entender à filosofia escolástica da Idade Média, esperamos que não perturbarão a ordem em que se acha a literatura moderna.' Translation by the author.

4   In the original: 'Tudo vai levar um tombo em Portugal. Vem perto o dia em que a vida aqui para muitos será aborrecida e enojada. Os princípios desorganizam-se, a guerra civil não se acomoda com um pequeno tributo de sangue, não há vencidos nem vencedores; a anarquia, depois da guerra, entrará no governo, qualquer que ele seja, e os alicerces do novo edifício serão cadáveres e as ruínas de muitas fortunas. Felizes os que podem ver de longe a pátria nas garras do abutre.' Translation by the author.

Locating the Real

Alain Badiou (2005: 79) says of cinema that:

> It is effectively impossible to think cinema outside of something like a
> general space in which we could grasp its connection to the other arts.
> Cinema is the seventh art in a very particular sense. It does not add itself
> to the other six while remaining on the same level as them. Rather, it
> implies them – cinema is the 'plus-one' of the arts. It operates on the
> other arts, using them as its starting point, in a movement that subtracts
> them from themselves.

Mysteries of Lisbon seems to chime with this thought in that, as much as
modernity is denied a superior status to what came before it, the technologi-
cally advanced medium of film is stripped of its status as an evolution with
relation to the other arts, being instead dissected into the various artistic
components at its origin. Ruiz himself (Piazzo 2009) enjoys playing with the
idea of an 'anticinema' that he claims to have practiced in his early work in
Chile, when film stock became too expensive, so he and his colleagues would
experiment with making films without film or even without a camera. Thus,
filmmaking starts for him with the act of artistically transforming whatever is
available in the material world before any modern technology comes into play.

Indeed, Isabel Branco reveals (Nagib 2017) that the entire interior and
exterior shooting, in *Mysteries of Lisbon,* was carried out on real locations,
which were transformed to a major or lesser degree according to the needs.
Numerous palaces and *quintas* (villas) in Portugal were utilised to that
end, including Palácio Foz (where the scene with the macaw and Alberto
de Magalhães takes place), Palácio Quintela, Palácio da Mitra, Quinta
da Francelha, Quinta da Ribafria and others. The addition of draperies,
furniture, paintings and sculptures were the magic wand that breathed
life into these old, often decaying settings, before they were photographed
by a dynamic camera in extremely choreographed, often acrobatic, long
takes and long shots that preserved their spatial integrity. It was thus,
from the film's inception, the real locations and artworks that gave life to
the characters, rather than the other way around, as illustrated by the tile
paintings and toy theatre from which the macaw, Alberto de Magalhães
and Dom Martinho de Almeida's seconds spring to life. Anabela Venda, the
artist who painted the fake *azulejos,* makes a brief but suggestive cameo
appearance as an English painter who has just finished drawing the portrait
of the schoolboy then only known as João. She claims, in the scene, that

Figure 6.7 *Mysteries of Lisbon*: a character becomes alive by looking at his own picture.

her model had sat motionless for hours in front of her, but once confronted with his own picture he suddenly becomes alive, running away with the drawing and not parting from it until the end of his days (Figure 6.7). The same procedure is repeated throughout the film, with the scenes enacted with the toy theatre subsequently re-staged with live actors, paintings that come to life when looked at by the characters, and sculptures that pre-empt future events in the film.

This attitude towards the world and the film world, that attributes to inanimate objects a life and powers of their own, would perhaps be amenable to a reading informed by speculative realism, drawing on the idea of 'object-worlds'. First introduced by Quentin Meillassoux (2016: 7), it means that 'all those aspects of the object that can be formulated in mathematical terms can be meaningfully conceived as properties of the object in itself' (3). Mathematics is a constant, though controversial subject within speculative realist currents, as Bryant et al. (2011) explain:

> [Quentin Meillassoux] argues for a mathematical absolute capable of making sense of scientific claims to have knowledge of a time prior to humanity. These 'ancestral' statements pose a problem for philosophies that refuse any knowledge of a realm independent of empirical access to it. If we are to understand these ancestral statements literally, however, it must be shown that we already have knowledge of the absolute.

Tangentially responding to this debate, Ruiz resorts to mathematics, i.e. to the infinitesimals theory mentioned above, albeit of an artistic rather than scientific kind, in order to open up storytelling to infinity beyond human

perception and existence, where objects acquire independent agency and intentions. *Mysteries of Lisbon* seems to be composed of and dominated by these mysterious objects.

There is however a political element which brings the film's possible realism closer to André Bazin's foundational approach, according to which a film's disclosure of the other artforms at its base is a realist procedure. In his 'Impure Cinema' article (1967: 54), Bazin applauds, for example, Robert Bresson's decision to film *Diary of a Country Priest* (*Le Journal d'un cure de champagne,* 1950) by following the Bernanos novel page by page, because this demonstrates the director's fidelity to the reality of the original literary style on which the specificities of the fable rely. *Mysteries of Lisbon* epitomises impure cinema in the way it places film on an equal footing with all other non-technological artforms and even with animals and inanimate objects, suggesting that, rather than a new invention, cinema is an art latent in all human expressions as well as in non-human objective reality, thus responding to both the subject and object-centred approaches.

According to Isabel Branco (Nagib 2017), the film had to be visibly set in Lisbon, so as to cohere with its title, *Mysteries of Lisbon*. But because real contemporary Lisbon could not possibly feature in a period film, the film's beginning, just after the credit sequence with the *azulejos,* shows a popular *cordel* theatre staging, focusing on an episode from Portugal's history, in which a large canvas depicting Lisbon's famous aqueduct is raised in the background, signifying both the play's simplicity of means and the staged nature of film. A self-reflexive, possibly 'modern' procedure, revealing the reality of both the theatre and the film mediums, this procedure also abolishes all hierarchies across different eras, traditions and aesthetics. Deleuze (2002: 39) states that, for Bergson, 'past and present must be thought as two extreme degrees which coexist within duration, the former of which is defined for its state of distension and the latter, by its state of contraction'. As a result, 'the present is only the more contracted degree of the past' (40). Ruiz's cinema seems to respond to this principle by turning storytelling into a timeless history-telling that ultimately finds what Sartre (2007: 22) calls the human reality that 'precedes its essence' – but also the reality of things and animals like the poor macaw.

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7   Passages to Reality

The Case of Brazilian Cinema

Abstract

Chapter 7 addresses the utilisation within film of artforms such as paint-
ing, theatre, poetry and music as a bridge or a 'passage' to political and
social reality. Rather than focusing on individual artists and films, the
chapter addresses a national phenomenon, more specifically, selected
works by filmmakers from the states of São Paulo (Beto Brant and Tata
Amaral) and Pernambuco (Cláudio Assis/Hilton Lacerda, Paulo Caldas/
Marcelo Luna), in Brazil, who over the years have bridged across their
regions' very different social history and geographic situation by means
of a shared artistic and political platform. Their films commingle in the
desire to reassess questions of national identity and social inequality
through an enhanced commitment to realism at the point of production.

Keywords: Brazilian cinema; Tata Amaral; Paulo Caldas; Cláudio Assis;
Beto Brant; Hilton Lacerda

This chapter is a companion piece to the feature-length essayistic docu-
mentary film *Passages: Travelling in and out of film through Brazilian geog-
raphy* (directed by Lúcia Nagib and Samuel Paiva, 2019), which provides a
panoramic view that situates the films studied here within a larger canvas,
encompassing other directors and films. Visioning *Passages* clarifies with
sounds and images all the points made below.

The chapter crystallises the main issue at stake in Part II, that is, the
utilisation within film of artforms such as painting, theatre, poetry and
music as a bridge or a 'passage' to political and social reality. Such intermedial
passages can be observed in productions from all over the world throughout
film history, and the Ozu/Mizoguchi and Raúl Ruiz examples, studied
respectively in Chapters 5 and 6, have already provided eloquent evidence of
their widespread use. However, rather than focusing on individual artists and

films, this chapter will address a national phenomenon, more specifically, selected works by filmmakers from the states of São Paulo (Beto Brant and Tata Amaral) and Pernambuco (Cláudio Assis/Hilton Lacerda, Paulo Caldas/ Marcelo Luna), in Brazil, who over the years have bridged across their regions' very different social history and geographic situation by means of a shared artistic and political platform.

Not accidentally, these are all prominent figures of what became known as the Retomada do Cinema Brasileiro, or the Brazilian Film Revival from the mid-1990s onwards, whose echoes can still be felt today. As I have explained in previous writing (Nagib 2003; 2007; 2018), the Revival movement arose at an emblematic moment of democratic consolidation in the country, after twenty years of military dictatorship followed by the disastrous, but short-lived government of the first democratically-elected President, Fernando Collor de Mello, impeached for corruption in 1992. With the subsequent governments of Presidents Itamar Franco, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Luiz Inácio (Lula) da Silva and Dilma Roussef, incentive laws were introduced and developed that boosted a production of near zero in the early 1990s to close to 200 feature-length films per year today. This was accompanied by a process of regionalisation that expanded film production, traditionally restricted to the metropolises of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, across other Brazilian states, such as Rio Grande do Sul, Minas Gerais, Ceará and Pernambuco, the latter having become in recent years a film hub of international standing.[1] Though widely heterogenous in terms of genres and styles, Revival films commingled in the desire to reassess questions of national identity and social inequality, once at the heart of the Cinema Novo movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which they revisited through a less ideological lens, but an enhanced commitment to realism at the point of production. At the same time, the movement's independent character favoured an emboldened use of the film medium that recognised no borders and exposed its inextricable connections with other art and medial forms. The intermedial method is thus strategically poised to shed a new light on the ways in which these films not only represented but interfered with and transformed the world around them.

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[1]   All these achievements were enabled by a neoliberal regime which, with all its faults and shortcomings, made room for the undisturbed thriving of the arts and creativity in general. Unfortunately, this positive development is now under threat by the far-right government in power since 1st January 2019, which is implementing a nefarious agenda against artistic freedom, human rights and the environment.

Accordingly, my proposal in this chapter will be to investigate the material life that pulsates in the intersection between film and other media by focusing on the passage, the fleeting moment where both film and life merge before becoming themselves again. This is the moment in which, I wish to claim, a film becomes artistic and political. Privileged case studies will be: *Delicate crime* (*Crime delicado,* Beto Brant 2005), in which film and painting in progress produce an 'aesthetic symbiosis', in André Bazin's (1981) expression, conducive to realism; *The Trespasser* (*O invasor,* Beto Brant, 2002) and *Mango Yellow* (*Amarelo manga,* 2002, directed by Cláudio Assis on script by Hilton Lacerda), in which musical interludes function as a tool to document urban territories of poverty; *Rat Fever* (*Febre do rato,* 2011, directed by Cláudio Assis on script and poems by Hilton Lacerda), in which poetry is infused with material reality via the live exercise of its words and the artist's body itself; Tata Amaral's *Antônia* (2006), *Bring It Inside* (*Trago comigo,* 2009/2016) and TV series *Causing in the Streets* (*Causando na rua*), which promote what she calls 'artivism' by means of music, theatre and street art in the making; and *The Little Prince's Rap Against the Wicked Souls* (*O rap do pequeno príncipe contra as almas sebosas,* 2000, by Paulo Caldas and Marcelo Luna), in which rap music unites all Brazilian metropolises through the common trope of geographic exclusion.

Though not exactly 'popular', these films are mostly conventional fiction or documentary features, intended for commercial distribution and exhibition at traditional outlets. Thus, the wisdom of this choice could be questioned, in that the intersection between real life and film would seem more evident in radical ventures, such as expanded cinema experiments involving live performance, or else works that provide comprehensive spectatorial immersion, such as Virtual Reality films. But this is where my argument aligns with a realist tradition harking back to Italian Neorealism, whose aim is to break the boundaries with the phenomenological world at the point of the film's production, rather than exhibition and consumption, relying heavily on: the physical engagement on the part of crew and cast with the profilmic event; the near identity between the cast and their roles; real location shooting; and film's inherent indexical property (as spelt out in the Introduction to this book). As well as drawing on these realist procedures, this corpus of films engages with other artworks in the making as an additional enabler of social change, as my analysis will hopefully demonstrate.

In conceptual terms, the idea of film as a vehicle or 'passage' is not new and derives from its own nature as a 'medium'. Already in the 1980s, Raymond Bellour (2012: loc 483) spoke of 'passages of the image' with reference

to cinema's ever-evolving technological condition that posits it 'between the moving image and stasis, between analogical photography and its metamorphoses, between language and image'. Bellour's 'passages', inspired by the then emerging practice of videoart, prefigured what later became known as 'remediation' (Bolter and Grusin 1999), or the multiplication of supports that over the last decades has allowed cinema to break free from the film theatre and pervade museums, galleries, schools, offices, domestic and personal screens. The passages addressed in this chapter, however, do not refer to modes of exhibition and consumption, but take place at the point of production, by means of an interaction between film (whatever its support) and other artistic and medial forms that are themselves still in progress. Pethő (2011: 11) has aptly defined the role of the *tableau vivant* in a film as 'metalepsis', or a 'leap' from the virtual world into material reality. The filmmakers addressed here are also striving for this leap by turning their cameras onto the production of other artworks in order to capture their material quality. It is as if the technological medium of film, unique in its property to elicit perceptual realism and mimesis of the real world, needed the sensory, physical quality of other traditional arts in order to gain substance. Thus, resorting to other media within film becomes a journey of discovery, a means to collect documentary evidence of the objective world and change it for the better.

In further, philosophical, terms the word 'passages' has become indelibly associated with Walter Benjamin and *Das Passagen-Werk,* his monumental study of the passages, or commercial arcades, of Paris, translated into English as *The Arcades Project* (1999). Benjamin's work of a lifetime, left unfinished with his suicide in 1940, is not far from a total-artwork aspiration. Acknowledging that 'few things in the history of humanity are as well known to us as the history of Paris' (882), Benjamin set out to compile the *Urgeschichte,* or 'primal history', of the nineteenth century, despite 'the manifest interminability of the task' (Eiland and McLaughlin 1999: x), using the Parisian passages as a kind of time capsule. The thousands of citations and notes, organised to that end by the author in 'convolutes' (sheaf of notes) and preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris, have for years baffled experts, such as the editor of *Das Passagen-Werk,* Rolf Tiedemann (1999: 929ff), who entertains the hypothesis that this might have been the work's final format envisaged by the author himself. If so, it would have been a kind of postmodern compendium avant la lettre, fragmentary, contradictory, never-ending, self-defeating. For the scope of this chapter, some of its recurrent ideas might nonetheless be illuminating, such as the condensation of past and present represented by the Parisian passages, with

its shops of bric-a-brac combining different eras, in which Benjamin (1999: 4-5) identifies the utopian elements of *Urgeschichte*:

> In the dream in which each epoch entertains images of its successor, the latter appears wedded to elements of primal history *'Urgeschichte'* – that is, to elements of a classless society. And the experiences of such a society – as stored in the unconscious of the collective – engender, through interpenetration with what is new, the utopia that has left its trace in a thousand configurations of life, from enduring edifices to passing fashions.

The utopia Benjamin refers to here is Charles Fourier's 'phalanstery', or a city entirely formed of passages, which in this configuration become places of dwelling as well as of commerce (17). Thus, in the phalanstery, passages are at once conducive and final, roads to somewhere else and points of arrival, their mixed, dialectical nature combining the belief in modern life and the hope of a classless society. Along the same lines, I would like to define my chosen case studies by their passages, which are movements towards an aim, but also points of arrival, sudden condensations of the Real of 'inbetweenness', as defined by Pethő (2011), as well as the locale of utopian connections that bring filmmakers together through the hope of a better society.

Aesthetic Symbioses

Delicate Crime, which has already been the object of my attention in the book *World Cinema and the Ethics of Realism* (Nagib 2011: 157-176), is an accomplished example of the political circuit that connects film, the other arts and real life. Here, I will expand on that initial approach by bringing in the full consequences of the film's intermedial procedures, which combine Sérgio Sant'Anna's eponymous novella at its base with theatre and painting without recognising frontiers between any of these different art forms.

Let us first look at the film's interaction with painting. One of the narrative strands in *Delicate Crime* focuses on Inês (Lilian Taublib), a young woman who lacks a leg both in the film and in real life. She models for a painter, José Torres Campana, played by recently deceased Mexican diplomat Felipe Ehrenberg, who was also a painter in real life. At a certain point, Inês is shown posing for the film's key work of art, a picture called 'Pas de deux'. Painter and model are naked and engaged in different embraces during

which Ehrenberg draws the sketches that are subsequently transferred to the canvas. Thus, what we see in this scene is the actors leaping out of representation and into a presentational regime in which the production of an artwork is concomitant with its reproduction. Indeed, the most startling aspect of the sequence of the making of 'Pas de deux' is that a real painter and a non-professional actress agreed to create an artwork in real life, while simultaneously playing fictional characters in a film. The fact that this involved full nudity and physical intimacy between both, and that, to that end, the model, who is disabled in reality, had to remove her prosthetic leg before the camera, indicates the state of extreme vulnerability the actors placed themselves in for the sake of the film. But this is where an ethical commitment to the truth of the unpredictable event comes into play, one which engages crew and cast in a socially transformative project. Risk and personal sacrifice were part of such a project, which, for example, caused Felipe Ehrenberg to lose his diplomatic job as a result of his participation in the film. But it was also liberating, in particular for Taublib, who thanks to the film was able to definitively rid herself of her prosthetic leg, which she wore for cosmetic effect only (see Brant's testimonial in the film *Passages*). The impact of the process of painting on the actress can be gleaned from the film itself, when lying next to the completed work she is overcome with emotion; her sobs at this point look and are real, a fact confirmed by Brant in his interview for *Passages*.[2]

Painting in progress, in *Delicate Crime,* thus functions as a passage to real life insofar as film fuses with it, in a similar way to that described by André Bazin (1981) a propos of *The Mystery of Picasso* (*Le Mystère Picasso,* Henri-Georges Clouzot, 1956), in which he identifies 'an aesthetic symbiosis' (200) between film and pictorial event:

> *The Mystery of Picasso* distinguishes itself radically from the usual didactic films about art made thus far. In fact, Clouzot's film does not explain Picasso, it shows him. (1981: 193)[3]

2   See full interview with Beto Brant for the film *Passages,* on: https://research.reading.ac.uk/intermidia/passages/ (accessed 24 May 2020).

3   The quotes from André Bazin's 'Un film bergsonien: "Le Mystère Picasso"' (1981) and 'Le Mystère Picasso: Picasso, Clouzot et la métamorphose' (1983) have been translated from French by the author. The former piece has been translated into English as 'A Bergsonian Film: *The Picasso Mystery*' (in: André Bazin (1997), *Bazin at Work: Major essays & Reviews from the Forties & Fifties.* New York: Routledge, pp. 211-220), however I went back to the original for my quotes for the sake of accuracy.

A milestone in the history of documenting painting, *The Mystery of Picasso* is indeed a fitting comparison here for having registered, rather than Picasso's works, Picasso *at* work, by means of an entirely original method. In order to emphasise the 'mystery' behind artistic creation, a new kind of coloured ink was used that soaked through the paper, making the artist's strokes visible on the picture's reverse side. It is from this side that Picasso's act of painting was mostly shot, hiding the artist from view and allowing his artworks to magically materialise in front of the spectator. For Bazin, such a method is 'Bergsonian' because it relies on time, or *durée* (duration), rather than space. Bergson's (2018) notion of *durée* refers to an inner psychic time made of a heterogenous succession of moments, in opposition to an exterior space, which is homogenous and made of simultaneities. In Bergson's conception, whereas *durée* is dynamic and contains the past, space is static and can only reflect the present. For Bazin, the emphasis on *durée,* or a time continuum, in *The Mystery of Picasso,* completes the revolution started in previous films on painting by the likes of Alain Resnais (*Van Gogh,* 1948; *Gauguin,* 1950; *Guernica,* 1950) and Luciano Emmer (*Picasso,* 1955). These had already abolished the picture frame, 'whose disappearance identified the pictorial universe with the universe in general' (Bazin 1981: 194), but it was only a spatial revolution. In *The Mystery of Picasso,* a temporal revolution takes place thanks to the employment of long takes directed at the painting in the making. The fact that these shots were accelerated by means of cuts, to the point of showing two strokes on the paper taking place at the same time, does not, for Bazin (198), detract from the film's realism, for one must differentiate between 'trick' and 'falsification':

> Clouzot is not trying to deceive us. Only the absentminded, the foolish or those who know nothing about cinema could be at risk of not noticing the film's acceleration effects obtained by editing […] [Clouzot] understood and felt, as a filmmaker, the need of a spectacular time, and he utilised the concrete duration of the events to his own ends, but without denaturing them.

Another kind of realism Bazin (1981: 197) identifies in the film is 'uncertainty in pure state', or the unpredictable nature of the painting's final form as it evolves in time, creating 'suspense' for the opposite reason of violent action: 'literally here, nothing happens, nothing except the painting's duration' (197). Finally, the film is realist for Bazin for revealing the many layers of time contained in the painting, which are not 'the temporality a posteriori implied in the contemplation of the picture, but an ontological temporality

implied in the picture's very nature'. He says: 'This we call "a painting" is just the ultimately arbitrary cessation of a series of metamorphoses that only cinema can capture in its nascent state (Bazin 1983: 122).

One could say that in *Delicate Crime* all these procedures and realisms are to be found, with their own original variations and contrasts. In the first place, the film sets out, not to contextualise the act of creation through a biographical approach to the painter, but to document how a painting comes into being, and in so doing attaining a 'symbiosis' with it, through which the act of painting becomes a passage to reality. No wonder this painting was the first sequence to be shot, though appearing towards the middle of the film, as Brant had to find 'the language for filming the making of the painting' which would define the film's entire aesthetic conception, as he states in *Passages*. The filming of a painting in progress is also at the root of *Delicate Crime's* 'ontological temporality', tricked though it might be through montage, but faithful to the unpredictability of the artistic creation that generates suspense in reverse, in Bazin's terms, culminating with the arbitrary cessation of the painting's duration. Finally, the process of painting unveils the many temporal stages of its coming into being, in the Bergsonian sense of *durée*, from sketches on small sheets of paper to the projection on the large canvas, where different layers of colours and shapes are superimposed on one another. Thus, if the ready picture can only show its present state in space, film reveals its various past lives and metamorphoses in time.

The differences between *Delicate Crime* and *The Mysteries of Picasso* are however equally striking. In the latter the artificially sped-up process of painting increases not only 'suspense' in the Bazinian meaning of the word, but the sense of magic and mystery. This resonates with the word 'genius', repeatedly employed by the voiceover narrator (Clousot himself) to describe the painter, suggesting, as Nead (2012: 37) points out, 'a cross-identification between painter and auteur filmmaker'. Nothing could be further from the ethos animating *Delicate Crime,* in which the painstaking, sweaty and uncomfortable process of posing and drawing is exposed. The painter sometimes forgets his original position with relation to the model and has to engage in several failed attempts at repositioning himself, to the model's annoyance; the model's arm goes numb, and the painter has to massage it back to life; breaks are taken so both painter and model can fan and recompose themselves etc. Picasso, on the contrary, states in *Mystery* that he could carry on painting around the clock if necessary, and the fluidity and automatism of his endless pictures are the film's very subject. When Clouzot's film finally 'defers to the corporeality of the mythic Picasso', in

Nead's (31) words, he is presented naked from waist up, his short but muscular torso appearing as the full embodiment of 'male artistic creativity' (Nead 2012: 27), whereas in *Delicate Crime* fragility (not least the actress's disability), doubt and gender equality are all apparent.

In both films, eroticism is of the essence, though an important difference separates them here too. In *Delicate Crime,* the completed picture, 'Pas de deux', has at its centre an erect penis next to a dilated vulva, implying that if the painting was real, so must have been the sexual arousal between painter and model. The first of Picasso's paintings in progress also shows a naked painter depicting a naked model in close proximity with one another, implying an obvious sexual relationship between both. However, the act of painting itself is dominated by the sole figure of the artist, who is working exclusively from memory, without any models around, not even inanimate objects. What this demonstrates is that *Delicate Crime* brings creativity down to earth by means of a documentary realism that deconstructs the figure of the artistic genius. The effort here is towards demonstrating shared authorship and agency, also as relates to sex, rather than the artist's genius and sovereign eroticism, by highlighting the female model's opinions, feelings and personal contribution to the work, alongside that of the male artist (Figures 7.1, 7.2).

Indeed, feminism is a most distinctive trait of *Delicate Crime* and its approach to reality, as can be noticed in another intermedial encounter obtained by means of theatre. In the same way that the film shows us painting in the making, extracts of real theatrical spectacles running in the city of São Paulo at the time are interwoven in it. The film's very opening is pure theatre, capturing with frontal framing a fragment of the play *Libertine Confraternity* (*Confraria libertina*), authored by playwright and theatre director Maurício Paroni de Castro, who was also one of the film's scriptwriters. A parody of psychoanalysis, it focuses on characters in a sadomasochistic situation leading to the liberation of the oppressed woman, whose chastity belt is unlocked by the figure of a dominatrix. Placed at the forefront of the plot, feminism then develops through extracts of another two plays. One of them is *Woyzeck*, the famous unfinished manuscript by Georg Büchner found after his death in 1837, in which the soldier Woyzeck accuses his wife Maria of adultery; the version shown here is an adaptation by Fernando Bonassi called *Woyzeck, o brasileiro,* or *Woyzeck, the Brazilian*. The other extract stems from *Leonor de Mendonça,* an 1846 play by Brazilian romantic poet Gonçalves Dias, in which a woman, Leonor, is again accused of adultery by her husband, D. Jaime. In both plays the female character is finally murdered by her husband. Female oppression, being the subject of

Figures 7.1, 7.2 In *The Mystery of Picasso,* the naked artist paints a naked model from memory; in *Delicate Crime* painter and model are together in an actual embrace.

the three plays staged in the film, then migrates into fiction via the character of theatre critic Antônio Martins, who writes his reviews of them whilst obsessed with Inês and tormented with jealousy of her erotic-artistic relation with painter José Torres Campana. The film then evolves to a possible rape

of Inês by Antônio, and she takes him to court on this charge, though the outcome of the court case is not revealed.

Whilst theatre is the channel through which reality migrates into fiction, it also brings fiction back to reality. Antônio is constantly interacting with real-life characters, not least the Pernambucan film director Cláudio Assis, who makes a cameo appearance as a rowdy jealous lover in a bar, in a short improvised theatrical sketch. Assis's episode, an eloquent example of how Revival artists from São Paulo and Pernambuco conversed across the country's extensive territory, is part of three bar scenes based on sheer improvisation involving professional and non-professional actors. The improvisation exercise with Assis is particularly effective in overlapping theatre performance, diegetic reality and real life. It consists of a couple (Assis and an aspiring actress, in the role of his lover) sitting at a table and engaged in a loud argument. Shot with the same frontal static camera as the other theatrical fragments previously shown, the scene gives us the initial impression of an extradiegetic excrescence within the plot. However, the quarrelling couple soon look at the camera and address someone off-frame. At that point a reverse shot shows us theatre critic Antônio sitting at the counter opposite them as a silent observer, now revealed to be the originator of the point of view, occupying the position which a moment ago was that of the film spectator. The uncovering of the voyeur, who suddenly acquires the active role of acknowledging theatrical exhibitionism, not only ties in the bar scene to the plot, but disrupts its illusionistic representation. And indeed at the end male and female characters are revealed to be only joking, embrace each other and leave the premises, with Assis explaining: 'This was just a jealousy scene'. Theatre here becomes a passage to the reality of both the film medium and the objective world.

Musical Interludes

Assis's appearance in Brant's film is not accidental and indicates that both directors had been conversing through their films, not least by creating intermedial passages.

Both Brant and Assis had started in the film business in the dark era of the late 1980s, when a stagnant film industry preceding the cinematic revival led to a massive migration of filmmakers to the advertising industry. Several of them turned to commercial music videos, working together with a blooming generation of popular musicians at the time, including Chico Science and Fred Zeroquatro in Pernambuco, O Rappa in Rio de Janeiro, and Os Titãs

and Sabotage in São Paulo (see in this respect Figueirôa 2006). Brant and Assis directly applied the skills acquired through music-video making to the social critique developed later in their feature films. To illustrate this point, I will now look at extracts from two films made respectively by Brant and Assis in the same year of 2002: *The Trespasser* and *Mango Yellow*. These, in my view, ideally reflect the directors' connective aim, first by turning film into music, second by establishing relationships across characters and social classes and lastly by nationalising regional issues. The extracts I will address consist of 'musical moments', as Amanda Mansur Nogueira (2020) has referred to them, in which music takes centre stage whilst seemingly pausing the narrative progression. In contrast to the musical film genre, however, the function of music here is to let the background imagery speak for itself, rather than making room for an entertaining spectacle of song and dance. They are moments in which, in the words of Samuel Paiva (2016: 73), 'musical language' prevails thanks to the recourse to music-video editing techniques. Two examples should suffice to illustrate this hypothesis.

In *The Trespasser*, the title role of hitman Anísio is played by Paulo Miklos, a musician and member of the band Os Titãs for whom Brant had made a music video. Anísio is hired by a property developer to kill one of his partners. As well as fulfilling this commission with such an exceeding zeal that he also kills his victim's wife, Anísio manages to penetrate the property developer's luxurious home and seduce his daughter Marina. Anísio and Marina then embark on a journey through the poor periphery of São Paulo (the location is mainly the district of Brasilândia, in the city's Northern Zone), in a footage devoid of dialogue and edited at the pace of a rap by Sabotage, who is also a character of the same name in the film. The result is a sweeping flânerie that collects documentary snapshots at the pace of Sabotage's rap song, 'Na Zona Sul', about the miserable Southern Zone of São Paulo (in all respects comparable to the Northern Zone where this passage was actually shot) and its 'difficult daily life'. At this point, thanks to the jump cuts, the *favela* appears as a natural continuation of the noble quarters of the city (see in this respect Nagib 2007: 115ff). The breaking of geographic boundaries caused by the brusque cuts results in striking and entirely recognisable evidence of the state of aesthetic communion among Brazilian urban social classes, despite the enormous economic gulf between them. The way that real life interweaves with fiction here, through a typical intermedial procedure combining film and music, was shockingly enhanced by the fact that Sabotage, the great revelation in the cast of *The Trespasser*, was murdered soon after the opening of the film as a result of an ongoing gang war in his community, in every way similar to those described in his songs.

Now compare this to the following sequence in *Mango Yellow* (*Amarelo Manga,* Cláudio Assis, 2002), in which film's ability to dissect and scrutinise the entrails of society is again demonstrated in music-video style. Dunga, a homosexual and one of the film's central characters, leaves the hotel where he works as a cook and walks a long distance to deliver a malicious letter to the wife of the man he covets. In this sequence, yet again devoid of dialogue, Dunga's brisk pace matches the rhythm of the song 'Dollywood', by Lúcio Maia and Jorge du Peixe, former members of the band Nação Zumbi, led by the legendary founder of the Manguebeat movement, Chico Science, tragically deceased in 1997 in a car crash. The extra-diegetic music punctuates the description of the area Dunga traverses, with its coconut-water sellers, knick-knack shops and a bridge over the Capibaribe river, until suddenly, abandoning the character, the camera penetrates a favela, where mothers wander around with their children and a pregnant girl fetches water from a well for her laundry. This then changes to a car-mounted camera at higher speed, which, much in the way of the favela scenes in *The Trespasser,* runs through the shacks and then travels back to the Texas hotel, the characters' headquarters, now following the yellow car of one of its guests, the necrophile Isaac. The way in which colour – in this case the colour yellow – combines with real cityscapes and city dwellers, functioning as a connective thread of repulsive dirt and expansive life, is powerfully highlighted through the careful use of props and objects that transforms Recife (the capital city of Pernambuco) into a live witness to Brazil's social inequality, not least because yellow is often carefully placed against a green backdrop suggesting the Brazilian flag. The inspiration for the colour palette is literary and draws on writer Renato Carneiro de Campos, cited by name and recited in the film in a bar scene, when one of his prose-poems is read out loud by a customer, when poetry combines with music as a conduit to material reality:

> Yellow is the colour of the tables, the benches, the stools, the fish knife handles, the hoe and the sickle, the bull cart, of the yokes, of the old hats. Of the dried meat! Yellow of the diseases, of the children's runny eyes, of the purulent wounds, of the spit, of the worms, of hepatitis, of diarrhoeas, of the rotten teeth. Interior time yellow. Old, washed out, sick.

In short, in both *The Trespasser* and *Mango Yellow* musical interludes combine real life and social critique in an inextricable manner, at moments in which film avers itself as passage, material inbetweenness and political intermediality.

Material Poetry

In these musical interludes, the lyrics can be as important as the music, and *Rat Fever,* directed by the same Cláudio Assis, again in partnership with poet and screenwriter Hilton Lacerda, provides abundant evidence of this. The film opens with one of the most poignant intermedial passages in Brazilian cinema, one that inspired the opening of our essay film *Passages.* The camera on a boat slowly passes under one of the Capiberibe bridges and details at its margins the sprawling favela of stilt shacks, precariously balancing over the filthy water. Meanwhile, on the soundtrack, we hear the offscreen voice of Irandhir Santos, in the role of the marginal poet Zizo, with his deep, velvety voice, reciting one of his poems (authored by Lacerda in reality) which is soon joined by Jorge du Peixe's original composition for the film, with low synthesiser notes and slow rhythm marked by the bass. The poem goes:

> *The satellite orbiting the world,/ Abyss of appalling things,/ People barking out their dreams,/ Ornaments of errant colours./ Tepid neighbour and princess,/ Slender in her sane madness,/ Cries with jubilation, the suburb!/ Weeps the planet in terror,/ Squeezed into the skimpiest of skirts,/ The dolls, bandits, the crippled./ Abyssal world, colossal world./ Right there, behind the mangrove,/ Repose insomnia, the cutlass, the hack-saw,/ The grind, the bonking/ And the blood./ Abyss, dark world, bottomless hole./ Throbs the burden of your streets,/ Throbs the ruminant cry./ Cries of 'no', world and abyss./ Cries of 'no'! For my abyssal world.*[4]

Poetry here constitutes an additional layer of intermedial passage, in organic association with the music and the images. The camera's patient curiosity in investigating this 'abyss of appalling things', this city 'slender in her sane madness' that 'cries with jubilation', inspired Samuel Paiva and me to embark on a similar trip through the Capibaribe, where we found and re-filmed the poverty and the dirt at its banks, but also the 'ornaments of errant colours'

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4   In Portuguese: 'O satélite à volta do mundo,/ abismo de coisas medonhas,/ pessoas que ladram seu sono,/ enfeites de cores errantes./ Cálida vizinha e princesa,/ magra em sua sana loucura,/ grita de alegria, subúrbio!/ Chora de medo o planeta./ Metida em saias bem curtas./ Bonecas, ladrões, pernetas./ Mundo abismo, grande mundo./ Logo ali, por trás do mangue,/ descansa insone a faca, o serrote,/ o trabalho, o sexo/ e o sangue./ Abismo, mundo escuro, profundo buraco./ Lateja o fardo de tuas ruas,/ lateja o grito ruminante,/ gritos de 'não', mundo e abismo./ Gritos de 'não'! para o meu abismo mundo.' The translation above is a combination of the film's subtitles and improvements introduced by me.

Figures 7.3, 7.4 The Capibaribe river in *Rat Fever* and in *Passages*.

on the improvised housing, the iron embroidery of the bridges, the historical Cinema São Luiz, key to Pernambucan filmmakers of the past and present, to all of which we pay homage in our film *Passages* (Figures 7.3, 7.4). *Rat Fever* is a typical expression of the Recife vernacular that signifies a 'state out of control', which in the film signifies the anarchic communal life Zizo presides over in his neighbourhood. But it also refers to leptospirosis, a disease transmitted through rats' urine which finds particular fertile ground in floodwater, a regular occurrence in Recife's mangrove zone. *Rat Fever* investigates precisely this underbelly of society, where dirt and disease thrive, but also a particular kind of poetry inherent in the physical experience of that milieu. One of the most inventive and powerful erotic scenes in the film – which is permeated throughout with erotic content – is when Eneida, Zizo's passion, urinates in his hand, squatting on the edge of a boat parked on a canal. Shot in one single long take, the scene leaves

no doubt about its authenticity, but also about the film's determination to change the lowest filth into poetry.

Rat Fever's storyline is not set in any specific time period. However, the choice of black and white stock – with the dazzling photography by one of Brazil's greatest DoPs, Walter Carvalho – and the art direction in the deft hands of Renata Pinheiro, who over the years has created a particular identity for Pernambucan cinema, among other elements, bring it close to the 1960s and 70s and the Marginal Poetry movement which spread around the country from the 1970s onwards. This movement was part of what became known as the 'geração mimeógrafo', or the 'mimeograph generation', involving intellectuals of all kinds who, due to the censorship imposed by the military regime at the time, took to the mimeograph to print out their writings as an alternative means to spread their ideas. This was also the case of the 'marginal poets', who, unable to find commercial presses for their outputs, resorted to the mimeograph to print out and distribute them independently. The physicality of this mode of dissemination – which often included street recitals by the authors – is referenced throughout the film, starting with its initial credits, written in typical typewriter typeface, accompanied by the sound of a mimeograph press and shown as individual pages, in the form of 'slides', that succeed one another onscreen. More than a mannerism, this stylistic choice feeds into the construction of the character of Zizo himself, soon shown at work on a mimeograph, where he prints out, page by page, his independent newspaper, called 'Febre do Rato' (Rat Fever). His prose and poetry work is all self-produced in the same way, and self-distributed in brochures and pamphlets, often read out in the streets and bars, or on a microphone from his derelict car (Figure 7.5). Thus Zizo is not just a poet, but poetry itself, and accordingly he is at a certain point shown writing poetry across his face, torso and limbs.

Another connection of the story to the 1970s is the way Zizo congregates a community of like-minded people around him who share everything, from habitation to sexual partners. Zizo himself sees as his social mission to satisfy old ladies in the neighbourhood in need of love and sex, using a round, well-shaped tub in his workshop to that end. The camera, often placed above the scene and occupying the space where the ceiling should have been, or sliding in tracking shots through rooms without walls, emphasises the sense of pervasiveness across the neighbourhood. In fact, Zizo's is a 'collective' body, always semi-naked, exposed and, in the end, sacrificial. And it was equally the mission of the film to have the entire cast share this mode of thinking and behaviour, by making them engage physically with their respective characters to unimaginable degrees, starting with Irandhir Santos, whose readiness to

Figure 7.5 *Rat Fever*: Zizo's poetry is self-distributed and displayed.

lend his full body and soul to fictitious characters (here and elsewhere) has turned him into a quasi-mythical actor of contemporary Brazilian cinema. The same could be said of other lead and supporting actors, such as Nanda Costa (Eneida), Mariana Nunes (Rosângela), Vitor Araújo (Oncinha) and Hugo Gial (Bira), whose stark-naked bodies are constantly under the camera's eye and whose roles include collective and cross-gender sex acts.

Still with reference to the film's timeframe, a parallel has been pointed out between the figure of Zizo and that of Paulo Martins, a poet and journalist in Glauber Rocha's landmark *Entranced Earth* (*Terra em transe,* 1967) (Rede Brasil Atual 2012). Indeed, both characters make politics through poetry, which, for Pasolini, a major reference for Rocha, encapsulated cinema's 'fundamentally irrational nature' (Pasolini 2005: 172). Hilton Lacerda, in *Passages,* also describes cinema as a poetic language whose various parts must combine through editing. But the two films seem to be comparable on another more complex level that brings us close to the Russian formalists and their concept of *zaum.* Defended by poets such as Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh, *zaum* refers to a 'transrational language' in which the word becomes 'broader than its meaning' (Steiner 1984: 144ff). Thus, it does not represent the thing, but is the thing itself, in the same way that Zizo and Paulo Martins are defined by the poetry they recite.

An episode, in *Rat Fever,* is particularly enlightening of the objectification of poetry. Throughout the story, Eneida, a schoolgirl, rejects Zizo's courtship, though obviously intrigued by and drawn towards him. One day, in response to a poem he had sent to her, she visits his workshop in his absence and copies her entire naked body on a xerox machine, by pressing the different parts of it against the glass and triggering the scanner (Figure 7.6). Later, when he finds Eneida's different body parts printed out, Zizo climaxes by kissing and rubbing himself against the xerox machine. Here, the physicality

Figure 7.6 *Rat Fever*: Eneida's body becomes a poem.

of the copier and printed page serves as a poetic passage through which the virtual medium of film reaches material reality.

The political commitment of crew and cast, in *Rat Fever,* is exposed in the manner of a manifesto in the film's apotheotic end. The marginal community finally invades Recife's historical centre on Brazil's Independence Day, the 7th of September, when military parades traditionally take place. Zizo climbs to the top of his car, recites a poem on a megaphone and invites all participants to undress. Eneida joins him on the top of the car, and when both are fully naked and most of the audience half undressed, a military police contingent breaks into the group, hitting them with batons and threatening them with shotguns and machine guns. In our film *Passages,* scriptwriter Hilton Lacerda explains that this was a real military intervention, prompted by someone in the neighbourhood who accused the actors of 'indecent exposure'. Though, in the fiction, Zizo is beaten unconscious by the police and thrown into the river, luckily no-one actually died or was hurt on the occasion, but the risk was real, and so was their courage to confront society and its defence structures in the name of the reality of film.

Intermedial Artivism

My next case study will be another exponent of the Revival and post-Revival periods, Tata Amaral. Her films *Antônia* and *Bring It Inside*, in particular, provide excellent material to reflect on intermediality as a passage to social reality. The portrayal of art in the making by actual artists grounds these films firmly within their historical environment, changing them into a piece of activism or 'artivism' as Amaral likes to call it, whilst committing casts and crews intellectually and physically to the causes defended in the fictional

plot. Tata Amaral is notable for having consistently addressed the theme of female repression within the Brazilian working classes in groundbreaking films such as *Starry Sky* (*Um céu de estelas,* 1996), a Revival landmark and the first of a female trilogy including *Through the Window* (*Através da janela,* 2000) and *Antônia,* the latter a feature-length film later expanded into a TV series. Famously, *A Starry Sky* culminates in the murder of the male oppressor by the liberated woman, unleashing a string of Brazilian films with a similar narrative conception, such as *Latitude Zero* (Toni Venturi, 2001) and *Up Against Them All* (*Contra todos,* Roberto Moreira, 2004), the latter featuring the same Leona Cavalli of *Starry Sky* (and also of Assis's *Mango Yellow*). But in order to properly evaluate Amaral's contribution to Brazilian cinema and film history in general, we need to move beyond readings that rely on representational strategies hinging on female role models to be emulated by a hypothetically ill-informed or naïve female spectator. Films are feminist not only when they 'represent' strong women, but also when they engage with their causes in a wider social context at *production* stage, i.e. when they interfere and transform reality with and through the actions of their characters.

Let us look at how this system is activated in *Antônia,* the feature-length film. In her excellent book *Brazilian Women's Filmmaking,* Leslie Marsh (2012: 178) finds in this film the representation of 'progressive woman/motherhood wherein women are not dependent on men or repressed by traditional gender roles'. This 'uplifting, positive image of young people', in Marsh's (177) words, is, however, one that required a reasonable amount of sanitation, for example, by keeping questions of drug trafficking and ensuing violence away from the story of that particular favela community. This fact has been celebrated as a 'feminine difference' to male-oriented favela films such as *City of God* (Sá 2013) – and it is true that in her interviews Amaral herself never hesitates to define violence as essentially masculine. In my view, however, rather than its pedagogical and somewhat simplified representational message, the great contribution of *Antônia* is to have unveiled real hip-hop female singers (Negra Li, Leilah Moreno, Quelynah and MC Cindy) from the periphery of São Paulo, whose extraordinary performances offer irrefutable indexical evidence of their actual value. Their musicianship overrides representation, adding a further and more effective political dimension to the film. These are characters whose existence is entirely dependent on their context, in this case, the Brasilândia district, which Tata Amaral made sure to name as such, so as to attach documentary authenticity to the story, as she states in the film *Passages.* The importance of this context is made clear at the film's very opening, as the girls emerge from between a hilly road and a favela community behind them (Figures 7.7, 7.8, 7.9). Having come together

Figures 7.7, 7.8, 7.9 *Antônia*: The characters' dependence on their context is made clear from the opening images, as the singers emerge from between a hilly road and a favela community behind them.

through and for the film, these singers had their individual careers changed and boosted exponentially thanks to it, with obvious positive consequences also for their communities. At the origin of *Antônia* is the commission by the culture secretary of Santo André – a city in greater São Paulo – to document female hip-hop singers in the region, and the film follows this documentary mission to the letter by describing step by step how music emerges from daily-life occurrences until it becomes an independent work of art, including lyrics collectively imagined, dance steps rehearsed, backstage production and background vocals that progress to foreground leads.

The combination of film and politics in Amaral's work by means of documenting art in the making, from its real raw material to the finished artistic product, is even more evident in another TV series, this time for Canal Brasil, *Bring It Inside* (drama series, 2009), which was turned into a single feature film seven years later, in 2016. Here, presentation and representation are neatly separated. Fiction is posited as an exercise in re-enactment of the plight of survivors from Brazil's military dictatorship atrocities from the late 1960s onwards. Demonstrating Amaral's freedom from gender constraints, the protagonist is now male, a character called Telmo, played by Carlos Roberto Ricelli in what is probably his best on-screen performance to date. A famous theatre director now retired, Telmo tries to fill in a gap in his memory about the character of Lia, a former clandestine guerrilla fighter like him. His attempt at putting together a play on the subject is interspersed with testimonials of actual victims of the dictatorship, who retell on camera their experiences of prison and torture, as well as the death of their comrades and relatives. Margulies (2003: 220) states that:

> Reenactment radically refocuses the issue of indexicality. The corroborating value of reenactment does depend on our knowledge that these particular feet walked these particular steps. But it is the intentional and fictional retracing that *enacted* lends to these faces and places an authenticating aura.

In *Bring It Inside* indexicality pierces through the many layers of fiction-making which are exposed as such in the film, revealing the stages through which a story is constructed out of real facts. Shot in a real disused theatre, the once famous Teatro Brasileiro de Comédia, the film takes spectators by the hand through the entire process of auditioning the cast, rehearsing and dress-rehearsing scenes which are mirrored by the retelling on camera, by real victims, of similar stories, complete with their hesitations and memory

gaps. Within the fable, Telmo is trying to deal with a sense that he might have unwittingly contributed to the death of his lover Lia, when under torture he confessed to a rendezvous with comrade Braga in a church, but chance meant that Braga had fallen ill and Lia went there instead and was caught by the executioners.

Margulies (2003: 218) defines reenactment as 'a repetition on camera of some mistaken behaviour, which it is the film's work to put on trial'. As well as representing a tragic love story, Telmo's acting is also a means for actual victims to attain atonement and justice through repairing their own untold and misremembered history, which is placed alongside fiction in order to bring home to the spectator the artifice of any representation, but also the reality of the original facts as well as that of the medium itself. The recourse to theatre functions here as a passage to the real, including the theatre actors' bodily commitment to the experience of torture in order to better apprehend and convey the victims' plights. Needless to say, the entire process is a didactic and self-reflexive exposition of Amaral's own filmmaking method, based on improvisation and identification between characters and actors, as well as on real location shooting. This method turned out to be immensely useful for those who are to this day still fighting for the punishment of the perpetrators, and this is why Amaral decided to make a single feature film out of the series as a means to give continuation to the work of recovering the country's historical memory and of fighting for justice alongside the victims.

Given the speed through which, in our day, conventional cinema is losing ground to other audiovisual forms, Tata Amaral is now more than ever engaged in diversifying her filmmaking activities and bringing them closer to real phenomena. An example is her recent episodic programme for TV Cultura, *Causando na rua,* a take on street art and activism whose title, an endearing popular slang, means 'causing in the streets', i.e. directly interfering in the reality of São Paulo whilst interacting with it, for example, through mapping out the city's hidden water courses or participating in artistic happenings and interventions focusing on gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Needless to say, women's causes feature high in the series, whose mode of production is multi-authorial and collaborative by definition.

In short, Tata Amaral's governing filmmaking principle seems to be the establishment of a strongly indexical relationship with reality in order to endow fiction with transformative effect, contributing to reconstruct history with all its contradictions and secure a better future for the country.

Geographical Passages

To complete my analysis, I will now turn to one of the most eloquent intermedial encounters of political intent in Brazilian cinema, this time explicitly uniting São Paulo and Pernambuco and in perfect symmetry to my previous example of the encounter between Pernambucan Cláudio Assis and Paulistan Beto Brant in *Delicate Crime.* It is the documentary film *The Little Prince's Rap Against the Wicked Souls,* made in 2000 by Paulo Caldas and Marcelo Luna. The film focuses on a vigilante, or *justiceiro,* called Hélio José Muniz, currently in jail for his numerous killings, as well as on a character in all respects his opposite, Alexandre Garnizé, the drummer of hip-hop band Faces do Subúrbio, who is devoted to educational and charitable work. Both characters hail from Camaragibe, a dormitory town in the periphery of Recife, where crime and impunity thrive, but where music offers, as suggested by Gama (2012), the utopia of social change. One of the film's most poignant moments concerns a scene bringing together members of Pernambuco's Faces do Subúrbio and São Paulo's Racionais MCs, two famous bands. The scene starts with Mano Brown and Ice Blue, from Racionais MCs, sitting with friends and enjoying a typical northeastern meal of dried beef and boiled manioc on a roof terrace in Camaragibe. Whilst chatting about the record levels of criminality in São Paulo's Southern Zone, the two look down onto the sprawling favela landscape and identify each of its sections with favelas from that area of São Paulo. This preludes one of the most symbolic 'passages' ever shot in Brazilian cinema, consisting of an aerial long take of around two minutes over the never-ending favelas around Recife, to the sound of rap 'Salve' (Salute)*,* composed by the two characters, whose lyrics, uttered from the perspective of someone behind bars, salute the populations from favelas from São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte and Brasília. As the names of these communities are called out in an interminable list, space-time realism enabled by the long take offers indexical evidence of the connection of all Brazilian regions through their underbelly of poverty (Figure 7.10).

As Arthur Autran (2003) reminds us, aerial shots of favelas have a long history in Brazilian cinema, harking back to Cinema Novo precursor *Rio 40 Degrees* (*Rio 40 graus,* Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1955), and are invariably intended to define the country's national identity through its deprived territories. The extraordinary event in this particular long take is, however, its intermediality, through which, as in the other examples, music offers a passage to reality for the virtual medium of film. The lyrics suggest that social change can only be attained through religion, by invoking the figure

Figure 7.10 In *The Little Prince's Rap Against the Wicked Souls,* the long take of the favelas around Recife offers indexical evidence of the connection of all Brazilian regions through their underbelly of poverty.

of a black Jesus who walked among lepers, a miraculous solution that had already been dismissed as ineffective as far back as in 1964, in Glauber Rocha's Cinema Novo milestone *Black God, White Devil* (*Deus e o diabo na terra do sol*). This however does not detract from the documentarian, physical truth provided by the interminable name calling of favelas across Brazil, the indexical images of real, continuous favelas, and not least the reality of death which this and so many favela films in Brazil are all about. Helinho, it must be noted, was the author of 44 deaths at the time of the film, and his ongoing trial had already sentenced him to 99 years in jail. He had actually 'passed' 44 lives, the verb 'passar' (or to pass) in Portuguese also meaning to kill or 'waste' in the favela slang abundantly employed in the favela films made in those days (see Nagib 2007: 99-114). By passing over to the other side of the prison walls through the conduit of music, the film puts us fleetingly in touch with the real utopia of art.

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Part III

Towards Total Cinema

8   The Reality of Art

Ossessione

Abstract

Chapter 8 is a study of *Ossessione* (Luchino Visconti, 1943), a film universally recognised as a masterpiece and foundational work of Italian neorealism, which has inspired new realist film currents and independent productions around the globe. Accordingly, it has been scrutinised from a variety of angles by successive generations of scholars. Yet, as is the case with any masterpiece of this magnitude, the possibilities of novel approaches to it are inexhaustible. In this chapter, I revisit the crucial topic of realism in *Ossessione* through a perspective hitherto underexplored in scholarship on the film, namely the contribution of opera and music to its realist endeavour. Under this light, *Ossessione* changes into an accomplished example of the aspiration to the total artwork.

Keywords: Neorealism; *Ossessione;* Luchino Visconti; Opera; Intermediality

This chapter segues from the previous part on Intermedial Passages by extending film's intermedial dialogues into the territory of opera, a medium, since Wagner, associated with the idea of 'total artwork'. 'Totality' here must, however, be dissociated from a Wagnerian absolutist endeavour as much as the totalitarianisms that led Europe into a world war in the 1940s. *Ossessione* (Luchino Visconti, 1943), the film in question here, was born, in the middle of the Second World War, as the first open rebellion against fascist propaganda, accomplished not least by bringing a then fashionable opera film genre down to the reality of life, or 'the reality of art', as Visconti's famously put it (1978: 84).

Ossessione is a universally recognised masterpiece and foundational work of Italian Neorealism, the most influential film movement of all times, which has inspired new realist film currents and independent productions around the entire world. Accordingly, it has been scrutinised from a variety

of angles by successive generations of scholars.[1] Yet, as is the case with any masterpiece of this magnitude, the possibilities of novel approaches to it are inexhaustible. Indeed, a meticulously researched paper on *Ossessione,* by Lorenzo Fabbri (2019), which reads its queer subplot as an implicit anti-fascist manifesto, has recently made the cover of the journal *Screen*. Original points on *Ossessione* are also made in the newly launched and highly erudite book, *Reframing Luchino Visconti: Film and Art*, by Ivo Blom (2017), which looks at Visconti's work through the lens of intermediality – or 'intervisuality', as the author defines it – focusing on film and painting. In this chapter, I shall revisit the crucial topic of realism in *Ossessione* through a perspective hitherto underexplored in scholarship on the film, namely the contribution of opera and music to its realist endeavour.

As is well known, Visconti was an active opera and theatre director, occupations he maintained throughout his film-directing career and which had a profound effect on the way he directed actors and contributed to set and costume design as well as the general mise-en-scène of his films. However, probably because opera is perceived as a sophisticated, expensive and extremely artificial form of art and entertainment, attention to the operatic inflections of his oeuvre has hitherto been reserved to his ostensibly opulent films, focusing on aristocratic or royal dramas, such as *Senso* (1954) and *Ludwig* (1973), made long after the dissolution of the neorealist project. To all appearances, *Ossessione* falls out of the operatic bracket given its focus on the poor and partially illiterate echelons of the Italian population, composed of tramps, peddlers, innkeepers and prostitutes, with emphasis on physical, rather than intellectual, phenomena, such as dirt, hunger, sex, sweat and vomit. However, opera is not only played in the film's diegesis, but is a key element of its plot.

From its very beginning, the film assails the spectator's senses with Giuseppe Rosati's loud, menacing nondiegetic orchestral music, played out here in the manner of an opera overture, over the tracking shot of a dirt road, as seen through the windscreen of a fast-moving truck. Strings and wind instruments swirl up then cascade down repeatedly, ending with banging drums and screeching horns that anticipate the double deaths on the road ensuing from the adulterous love story that follows. Such onomatopoeic and symbolic musical motifs, rife in the opera genre, transition smoothly into the intradiegetic opera and other musical pieces played in the next

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1   *biblio*Visconti in three volumes (2001-2009) compiles thousands of publications on Visconti and his films. Blom (2017: 25 n61) also lists an extensive number of publications on Visconti in several European languages.

scenes as a means to describe the main characters. The first of them is the Andante aria, 'Di Provenza il mar il suol', from *La Traviata,* by Giuseppe Verdi, sung by the innkeeper, Giuseppe Bragana, before his on-camera appearance, whose lyrics – a father's plea for his son to come home – present a remarkable parallel to his own story in the film (a subject explored in the fourth section of this chapter). The other two protagonists are also linked to intradiegetic musical motifs, Bragana's wife Giovanna to a then popular song, Carlo Buti's 'Fiorin Fiorello', which she also sings off-camera before being revealed to the viewer, as a kind of siren song that entices the wandering tramp Gino Costa into her husband's inn and bed; and Gino's tune played out on his harmonica, in the manner of American western heroes. A legion of other symbolic and ominous tunes and sounds populate the audio track, culminating in the central scene of the opera contest, in which the protagonists' fate is sealed against the backdrop of popular opera arias delivered by a succession of amateur singers.

Ascents and descents, sloping surfaces and rooftops suggesting falls and deaths are among the visual motifs borrowed from expressionist (and antirealist) cinema in *Ossessione* (among its multiple film and art references), starting with the very film title displayed diagonally across the frame and lavishly expanded on by a camera choreography that travels low to explore the characters' ragged footwear and high to enhance the universal reach of their feelings and plights. The film's rollercoaster opening tune presents a perfect match to these visual motifs, which are suggestive of danger as much as providers of a link between the characters' low social status and mythical – in this case Oedipal – drama. As Gramsci had once observed, a propos of Verdi, 'Italian artistic "democracy" had a musical, rather than literary, expression', creating a cultural vocabulary that circulated across all social classes, from aristocrats such as Visconti to roadside innkeepers as represented by Bragana in *Ossessione*. Gramsci (n/d: 54) goes on to say:

> In Italy, music was able to an extent to replace, within popular culture, that artistic expression which, in other countries, was supplied by the popular novel, and [...] the geniuses of music had a popularity that men of letters could not achieve.[2]

Ossessione, with its array of humble opera and music lovers, singers and players, provides eloquent illustration of this cultural phenomenon. Richard Dyer (2006: 28) states, quite rightly, that: 'The typical subject of neo-realism

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2   These Gramsci citations were translated from French by the author.

cannot speak for themselves: music is needed to speak for them'. However, he is wrong to conclude: 'But that music will not be their music'. At least in the case of *Ossessione,* and in line with Gramsci's thought, the opera that informs the melodramatic non-diegetic score is also the utmost expression of the dispossessed and the working classes.

In fact, opera lies at the very genesis of the film. Just before engaging with an (unauthorised) adaptation, in collaboration with a host of legendary neorealist and literary personalities,[3] of James Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* into what was initially known as *Palude* (or *Marshes*) and then *Ossessione,* Visconti had contributed to the directing, designing and editing of *Tosca* (also known in English as *The Story of Tosca,* Carl Koch and Jean Renoir, 1941), a film adapted from the play *La Tosca,* by Victorien Sardou, and its opera version *Tosca,* by Giacomo Puccini on a libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa. Moreover, as Blom (2017b: 150) reminds us, in the 1930s, in fascist Italy, it was fashionable to make films with opera singers or adapting operas to the screen. This combines with an artist who himself claimed, according to his biographer Laurence Schifano, to have been born under the sign of opera, and of Verdi in particular:

> I was born 2 November 1906, at eight o'clock in the evening. Years later, I was told that an hour later the curtain went up at La Scala on the umpteenth première of *La Traviata.* (Visconti apud Schifano 1990: 40)

Schifano (1990: 40-41) goes on to explain:

> Visconti [...] knew that the brilliant 1906-7 season began not with *La Traviata* but with *Carmen,* under the direction of the fiery Arturo Toscanini. But by tampering slightly with historical fact he used Verdi's radiant influence to illuminate his own life, made it a part of his personal mythology.

The pride of place given to *La Traviata* in Visconti's very first film as a director testifies to his life-long devotion to Verdi, which would resurface in his later works, notably in *The Leopard* (*Il Gattopardo,* 1963), in the form of

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3   The 'official' collaborators on *Ossessione*'s screenplay are: Mario Alicata, Antonio Pietrangeli, Gianni Puccini, Giuseppe de Santis and Luchino Visconti. However, *biblio*Visconti (2009: 263) cites a host of other confirmed and non-confirmed collaborators, including Alberto Moravia, Mario Puccini, Michelangelo Antonioni and Sergio Grieco, demonstrating the team work prevailing in those days of fight for liberation.

the hitherto unpublished 'Valzer Brillante', by Verdi, discovered by Visconti and played out in an adaptation by Nino Rota for the famous ball dance between Burt Lancaster and Claudia Cardinale. Visconti's own career as an opera director climaxed with the staging of *La Traviata* at La Scala, in Milan, in 1955, starring the world's most celebrated diva, Maria Callas, as Violetta Valéry, and Giuseppe di Stefano as Alfredo Germont.

Despite all evidence, however, the structuring presence of opera and music in *Ossessione* continues to be either overlooked or misinterpreted as a satirical device. Fabbri (2019: 19), for example, explains away the use of opera in the film as a means of ridiculing Bragana and his love of Verdi, 'an author who, with his tales of lost homelands, is crucial to the development of Italian nationalism'. Blom's first serious analysis of the hitherto little seen and underestimated film *Tosca* perceptively locates procedures of narrative suspense which Visconti would expand on in *Ossessione,* some of them concerning sound, but stops short of noticing the operatic links between the two films. Nowell-Smith (2011: 25) is almost alone in acknowledging the influence of opera and theatre in *Ossessione*'s mise en scène*,* though in a rather unfavourable light:

> The first striking thing about this formal [narrative] articulation is how simple it is, and how conventional. The form is that traditional to classical theatre and opera, a series of scenes involving two or at most three people at a time. This formal articulation reflects (or determines: the two are inseparable) the structure and development of the relations between characters, who form a series of couples.

He goes on to explain this set up as the awkward beginning of a 'far tighter construction' in Visconti's later films, 'which respects much more the complexity of social bonds' (25).

Taking advantage of this gap in Viscontian scholarship, my argument here will be that opera, and the use of music in general, in *Ossessione,* is perhaps where realism is most profoundly at play, a realism derived from the 'reality of art', to use Visconti's expression in his 1943 manifesto 'Anthropomorphic Cinema' (1978: 84). I will start with a reflection on how *Ossessione*'s reputed realism withdraws itself from the poetics of the everyday life championed by neorealist writers such Cesare Zavattini and realist cinema's foremost theorist, André Bazin. Instead I will propose a possible location of the Real in the film's mythic structure, which resonates with Verdi's own realist turn in the mid-nineteenth century, as represented by *La Traviata,* which brought French realism back to Italy in the form of

verismo, an artistic school inflected by both social realism and mythical symbolism. I will then investigate the genesis of Visconti's particular brand of realism in light of both his relation with Jean Renoir's poetic realism and the official, patriotic realism of his time, as evidenced in the film *Tosca.* The following section will study the way in which opera modulates from an overt mode in *Tosca* to a covert mode in *Ossessione,* thanks to its entwining with the diegesis and combination with realist cinematic procedures, such as the long take and the long shot, as evidenced in the central scene of the opera contest. I shall conclude by summarising the film's drive towards a total work of art as an attempt at a hybrid, all-encompassing kind of realism, reflecting human longings and ambitions beyond the characters' social class.

Deceptive Realisms

Ossessione's realism seemed so raw at the time, that it caused, as the legend goes, film patron Vittorio Mussolini (Benito's son) to storm out of the film's preview, shouting: 'This is not Italy!' (Schifano 1990: 179-180).

But where exactly does the film's realism reside? *Ossessione* is far from Cesare Zavattini's (1978) idea of the ultimate neorealist film, in which the story has been abolished and cinema is a mere observer of everyday life, 'a life', in André Bazin's (2009: 103) famous words, 'during which nothing happens'. There is nothing quotidian in this film's highly melodramatic and action-packed story. Right at the beginning, Giovanna, the wife of the innkeeper Giuseppe Bragana, entices into the inn and seduces the drifter Gino Costa, whom she tries to involve in a plan to eliminate her husband. Unable to take Giovanna away with him, Gino hits the road again by himself and meets, on a train, the peddler Spagnolo, who also immediately falls for him and takes him under his wing. Rediscovered by Bragana on a fairground in Ancona, Gino rejoins the couple and attends the opera contest from which Bragana comes out victorious. Again coaxed by Giovanna, Gino ends up killing Bragana in a simulated car accident. From here onwards, the story takes on an air of film noir, with detectives constantly on the lookout for Gino, while he tries again to escape Giovanna's grip by becoming involved with the prostitute-dancer Anita. Gino ends up returning to Giovanna, who is now pregnant by him, and both run away in Bragana's truck, but suffer an accident, this time real, in which Giovanna is killed.

Thus, narrative-wise, *Ossessione* is closer to the Hollywood crime dramas of the time than to the documentary realism that would soon

become the staple of Italian cinema. In terms of character construction, it takes even further distance from documentary reality by adhering to the myth. Gino, an unlikely Adonis in rags, irresistible to women and men alike, falls prey, like in the Oedipus complex, to the Jocasta-like figure of Giovanna, a scheming enchantress, younger than her husband Bragana, but clearly older than Gino and a commanding mother-figure to him. Bragana, in turn, feels an immediate fatherly attachment to Gino, a kinship at the centre of the Andante aria of *La Traviata* he constantly sings, in which a father begs his son to return home. Nonetheless, Gino ends up killing him. Finally, as usual in Greek tragedy, fate intervenes to punish the culprits, here with the death of the woman, the typical punitive closure of the opera genre as Catherine Clément (1989) has famously pointed out.

Poverty and suffering are usually associated with 'reality' as opposed to happiness and fulfilment, which are normally relegated to the realm of fantasy (Grodal 2002: 67ff). However, the poverty-stricken environment around these mythical characters counts little or nothing towards a story of crime and passion that could have taken place in any social milieu. Because of its universal appeal, drawing on human nature rather than on social condition, the theme of a triangle where two adulterous lovers murder an innocent husband or wife is a regularly revisited subject, having featured in cinema from F.W. Murnau's American production *Sunrise* (1927) to Nagisa Oshima's *The Empire of Passion* (*Ai no borei,* 1978). Cain's novel itself has several screen adaptations, including two eponymous versions, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (by Tay Garnet, 1946, and by Bob Rafelson, 1981) and an earlier French version, *The Last Turning* (*Le Dernier tournant,* Pierre Tournal, 1939).

In terms of mode of production, *Ossessione* apparently abides by some key tenets of cinematic realism, as defined by André Bazin, such as on-location shooting and the frequent use of long shots and long takes aimed at preserving the space-time continuity of the profilmic event. Nonetheless, a high degree of manipulation can be detected as regards the locations in the Po Valley, within the Emilia Romagna region, in northeastern Italy – which would become recurrent in Italian cinema thereafter – whose various towns are abundantly cited by name with geographic coherence: Ancona, Codigoro, Ferrara, Polesella, etc. This is one of the most fertile and wealthy regions in the country and yet it is shown here as a barren, dusty and desolate landscape, inhabited solely by the poor.

Another traditional realist procedure at the point of production is non-professional acting, which Visconti will adopt in his next film, *The*

Earth Trembles (*La terra trema,* 1948), set in Aci Trezza, a small fishing village in Sicily, featuring exclusively non-professional actors cast from among the local population. In *Ossessione,* however, there is a considerable degree of betrayal of this principle, given that the majority of actors with any speaking role are professionals. Gino is played by Massimo Girotti, a rising star in Italian cinema at the time, who from *Tosca* onwards will appear in several Visconti films. Giovanna is played by a 1930s Italian cinema celebrity, Clara Calamai, replacing the formidable Anna Magnani, originally cast, who became pregnant just before shooting started. This star-studded mode of production was not foreign to the neorealist move-ment developed thereafter. Though a defender of non-professional acting, Bazin himself was aware of the high number of professionals featuring in neorealist films, not least Magnani, the queen of melodrama, who stars in the neorealist landmark *Rome, Open City* (*Roma città aperta,* Roberto Rossellini, 1945). Confronted with this fact, he offered a kind of compromise, by stating:

> That someone is an actor [...] does not mean he must not be used [...] But his professionalism should be called into service only insofar as it allows him to be more flexible in his response to the requirements of the *mise en scène,* and to have a better grasp of the character. (Bazin 2001: 36)

Visconti, too, in his 1943 manifesto 'Anthropomorphic Cinema' (1978: 84), though championing non-professional acting, concedes to the use of profes-sionals under certain circumstances:

> Among all my activities in the cinema, my favourite is working with actors; with the human material from which we build those living men who give birth to a new reality, the reality of art. The actor is above all a man possessing key human qualities. I try to base my work upon those qualities and to graduate them in the creation of my characters so as to make a unity of the man-actor and the man-character.

Bazin was also aware of the importance of the subjective 'reality of the actor', whose larger-than-life personas, as in the case of his idols Eric von Stroheim, Michel Simon and Falconetti, offered themselves to a documentary approach. In this respect, then, he chimes with Visconti's search for the 'human reality' of the actors themselves, perhaps even above the 'fascinating simplicity' that makes non-professionals more 'genuinely sane' and 'better men' as Visconti states in his manifesto (84). In *Ossessione,* however, the

numerous local extras are given next-to-no opportunity to demonstrate these qualities, serving instead, in most cases, as a decorative audience in the background for the utterly theatrical, often literally operatic drama taking place in the foreground, as enacted by thoroughly accomplished professionals. Indeed, the long shots abundantly employed in the film as a means to contextualise the characters in a real world always include extras engaged in extraneous activities, such as playing cards, playing bocce, serving customers, having meals, threshing wheat, while the main action takes place in the foreground. They are undoubtedly displayed with exquisite pictorial sense and stunning mastery of detail in a film by a first-time director. But this very compositional care excludes all spontaneous documentary capture, changing the spontaneous presentation of reality into its staged representation. One typical example of the local populace serving as theatrical audience to the main drama is when an intoxicated Bragana celebrates his victory at the opera contest in Ancona, walking back to the carpark alongside Giovanna and Gino. He coarsely slaps Giovanna's backside and asks: 'Well, when do we make this son? We mustn't waste any more time'. The embarrassment to Giovanna and Gino caused by Bragana's acts and words is all the more visible for the fact that they are being observed by members of a family having a meal on a first-floor balcony, in the background, one of whose members gets up and leans on the parapet to observe the scene below. The passive extras in the background are no less theatrical than the professional actors in the foreground, given their mere decorative function.

Alongside the artifice introduced by professional acting, the actors' voices, together with the whole soundscape, are the result of manipulation, given that the entire film was post-synchronised as was the rule at the time, when direct sound recording was a rarity. This means that all actors were dubbed, either by themselves or by others. Calamai, Girotti and other Italian actors, in the film, are dubbed by themselves, however, Juan de Landa, who plays Bragana, was a Spanish-Basque actor, whose name was made through his work in Spanish parodies of Hollywood films. In his numerous performances in Italian films, he had to be dubbed by others due to his foreign accent. He even had a regular dubber, Mario Besesti, himself an actor and a legend in the Italian dubbing world for his powerful voice, suitable for corpulent actors such as Charles Laughton as much as the rotund de Landa. His foreignness notwithstanding, in *Ossessione* de Landa was given the role of the quintessential Italian character, an accomplished patriot who includes in his cherished possessions the feathered helmet from when he fought with the Sixth Regiment of the Bersaglieri, which defended

Italy in the First World War. It is the realisation that Gino had also been a Bersagliere, thus a 'figlio de La Marmora' (or the son of the famous founder of this military unit, Alessandro Ferrero La Marmora), that legitimises Bragana's instant comradery towards him.

Thus, in order to fully grasp *Ossessione'*s realist effect, one must look beyond the film's deceptive surface, and, as I suggest, into the art-historical realism inherent in it.

Art-historical Realisms

Several intradiegetic opera pieces are heard in *Ossessione*, the most significant of which is the aria Andante, of Verdi's *La Traviata,* which constitutes a leitmotiv and a narrative theme in the film, as will be discussed in detail in the next section. As far as realism is concerned, this choice could not be more appropriate, given that *La Traviata* marks a realist turn in Verdi's career and the history of opera as a whole. It is an adaptation of Alexandre Dumas fils's novel and play *La Dame aux camélias* (in English, *Camille*) with which Verdi became acquainted during a sojourn in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century. Based on Dumas fils's own love affair with courtesan Marie Duplessis, the story revolves around a consumptive *demi-mondaine,* Marguerite Gautier (changed into Violetta Valéry in the opera), who inspires both ardent passions and social reprobation. This down-to-earth, even scandalous story for its time gave Verdi an opportunity to put aside the revolutionary and patriotic themes hitherto prevailing in his oeuvre in favour of a more realistic and contemporary narrative (Bianchi 2013). As Bianchi (2013) puts it:

> Around the middle of the 19th century, as the strong national and patriotic movements were winding down [in France], a new capacity for self-observation and more rational analysis appeared in a society, which had just left so much turmoil behind [...] Certainly in France, around mid-century after the 1848 revolution, a literature began to spread in which a topical description of the new socio-historical reality exposed the adversities, especially those suffered by the bourgeoisie.

Bianchi (2013) goes on to highlight how psychological tendencies in French realist literature, by the likes of Émile Zola, overlapped with the highly symbolic, even mythical elements of Italian *verismo,* as exemplified in opera by Puccini and in literature by Giovanni Verga. These contrasting tendencies

towards myth, on the one hand, and realism on the other, so apparent in *Ossessione,* are probably what attracted Visconti to Verga's novella *L'amante di Gramigna,* in his first serious attempt at a film-directorial debut, which failed to materialise but is recorded in a fully-fledged script, written in collaboration with Giuseppe de Santis and Gianni Puccini, both of whom would subsequently contribute to his adaptation of Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (Micciché 1990: 24). Confirming his attachment to *verismo,* Visconti's next film, *The Earth Trembles,* would be a loose adaptation of Verga's major work, *I Malavoglia.*

In his classical book, *Realism in Nineteenth Century Music,* Carl Dahlhaus (2009: 64) states:

> If we wish to concentrate on a theory of realism as it was understood in the mid-century, the obvious thing to do is look for, or reconstruct, a connection between French realism in the 1850s and the dramaturgical premises of *La Traviata.* Seen in that light, the opera emerges as, so to speak, a realist enclave in an oeuvre which as a whole is representative of Italian romanticism.

The same could be said about *Ossessione,* a realist enclave within Visconti's openly operatic films, such as *Tosca, Senso* and *Ludwig.* More remarkably, *Ossessione*'s particular brand of realism resulted from an Italo-French connection in all respects similar to that which, a century earlier, had given birth to *La Traviata.*

As is well known, Visconti's entrance into cinema is a result of his acquaintance with Jean Renoir's filmmaking and leftwing politics in the mid-1930s, in France. In the director's words:

> It was in fact my stay in France and my meeting with a man like Renoir that opened my eyes to a lot of things. I realized that films could be the way to touch on truths we were very far away from, especially in Italy. (apud Schifano 1990: 143)

Renoir in turn, since the introduction of sound in cinema, had concentrated on themes and modes of realism developed in dialogue with French realist and naturalist novelists such as Gustave Flaubert, Émile Zola and Guy de Maupassant, all of whom were regulars at his painter-father Auguste's home (Andrew 2018: 128-129) and some of whose works he would adapt to the screen. One of these adaptations was Flaubert's *Madame Bovary,* directed by Renoir in 1934, a story of a love triangle within a provincial

context similar to that of *Ossessione* and with obvious formal influences on
it. Renoir's realist style is often associated with the apex of French 'poetic
realism', whose main features are summarised by Dudley Andrew (1995: 3),
with reference to Marcel Carné's 1938 *Port of Shadows* (*Le Quai des brumes*)
and *Hôtel du Nord,* in the following words:

> Evocative locations, characters from the lower social class, a downbeat
> ending, and a quartet of fabulous actors constitute the recipe for both
> films.

As much as some of Renoir's films, Visconti's *Ossessione* is very much in
line with this description, with its evocative locations in the Po Valley, low
social class characters, tragic ending and 'the quartet of fabulous actors',
Clara Calamai (Giovanna), Massimo Girotti (Gino Costa), Juan de Landa
(Giuseppe Bragana) and Elio Marcuzzo (Lo Spagnolo), whose outstanding
performances mark the peak of their careers.

Having met Renoir through the mediation of fashion designer Coco
Chanel, Visconti immediately started to collaborate in his films, being
credited as trainee in *Toni* (1935) and as third assistant and prop man in *A
Day in the Country* (*Une partie de campagne,* 1936), as well as making an
uncredited contribution to the set design of *The Lower Depths* (*Les Bas-fonds,*
1936) (Schifano 1990: 144-45; Micciché 2000: 5). Connecting all these films is
Renoir's preference for on-location shooting, depth-of-field cinematography
and long takes (as much as allowed by the technology of the time), all of
which were hailed by Bazin and the young *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics as
typical realist devices. Thanks to his connections with Visconti, Renoir is
often seen as a precursor of Italian Neorealism:

> *Toni* has often been seen as prefiguring postwar Italian neorealism – a
> view greatly influenced by the fact that Luchino Visconti, whose *Ossessione*
> (1943) and *La terra trema* (1948) rank among the most important neorealist
> films, cut his directorial teeth as Renoir's assistant director on the film.
> (Reader 2013: 445)

Renoir and his group of friends and collaborators were also responsible
for changing Visconti into a life-long communist, at a time when he was
'not a full-fledged Fascist, but a fascist fellow-traveller […] Someone
who knew nothing and understood nothing. Someone whose eyes, in
politics, were as closed as those of newborn kittens' (Visconti apud
Schifano 1990: 147).

Official Realism and *Tosca*

At the same time, in Italy, the fascist government was busy drafting its own recipe of cinematic realism. As Fabbri (2019: 7) puts it:

> From the interwar period onwards, and all the way to Vittorio Mussolini, the debate on realism was a site of power/knowledge struggle between conflicting accounts of national reality with radically different political implications.

Film buff Vittorio Mussolini, in the role of director of the film production company Era-Film and editor-in-chief of the magazine *Cinema,* was a keen promoter of a realist style drawing on the official culture's 'lacquered, inert and jingoistic vision' (Micciché 2000: 6), at the heart of which was the idea of Italy's racial unity. Paradoxically, however, in the early 1940s, *Cinema* became an organ of fascist opposition, in whose pages Visconti (in unacknowledged collaboration with Gianni Puccini) published his two famous humanist manifestoes, 'Corpses' (1941) and 'Anthropomorphic Cinema' (1943), as well as the scripts at the basis of *Ossessione* (Micciché 2000: 6). Another apparent paradox was Vittorio Mussolini's enthusiasm for Renoir, whose left-leaning films had met with censorship in Italy, but whose *The Great Illusion* (*La Grande illusion,* 1937) had been a hit at the Venice Film Festival (Blom 2017b: 151). As Blom (2017b: 151) details, in the late 1930s, French cinema had occupied the vacuum left by the interdiction of Hollywood films in Italy, and it is in the wake of this phenomenon that Vittorio invited Renoir to shoot a screen adaptation of the opera *La Tosca.* According to Blom (151), this came at a convenient time for Renoir, who was reeling from the critical and commercial failure of his latest *The Rules of the Game* (*La Règle du jeu,* 1939) in France, and whose political position had recently shifted from communism and the Popular Front to liberal humanism, under the influence, Blom (151) suggests, of his new Catholic Brazilian partner, Dido Freire, whom he had met during the shoot of *The Rules of the Game*. Renoir immediately liaised with his friend Visconti for collaboration on *Tosca,* and Blom gives a detailed account of the process of location scouting led by the latter. Real locations were key for Renoir, who 'wanted to give the film a documentary-like character', as if 'the cinematographer already existed in the 1800s' (Blom 2017b: 154). Realism was also sought for through cinematography, here in the hands of experienced DoP Ubaldo Arata, a master of long takes, crane and tracking shots, who would direct the photography of another neorealist milestone, *Rome, Open City*.

In the meantime, however, Italy declared war on France and Renoir had to hurriedly return home, after overseeing only five on-location takes for *Tosca*. The role of film director was then taken over by the German filmmaker, Carl Koch, who had previously collaborated as co-scriptwriter and assistant director in Renoir's *The Rules of the Game*. The copy of *Tosca* circulating in Italy today credits Koch as the film director (alongside Jean Renoir), Lotte Reiniger (Koch's film-animator wife) and Luchino Visconti as his 'artistic collaborators' and Ciro Betrone as his 'technical and editing collaborator'. Whatever their actual roles were in the film, the result was felt as 'realist' by the young *Cahiers du Cinéma* critic and future filmmaker, Jacques Rivette, who hailed, about *Tosca,*

> the five or six opening shots of nocturnal riding, where the magical baroque spectacle suddenly comes to life. Under close scrutiny of the camera the stones seem to pulsate and merge with the movement of the drama. *La Tosca* is no longer a realistic opera; it is reality become opera. (in Bazin 1971: 260)

Rivette's praise of realism in *Tosca* refers specifically to those shots directed by Renoir, which are also the film's opening shots, following the initial credits. The fact remains, however, that the changes occurred during the shoot could not but result in a hybrid, uneven aesthetics that made Visconti reject the film (Schifano 1990: 163; Blom 2017b: 150). Nonetheless, *Tosca* remains a highly interesting case of different, at times conflicting, 'realisms', which will then reappear, already perfectly integrated with, and almost indistinguishable from, one another, in *Ossessione*. Suffice it to look at the takes of *Tosca* overseen by Renoir and conducted by Arata in an exquisite combination of tracking shots, pans and crane shots, pursuing the horsemen carrying a message from the queen to baron Scarpia. The aim of these takes is to describe the monumental Palazzo Farnese and Castel Sant'Angelo, including detailed visual surveys of statues decorating the fountains and the bridge to the Palazzo, some of them edited into the footage for visual effect only, since they do not make geographical sense with the locations (see Blom 2017b for a detailed description of these locations and statuary). If there is realism in the capture of this Roman imagery, including some stray cats and the then unusual live-recorded sound of the horses' hoofs on the stone pavement, this is also entirely in tune with the fascist nationalism and racial ideals then informing the official concept of cinematic realism. This is confirmed at an early moment in the film, when a defender of Italy's national unity shouts: 'Viva l'Italia!', before being executed for subversive activities. Granted, these initial location shots animate with

real life the static prints of Roman scenes and monuments on which the initial titles are superimposed. But over these titles what conveys actual, physical realism is Mafalda Favero's sensational rendering of 'Vissi d'arte' ('I lived for art'), the famous aria sung by the opera's heroine, Tosca (who is a singer in the story), in praise of art and love. Favero, of course, does not feature in person in the film, which is also the case of Ferruccio Tagliavini, the singer of Scarpia's part, but both are credited in the initial title cards as stars, not of the film, but of the opera played in the sound track. This beginning, therefore, displays, in perfectly distinguishable form, documentary realism, official realism and the reality of art (in this case, that of opera).

To understand how these three tendencies inform the structure of *Ossessione,* let us now look at the fleeting appearance, in *Tosca,* of the actor Massimo Girotti, who takes on the protagonist role of Gino Costa in *Ossessione.* In *Tosca,* Girotti performs a non-descript role of just a few seconds as a blacksmith conducting repairs to the gates of the prison where libertarian Angelotti is jailed. He knocks out an old prison guard with a baton then bursts into Angelotti's cell with his companions, is quickly but ardently embraced by the latter and then strips to the waist to lend his dirty worker's shirt to his comrade and help him escape. This short action contains the germ of Gino's story in *Ossessione*: his murder of Bragana, the fascination his naked, sculptural upper body produces both in Giovanna and in the peddler Spagnolo, and the latter's homosexual attraction to him as suggested by the male embrace between Massimo and Angelotti, in *Tosca*. As well as the story of *Ossessione* in a nutshell, this scene encapsulates: a) social realism derived from the alignment of the film's point of view with that of the politicised working class; b) sensory realism produced by the emphasis on the worker's and prisoner's dirty clothing and bodily contact; and c) 'official' nationalistic realism elicited by the focus on a sculptural male beauty representing the Italian racial type, comparable to the classical stone sculptures lavishly scrutinised by the camera at the opening of the film.

More importantly, for my argument, these realist tendencies are introduced by, and derived from, opera. In *Tosca*, opera makes the entire non-diegetic soundscape, in synch with the development of the story. In *Ossessione*, a musical overture of operatic overtones makes way for opera to penetrate the diegesis and constitute a subplot. Thus, to resort to Wolf's (1999: 43ff) famous typology, if there is direct, or overt, intermediality in *Tosca,* in *Ossessione* it becomes indirect or covert, because its workings cannot be quoted separately from the film plot and narrative construction. Its structuring function is by this means majorly enhanced.

Operatic Realism and the Reality of Art

Now let us revisit *Ossessione*'s beginning where the three types of realism pointed out in *Tosca* can be identified in perfectly integrated form. After the title sequence with the dramatic incidental music by Giuseppe Rosati, the film cuts to the truck stationed outside Bragana's inn, called Dogana (or 'Customs'). The truck driver hoots for attendance and we hear Bragana's voice singing the Andante of *La Traviata.* He and the other passenger get off the truck and quench their thirst from a bottle they get from a compartment next to the truck's front door. The men's humble, working outfits and their gestures, including the pouring of the bottle's liquid straight into their throats, without touching it with their lips, their wiping of the sweat on their face and neck with a handkerchief and the barren, dusty scenery around them, including some chickens crossing the frame, compose the typical realist contextual description that situates the characters socially, culturally and geographically. The fact that the scene takes place out of doors and on a real, apparently unadorned location, configures the realism as mode of production so treasured by Bazin and subsequent neorealist films.

The driver has to call Bragana again, this time by name – denoting familiarity – and finally Bragana's singing and the accompanying piano sound stop to make room for Bragana's entrance into the scene, coming through the bead curtain of his trattoria's front door – as if he were appearing from the backstage onto the main stage of a theatre to greet the audience. Because of all the other Renoir-style social-realist elements in the scene, Bragana's theatrical entrance and operatic contours are entirely naturalised, contributing to, rather than clashing against, the general reality effect.

Bragana's chat with the truck men is about his own broken-down truck and about sound – the sound of customers' hooting, disturbing him even during the night – and about chickens too, whose allegorical functions encompass his ex-combatant credentials (mentioned above with relation to his feathered helmet) and manhood. The three men then discover Gino still asleep amidst the hay bales on the back of the truck. His face is hidden by a hat and, as he is chased out of the truck, a famous crane shot captures him from behind, searching his pockets and making a slow entrance into the inn for food. From the heights of the crane the camera descends to peruse Gino's ragged shoes as he makes his way into the place, and another customer's pair of dogs (a black, bony dog and a heavily pregnant bitch) sniff his feet suggesting smell, when he is then attracted by another singing, 'Fiorin, fiorello', in a woman's – Giovanna's – voice and turns to the kitchen. Those are the enticing words she sings here and in a later moment:

Italian	English
Fiorin, Fiorello	Flower, little flower
L'amore è bello vicino a te	Love is beautiful near you
Mi fa sognare, mi fa tremare	It makes me dream, it makes me tremble
Chissà perché	Who knows why
Fior di margherita	Daisy flower
Cos'è mai la vita	What is ever life
Se non c'è l'amore	If there is no love
Che il nostro cuore fa palpitar	To make our heart beat
Fior di verbena	Verbena flower
Se qualche pena l'amor ci dà	If love hurts you a little
Fa come il vento	Be like the wind
Che in un momento poi passa e va	That comes and goes in a moment
Ma quando tu sei con me	But when you are with me
Io son felice perché	I'm happy because
Fiorin, Fiorello	Flower, little flower
L'amore è bello vicino a te	Love is beautiful near you

Another semi-open curtain separates Gino from the kitchen, where he now enters to inspect, so to say, the theatre's backstage. There he finds Giovanna, though his body hides her from our sight except for her feet in clogs hanging from the table where she is sitting. A reverse shot then presents her to us as she looks at the intruding tramp for a first and then a second time, when Gino's face is finally revealed to us, focused on in a zoom that highlights his perfect features and clear, shiny eyes: one of the most handsome men ever shown on screen (Figure 8.1). Gino will then nonchalantly enter the kitchen, and try the food from the saucepan with his fingers. Just like Massimo in *Tosca,* he will proceed to take off his ragged jacket – under the pretext that 'it is hot here!' – revealing a minimal filthy vest and exposing his shoulders which are compared by Giovanna to 'those of a stallion'. Sculptural beauty without any comparable sculptures around, singing and theatrical devices combined with the lowest physical levels of life, including dirty clothing, smelly feet, hunger and sex drive, again naturalise all representational artifice, not least the official racial realism apparent in *Tosca* via the patriotic dialogue lines and monumental statuary. Thus Gino's perfect, god-like features, rather unlikely in that milieu, could be seen as the very representation of a new realism, for example, by *Ossessione*'s assistant director Antonio Petrangeli, who reportedly said: 'Shall we ourselves baptise Gino in *Ossessione*? We could call him, if you like, Italian neo-realism' (Nowell-Smith 2003: 26).

Blom (2017b: 163) notices, in *Tosca,* the procedure of making a character's voice precede their on-camera appearance, for example, Renoir's regular actor and screen legend Michel Simon, in the role of Scarpia, whose voice is

Figure 8.1 *Ossessione*: Gino's face is finally revealed to us.

heard but whose face is only introduced to the viewer several scenes later, and even then with a further delay of an extraordinary cone-shaped mask that covers it while his hair is being powdered by a servant. The prevalence of the aural over the visual sense is used here as a cinematic device of suspense construction which delays the revelation of a protagonist played by a great star. In *Ossessione,* this device is further sophisticated with the addition of opera singing by the characters themselves, most notably by Bragana, in a gesture that characterises opera as the very origin of his (and the film's) drama. Unlike *Tosca,* where opera runs on a parallel, extradiegetic track to the story, in *Ossessione* it fuses with the diegesis through the character of Bragana, whose recurrent singing of the Andante of *La Traviata* summarises a key element of the plot: his inexplicable and irresistible fatherly attachment to Gino, who is however having a torrid affair with his own wife, as I shall now explain.

Opera as the utmost reality of the characters reaches apotheosis during the opera contest scene, significantly located in the middle of the film at the story's turning point. After resuming his wandering life without Giovanna, who preferred the security of her husband's home, Gino accidentally bumps into her and her husband again, as previously mentioned, on a fairground in Ancona, where he was peddling with Spagnolo. Ecstatic with the reunion, Bragana reprehends Gino for having left their home and drags him to the

opera contest at the 'Caffé Amici del Bel Canto', where he, among several amateur singers, finally has the opportunity to exhibit his talent. This episode is lifted, with minor changes, from James Cain's novel, but it is also entirely in tune with the lyrics of the Andante of *La Traviata* sung by Bragana, in which the character of old Georges Germont implores his son, Alfredo – fallen captive to courtesan Violetta – to return with him to their native Provence.

Italian	English
Di Provenza il mar, il suol	The sea and soil of Provence --
chi dal cor ti cancello?	who has erased them from your heart?
Al natio fulgente sol	From your native, fulsome sun --
qual destino ti furo'?	what destiny stole you away?
Oh, rammenta pur nel duol	Oh, remember in your sorrow
ch'ivi gioia a te brillo';	that joy glowed on you,
E che pace cola' sol	and that only there peace
su te splendere ancor puo'.	can yet shine upon you.
Dio mi guidò!	God has guided me!
Ah! il tuo vecchio genitor	Ah, your old father --
tu non sai quanto soffrì!	You don't know how much he has suffered!
Te lontano, di squallor	With you far away, with misery
il suo tetto si coprì.	has his house become full.
Ma se alfin ti trovo ancor,	But if in the end I find you again,
se in me speme non fallì,	if hope did not fail within me,
Se la voce dell'onor	if the voice of honor
in te appien non ammutì,	didn't become silenced in you,
Dio m'esaudi'!	God has heard me!

The scene in the café depicts opera as entrenched in the characters' lives. The sense of opera's immense popularity among that society is conveyed through the realist devices of the long take and the long shot, here combined in a dazzling near-double 360° pan, lasting a full minute without a cut. The camera starts by focusing on a poster on the café wall, announcing the lyric contest. It then pans to the right where it captures, on the stage, the decrepit female pianist and the row of contestants of all ages and genders sitting in chairs next to one another and fanning themselves in the overcrowded place. A female singer is standing and delivering the famous Habanera aria from Bizet's *Carmen,* which warns against the dangers of love. The pan continues, surveying, past the stage, the packed venue, with crammed tables and standing customers occupying all available space, until it reaches the café's entrance, where Bragana, Giovanna and Gino are coming in. The camera follows them past the contest poster where it had started the pan and proceeds, as the three make their way through the crowd towards a vacant table, continuing to capture Bragana giving his name to the jury

Figure 8.2 *Ossessione*: Bragana sings his cherished Andante from *La Traviata*.

board and climbing up onto the stage where he takes a seat. This formidable long take situates in an unbroken time and space unit the drama going on between the three protagonists, whose mad love and betrayal are described in the various arias. The following contestant delivers an Italian version of the aria 'Je crois entendre encore' ('I think I still hear'), from Bizet's opera *The Pearl Fishers* (*Les Pêcheurs de perle*), whose subject-matter is the love of two inseparable friends for the same woman. Then it is Bragana's turn to sing his cherished Andante from *La Traviata* (Figure 8.2). As he delivers it, reverse shots show the barely repressed passionate dialogue between Gino and Giovanna, who must find a way out of their ménage à trois.

Bragana's performance, meanwhile, is infused with the same pathos observed in Cain's novel about the betrayed Greek husband on whom his character is based:

> He had a tenor voice, not one of these little tenors like you hear on the radio, but a big tenor, and on the high notes he would put in a sob like on a Caruso record. (Cain 1978: 8)

Sobbing notes, a common melodramatic ornament in bel canto, have been identified in *La Traviata* by Carl Dahlhaus (2009: 68) as a realist device that

jettisons formal tradition 'for the sake of dramatic truth'. Bragana's singing is, of course, littered with these sobbing notes, characterising both his pride in singing and genuine feelings. He is followed, on stage, by a hilarious contestant, an adolescent whose breaking voice turns the sobbing effect into the very reality of his body morphing into adulthood, while delivering the aria 'È il sol del'anima' ('Love is the sunshine of the soul'), from Verdi's *Rigoletto,* holding the hand of an old lady – his mother, perhaps, or even grandmother – standing for his implausible lover, but also evidencing opera as a family, day-to-day affair. Social realism is written all over this entire scene, where opera is naturalised as the privileged and authentic expression of the Italian populace.

In his perceptive assessment of the inextricable connection between melodrama and Neorealism, Louis Bayman (2009: 50) states, a propos of *Ossessione*:

> The melodramatic sensibility in *Ossessione* is built out of the barely repressed desire seen through the sweaty realism of the scandalously frank bodily intimacy between the cheating couple, the corporeality of their continual gestures expressing the heat and their physical yearnings with a cloying sensual materiality.

Opera, as the most melodramatic of the artforms, holds the clue to *Ossessione*'s particular and foundational kind of physical and sensual realism.

The film, moreover, though an inaugural work, contains the total artwork drive that characterises Visconti's most ambitious works. It is not the scope of this chapter to dissect the myriad artistic, particularly painterly and sculptural, citations and models that inform it. Modigliani, Cézanne and expressionist painters can be easily detected in the scene compositions, set and costume design in this film, which also contains endless cinephilic references – obviously to Renoir, but also to Chaplin, westerns, film noir and German expressionism. Like the extensive use of opera, other arts and films within *Ossessione* are there to bring to the fore, beyond social injustice and the plight of the poor, the universal human drama whose palpable reality can be best expressed and experienced through art.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate that the foundational realism, which has enshrined *Ossessione* as the inaugural neorealist film, is located where least expected. Usual realist devices at the point of production, such

as on-location shooting and non-professional acting, are both employed in the film, but in rather deceptive ways. Real locations are manipulated in order to turn one of Italy's wealthiest and most fertile regions into a barren and poverty-stricken landscape. The film's non-professional cast is given next-to-no speaking roles, these instead being the privilege of fully accomplished professionals, who are on occasion dubbed by someone else's voice. Social realism is also restricted to the film's outer façade of poverty, class struggle being hardly a subject in a story of mythical dimensions and universal resonance that could have happened among members of any social class.

A history of realist artistic movements is however embedded in the operatic structure of *Ossessione*, with emphasis on Verdi's *La Traviata*, whose Andante aria, among other opera tunes, informs an important subplot in the film, constituting a diegetic leitmotiv. *La Traviata* marked a realist turn in Verdi's career and in the evolution of the opera genre, representing a break with Verdi's usual themes of revolution and mythological heroes by addressing a down-to-earth, sensual subject-matter affecting the bourgeoisie of the time. Derived from French mid-nineteenth-century realist literature and theatre, Verdi's realist turn finds a remarkable parallel with Visconti's own filmmaking career development, which started in Paris under the mentorship of Jean Renoir, who introduced the Italian aristocratic fledgling into his own brand of poetic-realist cinema and leftwing politics. The (mis)adventure of the film *Tosca*, an opera adaptation directed in part by Renoir in Italy, on invitation by Benito Mussolini's son, Vittorio, and involving Visconti's collaboration on various fronts, has a lot to teach us about how Visconti appropriated Italy's fascist jingoistic brand of realism and turned it on its head to inaugurate, in *Ossessione*, the revolutionary, leftwing neorealist movement.

In particular, this chapter has attempted to prove that opera is not an artificial form to be overlooked in the study of this masterpiece, but, as Gramsci proclaims, an authentic, ingrained popular expression in Italy that brings together the reality of life, love and art.

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9 Historicising the Story through Film and Music

An Intermedial Reading of *Heimat 2*[1]

Abstract

Chapter 9 focuses on *Heimat 2: Chronicle of a Generation* (*Die zweite Heimat: Chronik einer Jugend,* 1992), the second part of the monumental *Heimat* TV and cinema series, scripted and directed by German filmmaker Edgar Reitz. The project, spanning over 60 hours, has in *Heimat 2* its longest instalment, with 13 episodes totalling more than 25 hours of film. My objective here is to evaluate the ways in which the *Heimat 2* series, as part of a 'total-history' project, i.e. the retelling of the history of Germany from the nineteenth century to today, presents history in the making by means of intermediality, that is, through the use of music as theme, diegetic performance and organisational principle of all episodes.

Keywords: *Heimat* series; Edgar Reitz; German Cinema; New German Cinema; New Music; Intermediality

This chapter focuses on *Heimat 2: Chronicle of a Generation* (*Die zweite Heimat: Chronik einer Jugend,* 1992), the second part of the monumental *Heimat* TV and cinema series, which started with *Heimat: A Chronicle of Germany* (*Heimat: eine deutsche Chronik,* 1982) and continued with *Heimat 3: A Chronicle of Endings and Beginnings* (*Heimat 3: Chronik einer Zeitenwende,* 2004) and *Home from Home: A Chronicle of Vision* (*Die andere Heimat: Chronik einer Sehnsucht,* 2013), all scripted and directed by German filmmaker Edgar Reitz. The project, spanning over 60 hours so far, has in *Heimat 2* its longest instalment, with 13 episodes totalling more than 25 hours of film.

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1   I would like to thank Suzana Reck Miranda and John Gibbs for their technical advice on this chapter.

My objective here is to evaluate the ways in which the *Heimat 2* series, as part of a 'total-history' project, i.e. the retelling of the history of Germany from the nineteenth century to today, presents history in the making by means of intermediality, that is, through the use of music as theme, diegetic performance and organisational principle of all episodes.

From its first series, the *Heimat* cycle has enjoyed milestone status as a sweeping representation of German political and artistic history, eliciting excellent scholarship, as well as heated debates on the accuracy of its historical representations. Indeed, history features high on the agenda of all four parts of the cycle, which are bookmarked by major historical events in Germany: the First and Second World Wars in the first *Heimat*, set between 1919 and 1982; the birth and development of new artistic movements, as well as the students' revolts between 1960 and 1970, in *Heimat 2*; the fall of the Berlin Wall in *Heimat 3*, set between 1989 and 2000; and the great wave of emigration from Germany to Brazil in *Home from Home*, where the story loops back to the 1840s. Binding all of them together, runs a national as much as subjective motif, the untranslatable concept of *Heimat,* involving the ideas of 'home' and 'homeland', whose romantic and nationalistic overtones had been embraced by the sugary and conservative genre of *Heimatfilme* in post-WWII Germany and radically rejected by the 'anti-Heimat' films that made up a strand of the New German Cinema in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Rather than focusing on the representation of the past, however, my objective here will be to evaluate the ways in which the *Heimat 2* series *presents history in the making* by means of intermediality, that is, through the use of music as theme, diegetic performance and organisational principle of all episodes. Set in the clearly demarcated decade of the 1960s, *Heimat 2* is devoted to chronicling the development of the Neue Musik (New Music) movement amidst the artistic effervescence in Germany at the time, including the beginnings of what was initially known as Junger deutscher Film (Young German Cinema) and later Neuer deutscher Film (New German Cinema). Beyond its many allusions to real facts and personalities in film and music, all the musical roles in the series feature real instrumentalists, singers, conductors and composers, who were all, almost miraculously, also brilliant actors, able to enact on-camera as fiction their actual musical performances. It is in the reality of this musicianship, and the way it inflects the series' form and content, that lies, I wish to claim, an element of incontestable truth, beyond the inevitable, even necessary, betrayals of history taking place on the level of the fable. By centring my focus on the intersection of intermediality and presentational history, I hope to capture

what Badiou (2002: 41) calls a 'truth procedure', which he defines as the 'fidelity to an event':

> To be faithful to an event is to move within the situation that this event has supplemented, by *thinking* [...]the situation 'according to' the event [...] [This] compels the subject to *invent* a new way of being and acting in the situation.

By being faithful to the contingent event of real-time musical performances, *Heimat 2* injects an element of unpredictable reality into the normative fictional situation that actualises history and constitutes the project's major political contribution, as my analysis in the following sections will hopefully demonstrate.

All films are intermedial by nature, given their dependence on other arts and media, including literature, theatre, photography, the plastic arts and, of course, music. Hence, the question arises of what films would be most suitable for an intermedial approach. In her field-defining book *Cinema and Intermediality: The Passion for the In-Between*, Ágnes Pethő (2011: 2) provides a helpful answer, by stating that the intermedial method is particular effective when a film

> consciously positions itself 'in-between' media and arts, employing techniques that tap into the multimedial complexity of cinema, exploiting the possibilities offered by the distinctive characteristics of the media components involved in the cinematic process of signification, and bringing into play the tensions generated by media differences.

In *Heimat 2,* this element of conscious borrowing of techniques typical of another medium, in this case, music, sticks to the eye (and ear), positing it as an ideal object for an intermedial approach. Granted, the series is first and foremost cinema in the conventional sense, reliant as it is on the film medium's properties of spatio-temporal movement and real-life mimesis for narrative purposes. As in the other *Heimat* instalments, here too storytelling takes the upper hand by means of minutely crafted life-like characters whose unfulfilled desires and ambitions propel the narrative relentlessly forward. Within this context, music could be simply seen as an element of cinematic function, at least as concerns the all-pervading non-diegetic music track, mostly authored by Greek composer Nikos Mamangakis, whose name was made precisely by his work on the first three of the four *Heimat* instalments, but also including a host of other existing classical and popular

pieces. As customary in fiction film, this non-diegetic music is there to suture the seams between shots and scenes, provide the desired emotional atmospheres and fill in ellipses of time and space. Even the fact that music is the very subject of the series, in the form of the life story of instrumentalist, composer and conductor Hermann Simon, as well as of those musicians, filmmakers, poets and other artists around him, does not in itself pose a threat to the medium's specificity, aligning it instead with the consecrated cinematic genre of music biopics.

However, a radical intermedial intervention takes place on the diegetic level, in the form of the real-life musical performances mentioned above, which recur throughout the series' extended duration and punctuate the entire narrative. The effect of these passages is consistent with what Werner Wolf (1999: 43) famously defined as 'overt intermediality', that is, when a medium other than the dominant one makes an appearance with its 'typical and conventional signifiers', remaining 'distinct and quotable separately'. This mode coexists with its companion piece, 'covert inter-mediality', which Wolf (43) illustrates with 'abstract modernist works by Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Georges Braque and others that constitute a kind of musicalized painting: while the result is still painting, music (its rhythm, certain non- or self-referential patterns) is the avowed structuring principle of the artefact'. In *Heimat 2,* covert intermediality is equally at play, not only for being the subject of the fable but also for the stylistic and thematic continuum between diegetic and non-diegetic worlds provided by music, which is mostly in the charge, in both cases, of the same composer, Mamangakis. As in the abstract art quoted by Wolf, music, consisting of a 'music-historical panorama of the 1960s', encompassing 'dodecaphonic, aleatory, bruitist, phonetic, theatrical, and electronic music' (Schönherr 2010: 130), inflects all aspects of the *Heimat 2* episodes, including spoken language, camerawork, editing, mixing, colour patterns and the serial structure of storytelling itself.

This musical way of thinking film is inscribed into Reitz's filmmaking career – partly fictionalised in the series – going back to his early films, when he adopted a method of writing scripts in the form of musical scores, including a self-devised notation system (Reitz 2004: 184). In *Heimat 2*, music-making often took precedence over the writing of the script, as Reitz (177) retells:

In *Heimat 2,* music is not a matter of post-production, but a constitutive part of the action. While still in the middle of script writing, I was already in contact with Nikos Mamangakis. In many of the film scenes music is

played, and these musical pieces had to be ready long before the comple-
tion of the script, so that the actors could study them.[2]

It is this combination of overt and covert intermediality, contained in Reitz's
method of filmmaking, that allows for historical realism to freely migrate
from a true-to-life mode of production to an entirely fictional mode of
address.

I have explored in Part II the ways in which the utilisation of other media
within film can serve as a passage to physical reality, for example, by the
filming of the act of painting or theatrical performances as they happen. In
Heimat 2, this passage is opened up by music, which provides film with the
proof of the material reality at its base, by means of artists who take upon
themselves the difficult task of representing as fiction their actual musical
skills. This procedure, uncommon in standard biopics of musicians and
other artists, is embraced here as part of director Reitz's own realist pursuits.
As one of the founders and intellectual heavyweights of the New German
Cinema, Reitz remained faithful in the *Heimat* project to the principles
of the Nouvelle Vague, so influential on his generation of filmmakers, of
breaking out of the studios and taking to the streets to make their films.
For him, on-location shooting brings into the ready product 'a piece of life
[that] really took place', as well as forcing the filmmaker to think the film
according to a place that is alive and evolving (Reitz 2004: 154-155). Thus,
the fictional rural village of Schabbach, the home of the Simon family at the
centre of the *Heimat* cycle, was obtained by the combination of locations
from a group of around ten villages in the German region of the Hunsrück,
where the dialect, domestic habits, art craft and housing were painstakingly
reconstituted by piecing together lost and surviving traditions. In *Heimat
2,* viewers are presented with real Munich, with its recognisable districts
and landmarks, though duly modified to fit its 1960s appearance; all other
secondary locations are equally real, albeit adapted to a past-time period.
But even when changes were required for the representation of the past, an
effort was made to avoid studio at all costs, and instead identify real apart-
ments, houses, shops and offices, as well as real used furniture, costumes
and props, to compose the sets.

This insistence on historical realism that embeds presentation within
representation is probably the reason why the *Heimat* project as a whole, and
Heimat 2 in particular, has often been understood as an attempt at faithfully
retelling the history of the 1960s, rather than a historically-inspired fictional

2   All citations from German, in this chapter, were translated into English by the author.

story, most notably by Johannes von Moltke (2003), who laments the flaws in the series' historical account of the New German Cinema. In a book chapter entitled 'Home Again: Revisiting the New German Cinema in Edgar Reitz's *Die Zweite Heimat* (1993)', von Moltke (2003: 131) meticulously locates and weaves together all mentions, allusions and metaphors regarding this film movement in the series, noting its defeatist, nostalgic and melancholy tone, with its focus on individual artists and their emotional and professional dramas that ascribe a secondary and rather simplified role to the political struggles so prominent in the 1960s:

> *Die Zweite Heimat* registers the (allegorical and literal) deaths of its film-makers with deep regret, lamenting both the disbanding of a group and the end of an avant-garde movement that at the beginning of the narrative was celebrated as Heimat.

In frank contradiction with his own thinly disguised fascination with the series, von Moltke (135) arrives at a damning conclusion:

> We need to move beyond Reitz's version of film history, with its circular inscription of Heimat as a mythology for reconstructing a national cinema, in order to mourn its passing. In other words, we need to adopt an approach to the New German Cinema that recognizes its historical boundaries and internal contradictions. Only then can we hope to mine the 1960s for the ways in which they speak to the film-historical present in Germany.

It may indeed be disappointing, for those looking for historical accuracy, that the series' musicians and filmmakers, many of whom are based on very successful real-life artists, have to repeatedly meet with failure in nearly all their artistic pursuits; that the romance between the lead pair, composer and instrumentalist Hermann Simon (Henry Arnold) and cellist and singer Clarissa Lichtblau (Salome Kammer), is marked by misunderstandings and misfortune until the very end; that the young actor Ansgar has to die just as he finds the love of his life in the singer Evelyne, which is also the fate of aspiring filmmaker Reinhard after meeting photographer Esther in one of the most poignant episodes, set in Venice. And were the students' revolts in the 1960s really only a side story, a kind of disruptive noise in the lives of all these artistic geniuses? Whatever the case, one must consider that frustration, mismatches and fruitless pursuits by heroic characters are the rule of fiction-making: if Hermann had found success and requited love in

the first episode, the series would have needed to end there. On the other hand, the fact that the *Heimat* project was launched in the 1980s – precisely as the New German Cinema started to disperse and decline – and continued up until very recently is the proof of its successful attempt, not simply at mourning the past, but at giving a new lease of life to this national film movement. It is the permanent actualisation of history through its own existence as a life-long film that makes *Heimat* so convincing for critics and audiences alike.[3] Indeed, the *Heimat* project as whole became notable precisely for eliciting a reality effect among audiences that reached far beyond its (mis)representations of history.[4]

In what follows I shall attempt to locate history in the making within historical representation in *Heimat 2* by means of an intermedial approach to film and music. I will first examine music as a structuring principle that informs camerawork, colour pattern, editing and special effects in the series' episodes. I will proceed by focusing on musician actors, who contributed to fiction the reality of their own bodies and skills. The last section will investigate the ways in which the avant-garde and serial experiments portrayed in the film combine with the serial format of *Heimat 2*, giving it a sense of presentness and continuity that offers the spectator a kind of parallel life and advances by a few decades the addictive effect of the series available on today's streaming services.

3   The first *Heimat* series enjoyed huge success around the world, but in particular in Germany, where its official TV audience rating stood at 26%, meaning tens of millions of spectators (see Skrimshire 2012 for a full account of the *Heimat* reception career). *Heimat 2* garnered stronger enthusiasm internationally – and in Italy in particular – than at home, though there are records of rapturous receptions all over Germany, in marathon cinema screenings lasting for several days (Lentz 2005: 63ff). A veritable *Heimat* cult has emerged since the launch of the first series. Thanks to it, the Hunsrück became a tourist destination, with new hotels, restaurants and shops. Few films will have elicited such profuse fan pages, such as https://www.heimat123.de/ and https://www.heimat-fanpage.de/, containing hundreds of documents, photographs, films and links to related websites. This adds to Edgar Reitz's own highly informative homepage http://www.edgar-reitz.de and his foundation's online shop, http://shop.edgar-reitz-filmstiftung.de/ (all accessed 24 May 2020), where browsers can find a host of *Heimat*-related materials for sale, not least the full soundtrack recordings of all instalments. Reitz himself has given a great number of long interviews and published widely on the *Heimat* project, including the scripts of the whole cycle, totalling thousands of pages.

4   In a lecture entitled 'Film und Wirklichkeit' (Film and Reality), Reitz gives amusing accounts of the series' reality effect, including the cases of a lady who identified her own husband in the character of Horst, in the first *Heimat* instalment; of an English couple who came to one of the villages that make up Schabbach, in the Hunsrück, looking for the tomb of the Simon family; and of a doctoral student from Mannheim who wrote a thesis on the development of amateur photography in the twentieth century using as archival evidence the cameras and photographs shown in the *Heimat* cycle (Reitz 2008: 366-367).

Film as Music

I would like to start by looking at *Heimat 2*'s title musical piece, because it gives us the clue, in a nutshell, to the intermedial and structuring function of music in the entire series. Composed by Mamangakis, the piece that opens and closes all episodes is a variation of the theme the composer had devised to open the episodes of the first *Heimat* series, in which it appears over the series' title and Reitz's credit as director and screenwriter, prolonging into the first narrative scene. In *Heimat 2,* the theme is restricted to the opening vignette containing the title cards in red lettering, 'DIE ZWEITE HEIMAT', that advances towards the viewer in a zoom forward, followed by the line, 'CHRONIK EINER JUGEND IN 13 FILMEN von Edgar Reitz'; at the end of each episode, the theme re-emerges over the rolling credits. The vignette contains one single static, high-angle long shot of a city easily identifiable as Munich thanks to its picture-postcard framing of the town centre, with landmarks such as the church of St Michael (St Michael in Berg am Laim) on the centre-left of the picture, enveloped in bright yellow light, and the Cathedral of Our Lady (Frauenkirche), less prominent on the centre-right. Altogether the vignette lasts for 30 seconds, but in that very short period we see the cityscape quickly going from daylight to dusk and night thanks to the use of time-lapse photography, a trick that accelerates exponentially the passage of time. Thus, the lights on the windows of the apartment buildings go on and off in split seconds, whereas in reality this process would have taken hours. The same effect applies to the clouds that race across the top of the image and the several airplanes that traverse the frame in the blink of an eye like little dots of light.

Time-lapse filming technique had become popular in the 1970s and 1980s within Reitz's circle of filmmakers, being resorted to by Reitz himself since his first *Heimat* as well as by his colleague and collaborator Alexander Kluge, in order to, as Lutze (1998: 105) suggests in relation to the latter, 'compress time so that a relatively invisible movement is revealed or an entire process becomes visible'. In *Heimat 2,* the speed that compresses the day cycle is of a different nature, and in fact aimed at capturing the 'musical' quality of the city's dynamics, even when apparently in standstill. Mamangakis's imposing musical track, involving piano, orchestra and choir, as well as a number of synthesiser effects, is entirely conventional in its quaternary beat, tonal harmonic field in F-minor, and repetitive cord of fifth (C) and octave, with a final unresolved modulation that makes room for the introduction of the film's storyline. Meanwhile, a loud, aleatory percussive line cuts across the orchestral arrangement in complete disaccord with its regular beat. On

closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that this irregular drumming is remarkably in synch with the blinking lights of the apartment buildings, and even seems to be *caused* by them. The fact that the earlier version of this title theme, used in the first *Heimat* series, had no percussion suggests that the drumming line was created for *Heimat 2* to match the city's blinking lights as captured through time-lapse photography.

By this means, the vertiginous compression of time in the vignette unveils the musical shape of Munich with its irregular beating heart that anticipates the film's main subject: music. Indeed, in the first episode, immediately after the vignette, we find protagonist Hermann Simon grieving the end of his romance with his beloved Klärchen, who met with the opposition of his family for being almost twice his age and a mere servant in the parental home. On his knees in his bedroom, Hermann vows: 1) never to love again; 2) to leave forever his Schabbach Heimat, the horrible Hunsrück, his mother and the family home; and finally, 3) to make music his one and only Heimat. Having passed his *Abitur* (final school exam), Hermann then departs to Munich, where he is admitted into the Musik Hochschule, or Conservatoire, and plunges into a world of music, which identifies the city with his 'musical Heimat'.

Thus the opening vignette gives us a first example of overt intermediality, in which music and film are in dialogue with each other but can be quoted separately. It is equally a case of covert intermediality, in that music and film inform each other's organisation, by combining structured and unstructured elements, so as to highlight the emergence of unpredictable real phenomena within pre-established, conventional modes of music and filmmaking. The short vignette anticipates these counteracting, unstructured events, in the form of the avant-garde, serial and aleatory music performed in reality by Hermann and his music colleagues throughout the episodes, both in overt and covert modes, as a counterpoint to the conventions of both filmic storytelling and non-diegetic music. They constitute irruptions of presentational reality within the fable's illusionist realism, which, clearly detectable as they are, do not go as far as breaking the fourth wall or disrupting the conventional musical and filmic boundaries around them.

This method is a late and compromising development in Reitz's filmmaking career, which started with a radical adherence to music as a filmmaking grammar. Still as a student, in the late 1950s, he regularly attended concerts of New Music in Munich, as well as the series 'Musica Viva' led by symphonic composer Karl-Amadeus Hartmann. He also frequented the circle around the electronic music composer Josef Anton Riedl, a former student of Carl Orff, in whose Munich studio he had the opportunity to meet avant-garde

eminences, such as Pierre Boulez, György Ligeti, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luciano Berio and Mauricio Kagel (Reitz 2004: 181). Nikos Mamangakis, a former student at the Conservatoire where Hermann enrols in *Heimat 2,* was also a member of that group. What impressed Reitz (2004: 181) most about electronic music production of that time was its similarity to the process of filmmaking:

> First a kind of script was sketched, and then the material was produced with sound generators and recorded. The electronic means allowed for the production of rhythmic forms that could not be played manually. The music track would come together as in the shooting of a film.

On the basis of that experience, Reitz devised a method of 'scoring' for films, which garnered the admiration and support of Norbert Handwerk, the owner of Insel Film, in Munich, who gave him carte blanche to create his short experimental films. Handwerk finds an endearing representation in *Heimat 2* in the figure of Consul Handschuh, head of the production company Isar Film, whose enthusiasm for Hermann's electronic experiments is so boundless that he offers to make him the heir of his company and fortune. As for Reitz's film scoring method, it was entirely based on movement and speed, which he justifies by the fact that 'until the mid-1970s progress was synonymous with speed and car driving' (Reitz 2004: 184). Thus, his fascination with cinematic speed, as seen in the use of time-lapse photography in the *Heimat* cycle, harks back to his beginning as filmmaker in the late 1950s. But he finally had to compromise on this kind of 'pure cinema' (123), as it resulted in 'a world of forms that are not communicative anymore' (184). He says: 'The avant-garde opened up new worlds, but – and this is its tragedy – the contact with the audiences was broken' (184).

     To redress this problem, Reitz had to resort to storytelling, i.e. to the language-based film script, which brings into cinema the impurity of literature (Reitz 2004: 123). *Heimat 2* deploys a veritable catalogue of the ways in which the two methods of 'film scoring' and 'film scripting' interact, resulting in covert and overt intermediality respectively. An example is the following scene of episode 2, 'Two Strange Eyes'. Having recently arrived in Munich, Hermann attends a concert by two prominent students of the Conservatoire, Volker Schimmelpfennig (incarnated by composer and virtuoso pianist Armin Fuchs) and Jean-Marie Wéber (Martin Maria Blau), who pay homage to two of Reitz's filmmaker colleagues, Volker Schlöndorff and Jean-Marie Straub. The concert is a multimedia chamber opera, with the instrumentalists and singer dressed as clowns, playing music (in reality

composed by Mamangakis) on a poem by Günter Eich entitled 'Wacht auf, denn eure Träume sind schlecht!' (Wake up – your dreams are bad!). Meanwhile, a wide screen on the back of the stage shows Reitz's most emblematic scored film, *Speed* (*Geschwindigkeit,* 1963) – credited in the episode to Reinhard Dörr (Laszlo I. Kish), a nod to filmmaker Reinhard Hauff, and Stefan Aufhäuser (Frank Röth). In *Speed,* 'the protagonist is the camera' (Rauh 1993: 55), for which a new technique was developed that allowed for changes in the filming speed during the shoot. In permanent movement during the piece's 13-minute duration, the car-mounted camera captures landscape images in increasing velocity until they blur into abstraction. *Speed*'s original music score was composed by Riedl, but nowadays the film is often screened as part of avant-garde music concerts by other composers (Sobhani 1997: 201). However, in the scene, this piece of 'pure cinema' and its accompanying chamber opera are not allowed to speak for themselves, as the editing frequently cuts away from the performers to focus on the intrigue going on amidst the audience: Jean-Marie taking his seat next to Clarissa, who looks back at an anxious Hermann, who is in turn being hassled by an overbearing wannabe actress, Renate; we are also introduced to the publishing heiress, Fräulein Elisabeth Cerphal, in the audience, accidentally sitting next to Juan Subercaseaux, the actual focus of this episode, who bluntly expresses his dislike for the concert. Thanks to these fictitious goings-on in the audience, the real-life avant-garde performance, itself a self-reflexive satire, is normalised and rendered 'communicative', in Reitz's terms.

This use of storytelling as a means to facilitate access to the intricacies of avant-garde art forms resonates remarkably with the idea of 'impure cinema' once formulated by André Bazin, in his anticipation of intermedial theory in the early 1950s. For Bazin (2009: 137), cinema, as a mass entertainment par excellence, had the mission to popularise the other arts:

> [T]he success of filmed theatre serves the theatre, as literary adaptation serves literature [...] In truth, there is no competition or replacement at work, only the addition of a new dimension, one gradually lost by the other arts since the Renaissance: an audience.

'Impurity' as a 'popular' device is even more clearly deployed in a scene in the first episode. Hermann has been given the key to a rehearsal room in the Conservatoire, but finds it already occupied by a group of musicians, led by Volker and Jean-Marie, who invoke their priority use of the room. They then resume the performance of an experimental piece for two pianos

and two xylophones while the camera closes in on Hermann, who is visibly riveted. Rather than leaving the spectator on their own to grapple with the intricacies of the musical piece, the film brings in Hermann's voiceover to offer an explanation:

> How I envied the older students. They were the lords of creation, haughty, against the whole world. They were the proud prophets of the New Music. Whatever shocked the old generation, they did it.

By interpolating this explanatory voiceover, that verbalises the music's rebellious character, this very rebellion is neutralised, while the music remains audible in the background. Real-life performance, offering the actualised evidence of a historical musical movement, is by this means integrated into narrative, while history for the few turns into storytelling for the many.

Though apparently conservative, this double movement resonates with daring experiments in the film form, already noticeable in the use of time-lapse photography and electronic sound manipulation pointed out in the opening vignette. Colour is a realm particularly marked by two contrasting tendencies. Already in his earlier films Reitz and his team had been mixing colour and black and white in the same footage, a technique which is applied, apparently randomly, in the first *Heimat* series, but in a more codified manner as black and white for daytime and colour for night-time situations in *Heimat 2*. Here, this pattern is further sophisticated with the use of colour sections within black and white imagery during dusk or dawn situations. At these moments, colour appears as a disruptive streak of images, which is however contained by the narrative flow, as in the case of live performances of experimental music, and often itself narrativised by a sudden sense of estrangement or displacement on the part of the characters. For example, every now and then Hermann looks at himself in the mirror from a black and white position to find his reflection in colour and vice versa; elsewhere, doors or windows are black and white or colour within a contrasting colour pattern around them, suggesting the overlapping of different worlds.

Combined with overt and covert musical intermediality, visual experimentation, as much as live performances, in *Heimat 2* introduces an element of innovation into the very form of storytelling, in both cases refusing to give a closure to the history of either the New German Cinema or the New Music movements.

Musicians/Actors/Characters

Biographism is a key element in obtaining actualisation of history in
Heimat 2. A great deal has been said about the ways in which Reitz brings
to the screen his own experience as filmmaker and music expert in the
series, including sections of his own early films, such as the aforementioned
Speed, but also his Mexican documentary *Yucatan* (1960), the multi-camera
and multi-screen experiment *VariaVision* (1965) and the faux-documentary
adaptation of ETA Hoffmann, *Cardillac* (1969) (see further details in Sobhani
1997). Equally decisive, however, is the way in which the cast's own talents
and abilities inform both form and content of the episodes. One notable case
is that of Juan Subercaseaux, played by Chilean multi-artist and polymath
Daniel Smith, who introduces the subject of language 'as' music. According
to autobiographical details he relays to Hermann the first time they meet in
a corridor of the Conservatoire, and which coincide in all with his own self-
authored online CV,[5] Juan speaks 11 languages, or 'actually ten, music being
my eleventh', as he states. This first dialogue between the two is captured
with enhanced focus on Juan's lips as he speaks each of the words, bringing
to the spectator's awareness the German declinations and the original
sound of the names of each of the ten languages he speaks. The dialogue
culminates with general merriment among the surrounding students when
Hermann is called to the exam room and replies out loud: 'Eisch!' ('I'),
giving away his provincial origin through his dialectal pronunciation of
the high-German pronoun 'Ich'.

This sets out the pattern prevailing across the film of the use of language
as music. Not only do we follow Hermann's uphill struggle in learning High
German and its impossible 'ch' sound, but we are enlightened on the choice
of people's names in the series according to their resonance, as in the case of
Hermann's lovers, 'Klara, Klärchen, Clarissa', that he spells out to Juan. In the
Cerphal villa, called Fuchsbau (Foxhole), where musicians and filmmakers
gather under the heiress's protection, a lot of the artistic exercise revolves
around language, including Clarissa's singing together with Juan in Span-
ish, a male avant-garde duo who turn words into guttural and percussive
sounds with their mouths, and a kind of 'cadavre exquis' exercise between
the poet Helga Aufschrey (a nod to filmmaker Helga Sanders-Brahms)
and Hermann around the fortuitous word *Katze* (cat) and its derivations,
which results in an atonal song, jointly authored by Helga and Hermann
(in reality, a poem by Reitz set to music by Mamangakis), and subsequently

5   See https://heimat123.net/actors/juan.html (accessed 24 May 2020).

sung by Evelyne Cerphal, the heiress's niece. As well as melody, language is percussion, as conveyed by Juan's marimba and drums piece 'Prelude', which he rehearses in the Conservatoire's majestic concert hall. Displayed as Juan's personal and cultural expression, which is misunderstood and rejected by the Conservatoire as 'folklore', the haunting marimba melody, authored by Smith himself, then migrates to the non-diegetic realm for atmospheric effect. The marimba scene reflects in another entertaining example of phonetics turned into bruitism, which is the improvised 'spoon concert', performed at the university cantina where students, joined by Juan, break out in concerted tongue noises, slapping their cheeks, groaning, stamping, then resorting to cutlery to hit all objects around – crockery, radiators, kettles, the windows – while a rapidly sliding high camera surveys the tables in the same beat of the drumming, as if under its command. As Sobhani (1997: 203) points out, this concert is 'reminiscent of a performance by John Cage in 1942, when he created a savage rhythm with his percussion group by playing [...] anything they could lay their hands on in an attempt to make *all* the field of audible sound available to music'.

Thus the communicative vector is music in its widest sense, governing everything, not least the central love story between Hermann and Clarissa, whose arc is drawn by the sounds emanating from their own biographies as instrumentalist/composer and cellist respectively, both in real life and on screen. They first bump into each other in the Conservatoire's stairs, where they merely exchange inquisitive glances. They are then shown having separate, but near-concomitant, encounters with their celebrity music masters. Hermann's is none other than Mamangakis himself, in a cameo that allows him to pass the baton of his real-life musicianship to the hands of his fictitious alter-ego (Figure 9.1).[6] Hermann, overawed by the famous master, very tentatively shows him a short dodecaphonic piece for piano, flute and voice. To his embarrassment, Mamangakis asks him to sing the melody, which is not at all Hermann's forte, but he obliges anyway, accompanying himself on the piano. The next shot, from Hermann's point of view, shows, through the window, Clarissa down below approaching the building with her cello. The reverse shot goes back to Mamangakis, who comments that 'our great composers wrote their best works for people they loved, a woman

6   It should not be surprising that Mamangakis has only this opportunity of dialogue, alongside a second mute appearance conducting a concert for cello and orchestra authored by Hermann, with Clarissa as soloist: he is a clumsy actor and a rare case in which dubbing was used (albeit with his own voice), most likely to camouflage the mishaps in his live utterances.

Figure 9.1 *Heimat 2*: Hermann's master is the film's composer Mamangakis himself, in a cameo that allows him to pass the baton of his real-life musicianship to the hands of his fictitious alter-ego.

perhaps', a veiled reproach on the formulaic dodecaphonic piece Hermann has just presented and a premonition of the love story to come.

The next scene offers us a similar set-up with Clarissa receiving a cello lesson from her own star Professor P., an elderly man who courts Clarissa explicitly, suggesting that she is excessively devoted to her cello and should enjoy herself more as a woman (Figure 9.2). Clarissa immediately rejects this approach, which points to a kind of abusive, even sinister side of the master-student relationship. Clarissa had started by playing a romantic piece, Johannes Brahms's Cello Sonata in E-minor, Opus 38, and now the professor takes up the cello to show her how the Brahms piece resonates in a piece by an exponent of atonality and dodecaphony of the Second Viennese School, Anton Webern, 'Three Little Pieces for Cello and Piano', Opus 11. He first plays a 'very male, aggressive' note, which is followed by what he describes as 'a very feminine, gentle reply', during which the camera zooms in on Clarissa's face who half smiles and raises her eyes away from the professor, as the image cuts back to Hermann now walking in a corridor of the Conservatoire. In these two scenes, it is the music, as produced by two actual musicians and their instruments, that dictates the acting, editing and sound scape, giving meaning and political content to the representation

Figure 9.2 *Heimat 2*: Clarissa receives a cello lesson from her star Professor P.

of romance within the fable. More pointedly these scenes enlighten the viewer on how best to appreciate serial and atonal music, as represented by Webern's and Hermann's piece, by interweaving them with a romantic melody and a love story.

The stunningly beautiful notes by Brahms and Webern played on the cello by Clarissa and Professor P., moreover, launch the kind of power structure dominating the relationships among the characters. Professor P. is the first example, in *Heimat 2*, of the recurrent figure of elderly, lustful mentors longing for their young, attractive pupils, such as Hermann's former teacher in Schabbach, Herr Schüller, who suddenly turns up at his Munich accommodation accompanied by one of his young sexy pupils and former Hermann colleague, Marianne Elz. Clarissa herself is supported by an infatuated, soft-spoken and mildly repulsive elderly patron, Dr Kirchmayer, an ally of her autocratic mother, who has funded her cello learning from the beginning and finally buys her a priceless antique instrument with the undisguised intention to tighten his grip on her. The unfavourable light in which these elderly men are shown, an indictment of the kind of abusive behaviour in the artistic milieu brought to light by the #MeToo movement decades later, might also be understood as a disclaimer for Reitz himself, who became involved with Salome Kammer,

the actress who plays Clarissa, during the shoot of *Heimat 2,* being 27 years older than her (they remain happily married up to this day).[7] Whatever the case, the 'politics of intermediality' here, to use Jens Schröter's (2010) term, is to question the liberating power of music Hermann and Clarissa abide by to the point of renouncing love. The aggressive male voice against the subdued female response in Webern's piece, played on the cello by Professor P., translates for Clarissa into an oppressive instrument. Later in the plot, Clarissa finds herself pregnant – the father could be either Volker, her future husband, or Jean-Marie – and develops sepsis as a result of a botched abortion. In her illness, she has nightmares of cello F-holes carved on her back, which she desperately tries to get rid of by asking the same charlatan abortionist to sew her fissured skin together. The nightmare is sparked by Hermann's first concert, 'Spuren' (Traces), which should have featured Clarissa on the cello, but which she has to miss in order to have the abortion. In the actual concert, Hermann then marks Clarissa's absence in the orchestra with a live naked model, carrying the cello F-holes on her back, exactly like in Man Ray's famous photograph, 'Le Violon d'Ingres' (Ingres's Violin) (Figure 9.3). As Mattias Bauer (2012: 67) comments:

> Clarissa's body thus becomes the scene of the inscription of the experiences she suffers; at the same time, the relation to Man Ray reflects the composition principle that governs *Heimat 2.* On the visual and aural, scenic and diegetic levels of the communication of plot and meaning, assonances and resonances, correspondences and inferences are introduced, which encourage the viewer and listener to perceive recurrent motifs [...]

Biographical intermediality here makes room for the political as much as for the haptic perception of the film, according to one of the two main intermedial templates defined by Pethő (2011: 99) as a 'sensual' mode, which

> invites the viewer to literally get in touch with a world portrayed not at a distance but at the proximity of entangled synaesthetic sensations, and resulting in a cinema that can be perceived in the terms of music, painting, architectural forms or haptic textures.

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7   Age difference among couples is an interesting thematic undercurrent in *Heimat 2.* Hermann's first love, Klärchen, who is nearly twice his age, is another example, purportedly lifted from Reitz's own biography.

Figure 9.3 *Heimat 2*: Hermann marks Clarissa's absence in the orchestra with a live naked model, carrying the cello F-holes on her back, like in Man Ray's photograph, 'Le Violon d'Ingres'.

Clarissa will go on, in the series' latter episodes, to abandon the cello and devote herself entirely to singing. A fact collected from Kammer's own biography, this move represents, in the fable, a break with the male oppressive power and the embrace of feminism. Together with a group of female musicians she had met on a US tour, she forms a troupe which performs the climactic spectacle, 'Hexenpassion' (Witches Passion), in the closing episode, with atonal music and *Sprechgesang* composed by Mamangakis on poems by expressionist writer Else Lasker-Schüler, focusing on the trial of the peasant Katherine Lips, accused of witchcraft in 1672 in Marburg. Again here the live performance of a historical fact injects an element of presentational truth into representation. As Schönherr (2010: 123) states,

> the textual collage of the historical interrogation records from the witch trials with Else Lasker-Schüler's poems establishes a musical memory for the suffering of women under patriarchy whose artistic reenactment certainly also implies a Utopian element that points to the future.

Historicising Storytelling through Film and Music Serialism

Now the question remains of where to place the *Heimat* project, and *Heimat 2* specifically, within the development of German film history. As von Moltke rightly points out, references to the New German Cinema abound in *Heimat 2*, to the point of it being perceived by him as an attempt at historicising the movement. A closer look however discourages us from such a reading, if we consider that the film ends in 1970, when the New German Cinema was just starting to conquer the screens. Rather than developing a complete historical picture of the movement, *Heimat 2* concentrates on its nascent phase in the early 1960s. It is the period of the watershed 1962 Oberhausen manifesto, the launchpad for the Young German Cinema – which preceded the New German Cinema – that proclaimed: 'Papas Kino is tot!' (Dad's cinema is dead!), mimicking the early Nouvelle Vague and its disdain for the *cinéma du papa.* There is no lack of allusions to this memorable event, not least with Reinhardt and Stefan distributing stickers with this slogan all over Munich. There is also an 'anti-film' screening by the duo and Rob at the Foxhole, called *Brutalität in Stein* (*Brutality in Stone*)*,* which is actually the title of the 1961 short film directed by two key figures of the Young German Cinema, Alexander Kluge and Peter Schamoni, though the piece screened at the Foxhole is by Reitz himself. People are constantly filming in the streets of Munich, in the early episodes, to the point of film crews having become a tourist attraction, as a cab driver explains to Evelyne, a newcomer to the city. Hannelore Hoger, in the role of Fräulein Cerphal, is another New German Cinema foundational figure, who came to prominence through her acting in Alexander Kluge's films, the same applying to Alfred Edel, a recurrent actor with Kluge and Werner Herzog, who carries his own name in a short-lasting role as an eccentric intellectual drunkard. More than anyone else, Kluge is the recurrent reference here, a filmmaker and philosopher with whom Reitz collaborated as cinematographer in the landmark *Yesterday Girl* (*Abschied von gestern,* 1966) and other works. In *Heimat 2,* Kluge is personified through the amusing figure of bookworm Alex (Michael Schönborn), the eternal philosophy student, who claims to be writing three philosophical compendiums at the same time and goes about explaining the love affairs around him in terms of Heidegger, Spinoza and Adorno, while remaining himself entirely chaste.

All these details demonstrate the focus on the infancy of the New German Cinema movement, and not on its later and more important history,

offering no justification to von Moltke's expectations of a full assessment of the period. Reitz (2004: 173) himself sees his role as rather peripheral to it:

> After a screening of *Heimat 2,* a colleague said that any of us could have made the film: all of us had experienced that time and had similar stories to tell. Only no-one had done it, although I was only a marginal figure in the movement. When I think about Oberhausen and the *Autorenfilm* [auteur cinema], I was one of the first six, but not the first or the second, but the sixth. My name is not on any list of the important German film-makers of the time.

One might diverge – as I do – from Reitz's assessment of his peripheral role in the New German Cinema, but the fact remains that *Heimat 2* is simply not set in the period when this movement fully developed. In contrast, in the early 1960s, the New Music movement had reached an apex marked by a dramatic change in its political direction, and this is the true focus of attention here. As Schönherr (2010: 111) explains, most New Music representatives in the immediate postwar period had had direct experience of the horrors of the front, an example being Stockhausen, a prominent serialist composer in the 1950s, 'who was confronted almost daily with the brutality of the battlefield as a paramedic (and who lost his mother in a concentration camp and his father in combat)'. For this generation, according to Schönherr (111), serialism was convenient as a kind of 'music that eliminated any historical and personal narrative and suspended the subject from working through its own trauma, guilt, and responsibility'. The 1960s, however,

> appear to have been a turning point in the postwar history of New Music, which entered a new phase of critical self-reflection and openness that led to a resemanticization reflected in the stylistic and programmatic diversity of the music of that period. (Schönherr 2010: 113)

This gives the opportunity, in *Heimat 2,* for history to make a decisive appearance, through the revelation of the horrors of the Holocaust at the very centre of creativity and romance: the Foxhole. Though the place where, in the prewar years, famous artists and thinkers had assembled, including Bertolt Brecht and Lion Feuchtwanger, as Elisabeth Cerphal repeats to all her guests, the wonderful villa, at the heart of the Munich artistic district of Schwabing, turns out to have been unduly appropriated by Elisabeth's father from his Jewish publishing partner Goldbaum, who perished in the

war. Goldbaum's daughter Edith, once Elisabeth's best friend, was sent to the Dachau concentration camp thanks to a tip-off by her own SS-officer husband, Gerold Gattinger, now Elisabeth's 'financial adviser' and cohabitant of the Foxhole. The revelation of this fact constitutes a rite of passage to the young artists, adding a sense of guilt and responsibility to their hitherto unconcerned artistic exercises. With the old Cerphal's death and before Esther (Edith's daughter) can claim her right to the property, Elisabeth finally sells it to a construction company that razes it to the ground to make room for lucrative apartment buildings, leading to the artists' disbandment and forced independence.

While the innocence of Fräulein Cerphal, the eternal student and sympathetic patroness of young talents, disintegrates – Cerphal being a homonym of *Zerfall,* or 'decay', as von Moltke (2003: 130) notes – music acquires historical and political weight. In Reinhard's episode, where he meets Esther in Venice and commits to writing a film about the loss of her mother in the concentration camp, Mamangakis's non-diegetic music is extensively replaced by Olivier Messiaen's 'Quartet for the End of Time'. Messiaen famously wrote this piece, one of the most important of his prolific career, in 1941, while a war prisoner in Görlitz, then Germany (now Zgorzelec, Poland). This heart-wrenching, poignantly beautiful piece for piano, violin, cello and clarinet was premiered at the prison-of-war camp by Messiaen himself and other musician inmates, with decrepit instruments and under the rain, on 15 January 1941, for c. 400 enraptured prisoners. The presence of Messiaen's music in *Heimat 2* is fitting in many ways, not least for the composer's status as one of the precursors of serialism, which he passed on to dedicated students such as Boulez and Stockhausen. This historical lineage, and the pain and mourning it carries, characterises many other musical choices in *Heimat 2,* the aforementioned Brahms imbedded in Webern being a similar case of historical affiliation with both romantic and sinister undertones.

Historical continuity finds a parallel, in the series, with the space-time continuum envisaged by avant-garde music, which included the breaking of the boundaries of established categories and art forms (Grant 2001: 110ff). Atonal, serial, aleatory and electronic music, as exercised within the New Music movement in Europe, as well as the 'indeterminate music' practiced by John Cage in the US, saw no frontiers between melodic sounds and noises, and even silence, as in the Cage-inspired concert, 'Persona', in *Heimat 2,* in which the musicians set up a stop watch to one minute, which is mostly filled with the players quietly mimicking the notes, and only producing actual sounds for five seconds. As it moved into the territory of

electronics, avant-garde music dissolved its boundaries with engineering, architecture, mathematics and other sciences. And by surrendering on its specificity, it opened up for Reitz the possibility of intermedial cinema, which finds common ground with other arts as well as with real life. The *VariaVision* project, funded by Consul Handschuh and marred by mishaps which are played out in slapstick style in *Heimat 2,* is based on one of Reitz's actual experiments that had no beginning or end. Combining 16 screens, a spoken text by Alexander Kluge and electronic music by Josef Anton Riedl, the installation integrated the mediums of film, literature and music in a continuum which the spectator could appreciate for hours or minutes at will (Sobhani 1997: 206).

Likewise, history serves Reitz's storytelling as an open-ended process, which time-based media such as music and film can accurately represent as form and fictionalise as content.

> Our story is almost 26 hours in length. In 26 hours you can read a large novel or make a short trip. Our film belongs to a category other than that of a feature film. It is of course done with actors and portrays persons, but it doesn't do this with the aim of developing a plot with a certain dramatic ending. We gave the film the subtitle 'Chronicle of a Young Life' in order to point to a certain form of narration, which is like life itself [...] (Reitz apud Parkinson 2005: 39)

By breaking away from the standard two-hour feature format for cinema, Reitz's 'life-long film' responded to a need for change felt by many of his generation. Around the same time when the first *Heimat* series was shot, in the 1980s, Kluge gave up on the feature-length format to devote himself entirely to short essayistic documentaries for television. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, in turn, launched his TV series in 14 episodes, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1980), bringing experimentation into a field hitherto dominated by American commercial ventures. *Holocaust* (Marvin J. Chomsky, 1978) is an example of the latter, and actually what made Reitz conceive of his own series, a move that Murray Smith (2017: 172) qualified as

> [...] Reitz's refusal of the full-blooded, 'Manichaean' melodrama of *Holocaust,* along with his commitment to an alternative but still emotional form of drama: a kind of synthesis of Brecht's 'epic' and 'dramatic' modes.

Combining musical serialism with the television serial format, as a mode of telling history through the evolving form of music and film, Reitz ended up

anticipating the artistically (and commercially) sophisticated series of our day, which offer to the viewer a kind of parallel reality in which to immerse for months or years of 'binge watching'. In other words, the actualisation of history by means of music gives material form to the virtual medium of film. Or, in Reitz's (1996: 132) words:

> Heimat means for me something that we have lost and maybe can retrieve in cinema as Heimat *Ersatz*.

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10   Total Cinema as Mode of Production

Abstract

Chapter 10 examines Bazin's 'myth of total cinema' in light of a major trend in recent world cinema to focus on monumental landscapes, in films by Byambsuren Davaa and Luigi Falorni (*The Story of the Weeping Camel/ Ingen nulims*, 2003), Abderrahmane Sissako (*Timbuktu,* 2014), Mikhail Zvyagintsev (*Leviathan/Leviafan,* 2014), Nuri Bilge Ceylan (*Winter Sleep/ Kış uykusu,* 2014), Cristina Gallego and Ciro Guerra (*Birds of Passage/ Pájaros de verano*, 2018), and Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles (*Bacurau,* 2019). Taken together, these films testify to the remarkable convergence among filmmakers from the most disparate corners of the globe in resorting to expansive landscapes as a totalising cosmos and a sealed-off stage for the drama of existence, where realism manifests itself by means of real locations.

Keywords: *Leviathan; The Story of the Weeping Camel; Bacurau; Winter Sleep; Birds of Passage; Timbuktu*

This last chapter addresses an impulse pointing in the opposite direction to non-cinema (explored in Part I), that is, total cinema. In lieu of a cinema which, in order to acquire political value and the status of art, dissolves itself into real life, total cinema aspires to change life itself into film. In focus will be landscape films, or films in which landscapes are not only an attractive and imposing backdrop to the action, but the only universe available to humans and other animals inhabiting it. Examples of such films abound in recent world cinema, which makes the case studies selected here rather arbitrary. However, given the speed with which landscapes around the globe are transforming, even completely disappearing, in the face of climate change, deforestation, wars, migration, tourism, construction expansion and other factors, landscape films have naturally emerged as an urgent record of ephemeral vistas, with a curious spike in the year 2014, when several such films collected international awards; three of my six case studies

date from that year. Taken together, these films testify to the remarkable convergence among filmmakers from the most disparate corners of the globe in resorting to expansive landscapes as a totalising cosmos and a sealed-off stage for the drama of existence. None of these films, listed here in chronological order, could be imagined without their outdoor settings: the Gobi desert in South Mongolia, in *The Story of the Weeping Camel* (*Ingen nulims,* Byambasuren Davaa and Luigi Falorni, 2003); the Sahel savannahs in Mauritania (standing for Mali), in *Timbuktu* (Abderrahmane Sissako, 2014); the rocky coast of the Kola peninsula, northwestern Russia, in *Leviathan* (*Leviafan,* Andrey Zvyagintsev, 2014); the extraordinary rock formations of Cappadocia, central Anatolia, Turkey, in *Winter Sleep* (*Kış uykusu*, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 2014); the desert of the Guajira peninsula, in northern Colombia, in *Birds of Passage* (*Pájaros de verano,* Cristina Gallego and Ciro Guerra, 2018); and the Brazilian *sertão,* or northeastern scrubland outback, in *Bacurau* (Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles, 2019).[1]

In all these films, the totalising impetus, expressed through the monumental scale of the landscape, combines with a desire for realism by means of real locations endowed with unique geological formations, vegetation, populations and fauna. These are not, however, necessarily at the service of documentary accuracy and in fact, in most of the films in focus here, real settings were redefined and renamed to suit the fictional plot, to which are added the changes effected by art design, framing, editing and special effects. For example, in *Bacurau,* the *sertão* announced at the beginning of the film as 'western Pernambuco state' is actually the Seridó *sertão,* in Pernambuco's neighbouring state of Rio Grande do Norte. *Timbuktu,* likewise, was not shot in the real Timbuktu city and surroundings, in Mali, due to safety concerns, but in Oualata, in the southeast of neighbouring Mauritania. Pribrezhny, where the story of *Leviathan* takes place, is a fictional town; the film's main photography took place in the towns of Teriberka, Kirovsk, Monghegorsk and Olenegorsk, around the city of Murmansk, on the Barents Sea coast. In *Winter Sleep,* the fictional plot based on a selection of Anton Chekhov's short stories, combined with a section of Dostoyevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov,* was transplanted from Russia to Turkey. It is in *The Story of the Weeping Camel* and *Birds of Passage,* both endowed with a

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1   These are some of the main awards collected by the films in focus here: *The Story of the Weeping Camel,* nomination for an Oscar in the category of best documentary; *Timbuktu,* seven César awards, including best film; *Leviathan,* Golden Globe award for best foreign-language film; *Winter Sleep,* Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival; *Birds of Passage,* Ariel Award for Best Ibero-American Film; *Bacurau,* Jury Prize, Cannes Film Festival.

strong ethnographic motivation, where landscapes come closest to offering documentary evidence of a people and their culture, respectively the Wayúu in Colombia and the nomad shepherds in Mongolia, though even in these two films documentary fact and local legends are combined in a constructed plot. The question then arises of the extent to which the indexical realism of the landscape can survive the forcibly manipulative processes of film production and postproduction.

In this chapter, I shall tackle this question from different but interconnected perspectives. I shall start by considering the sine-qua-non requirement, at the origin of all these films, of real, outdoor locations, and the painstaking scouting process this invariably entails. I will then evaluate in all these films – with particular attention to *Leviathan* – whether these 'locations' qualify as 'landscape' as opposed to mere 'settings', as per Lefebvre's (2006) famous distinction, which defines landscape in cinema according to its degree of narrative 'autonomy' and 'spectacular' time.

Landscape as a concept has a long tradition in western philosophy, extending from Kant to Rancière, and I shall examine the conundrum between 'selection', 'ordering' and 'arranging', pertaining to the philosophical definition of landscape, and the totalising impetus akin to notions of 'nature', 'beauty' and the 'sublime' as they present themselves in the films in question. This will include a reflection on the ways in which landscapes in them acquire 'worldhood' (Yacavone 2015) by means of isolation and remoteness, which promotes a complete integration between habitat, fauna and flora. In all cases, however, the fabled, utopian, even mythical settings remain vulnerable to alien invaders whose presence produces a tear in their integrity allowing for issues of our time – political corruption, drug trafficking, destructive tourism, gun culture – to seep in and ultimately restore their indexical link with the real world. This is also, and most importantly, the process through which landscape reveals itself as a repository of history, where fiction, myth and legend combine into fact. Analyses of *Timbuktu, Bacurau* and *Birds of Passage* will substantiate these claims.

The chapter will then define the drive towards total cinema, in the films in focus here, as realist, but of a realism at the opposite end of Bazin's (1967) famous 'myth of total cinema', which he describes as the human desire for the 'reconstruction of a perfect illusion of the outside world' (1967: 20). I will argue that the totalising landscapes here are marked, instead, by realism as a mode of film production, one that requires the collection of evidence in the objective world in support of the facts narrated in the fable. As such, they appeal to the spectator's *understanding* of the reality at stake, rather than enhancing, through artifice, the *illusion* of reality as elicited by the

cinematographic apparatus, in Baudry's (1986) foundational formula. In order to clarify my argument, I will first turn to *Winter Sleep,* in which Plato's allegory of the cave, used by Baudry to identify the moment of truth within and outside the cinematographic apparatus, receives literal expression as a defining feature of the landscape. Finally, I will focus on *The Story of the Weeping Camel,* which, by means of a perfectly integrated cosmos combining landscape, human and non-human animals, offers a miraculous symbiosis between legend and fact. Here, realism as mode of production ends up meeting Bazin's total realism at reception point through the back door, which he left conveniently open for cinema's return to the moment when it 'had not yet been invented' (Bazin 1967: 21).

Real Locations as Landscape

Finding real outdoor locations is described by all filmmakers in focus here as a pre-condition for their films, despite the arduous, time-consuming and costly scouting process they entail. For the makers of *Leviathan,* for example, as important as the characters in the film was the environment in which they lived, and for this reason, as Vassilieva (2018) points out,

> it took [director Andrey] Zvyagintsev and [his DoP Mikail] Krichman four months to find the ideal location – having started in the countryside close to Moscow, they visited 75 small Russian towns before deciding on the small village of Teriberka on the Kolsky peninsula, and reworking the original script accordingly.

It must be noted that Teriberka is located more than two thousand kilometres away from Moscow, where the scouting began. This, for Vassilieva (2018), demonstrates that, with *Leviathan,* Zvyagintsev had moved 'from his earlier aesthetic of high modernism towards an aesthetic of realism, based on observation and accurate representation', despite the fact that the real locations were renamed in the fictional story.

Realism is, in turn, explicitly cited by Kleber Mendonça Filho, co-director of *Bacurau,* who states that the film shows 'the behaviour of many real places in Brazil. I can state this with conviction, after having driven 11 thousand kilometres to find a location together with Juliano [Dornelles, *Bacurau*'s co-director]' (Molica and Motta 2019). This staggering figure (if correct or even just approximate) demonstrates the effort, not only to find the ideal setting – i.e. the village of Barra and surroundings, renamed Bacurau in the

film – but also the appropriate cast, in part drawn from nearby villages. 'We needed to be very honest with the representation of that kind of place', states Mendonça Filho, who justifies the choice of local villagers to complement the mixed cast with the fact that 'they understood the story [...] they knew the type of situation' (Girish 2019).

The strong belonging between cast and place was also essential for the makers of *The Story of the Weeping Camel,* who, after travelling four thousand kilometres in the Gobi desert, finally found not only the perfect location, but 'the perfect family to channel this folkloric tale: four generations living together in one camp, including wise-and-wizened oldsters, young parents with movie-star looks and effortless grace, and three appealing children' (Winter 2004). The ten years' preparation for the shoot of *Birds of Passage* in the Wayúu territory in Colombia, with a Wayúu-heavy cast; the superb locations of *Winter Sleep,* where the population live not only *on* the land but *inside* the rocks in whose caves they install their houses; the close links between the Tuaregs and the desert expressed through their traditions and language, Tamasheq, as well as the Bambara-speaking population of the Sahel; in short, in all cases examined here it was first necessary to find the place and its related people for the plot to make sense. Even in the case of *Leviathan,* with a cast majorly composed of professional actors, DoP Krichman 'wanted the characters to live in that universe and allow the audience to appreciate it in every scene, not leave it in a blur' (apud Vassilieva 2018).

Real locations have been a staple in realist cinema since Visconti's foundational neorealist film *Ossessione,* examined in Chapter 8, in which the Po Valley settings were so decisive for the film's aesthetic composition, that they became a recurrent background in Italian cinema ever since. I would however, hesitate, to define *Ossessione* as a 'landscape' film given the settings' strong subordination to the operatic narrative taking place in the foreground. In the films in focus in this chapter, instead, settings have a prominence that changes characters and animals living in it into their extension, claiming their own power of attraction in parallel or even in competition with the main fictional plot. The often-cited chapter by Martin Lefebvre, 'Between Setting and Landscape in Cinema' (2006: 19ff), can help us understand how background settings may ascend to the status of landscape in film.

Lefebvre argues that, whereas in experimental cinema landscapes can occur without necessarily contributing to narrative progression or any narrative at all, in 'classical' cinema, everything must be subordinated to the narrative, including the settings. He starts by drawing on Laura Mulvey and her distinction between the diverging gazes elicited by men and women

on screen, respectively an active and a contemplative gaze. On this basis, he devises two corresponding modes at work in landscape films, the narrative and the spectacular mode. Alternating on screen, these two modes allow the spectator to follow the story and pause at intervals to contemplate the spectacular landscape, which claims for itself a non-narrative or 'contemplative' time. As opposed to a film setting, a film landscape is thus endowed, in Lefebvre's view, with a double temporality, one as background to the narrative, and another as a spectacle in its own right. In sum, what defines a landscape in film is its 'autonomous' character.

Even though none of the films in this chapter can be classified as 'classical', along the lines of the strict rules described by David Bordwell et al in *The Classical Holywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (1988), they are all narrative films, abiding by the rules of continuity, coherence, plausibility and verisimilitude. Thus Lefebvre's concept of the autonomous landscape applies entirely to them and helps us work through the hypothesis of total cinema as realism at the point of production. The opening of *Leviathan* is an eloquent example of this.

Still over the initial credits, and before any images are shown, the film starts with the help of another temporal medium, music, in the form of incisive and repetitive orchestral attacks, composed by minimalist Philip Glass, imposing itself as the originator of the tale. There follows a first landscape image in the form of a cliff of rocks taken from above, accompanied by the sound of waves crashing against them. As the music evolves, further expansive landscape shots are displayed in a sequence like a slideshow: sea and rocks, sea and a beach of boulders, sheer rocks, a lake surrounded by rocky peaks shot from two different angles, all taken with static camera. Then, gradually, signs of human activity start to emerge in the landscape, a decaying wooden harbour, derelict fishing boats, a long bridge seen from far above, a little motorboat passing under it, a house, the light in the house going on and finally a human being coming out of it, the protagonist Nikolai. As natural vistas are slowly replaced by manmade settings, non-diegetic music also recedes to let the local sounds of birds, dogs barking and the motorboat come to the fore and initiate storytelling. The principle governing the editing work in this opening indicates that fiction can only take place once a solid ground in an autonomous landscape, acquired through protracted duration, has been laid out. The 'spectacular' landscape, such as the vistas shown at the beginning, will continue to appear at regular intervals during the film, most prominently at the end, when a huge Orthodox Christian Church is unveiled at the top of the hill were Nikolai's house used to be. It was precisely the magnificent view onto the

Figure 10.1 *Leviathan*: the small figure of Roma sits opposite the enormous whale carcass.

expansive seascape that made it a coveted spot for the corrupt Major, Vadim, resulting in Nikolai's relentless persecution and final incarceration, with his house being razed to ground and the land appropriated by the church. Elsewhere, in the film, shots of spectacular landscapes are interspersed to reassert their crushing power over the minute human beings photographed against them, as in the scene in which Nikolai's current wife, Lylia, looks at the immense sea, from the top of a rock, and spots a whale breaching; Lylia's dead body will be subsequently retrieved from the sea as a result of a mysterious murder or suicide. Shortly before that, a majestic skeleton of a dead whale stranded on the beach had forecast the tragedy, in another spectacular series of shots where the small figure of Roma (Lylia's rebellious stepson) sits in distress opposite the enormous carcass (Figure 10.1). The carcass itself is, however, the proof of human interference in what should have been a 'natural' landscape, as it is the result of a careful reconstruction for the film.

Whale, sea and rocks here present their own tacit and mysterious narrative, based on spectacle and duration, flirting with the sublime, whilst alluding to the biblical legend of the destructive sea monster Leviathan, announced in the film's title. This, in turn, resonates with the prominence of religion in the film in the figure of a bishop enmeshed in the corruption network led by mayor Vadim, and it is the church, erected for him by the mayor, that ends up dominating the landscape. This example demonstrates how the landscape in a film can come in and out of the narrative thread, adding religious, mythic and legendary overtones to the story and overflowing the fictional frame to connect with historical and political reality. In the next section, I shall examine how it can also constitute a world in its own right.

Landscape, Worldhood and Otherworldly Invaders

As Harper and Rayner (2010: 16) point out, 'Landscape involves isolation of a certain spatial extent and a certain temporal length'. 'Isolation' in its strongest sense is indeed key to the settings in the films in question here, consisting of remote areas whose insular condition allows for the issues in focus to unravel undisturbed, with enhanced clarity and poignancy. As Harper and Rayner (16) go on to say:

> all notions of landscape are produced by human interpretation which, simply due to human physiology or due to political or cultural bias, is selective. Subsequent aesthetic treatments of landscape, whether in painting, photography or film, involve further selection, interpretation and omission, whether by an individual or group [...] Like a map, the cinematic landscape is the imposition of order on the elements of landscape, collapsing the distinction between the found and the constructed.

We have seen above, in the example of *Leviathan,* how the found and the constructed are combined, most impressively in the constructed whale skeleton, an artwork installation on a natural rocky beach.

'Ordering' and 'arranging', in turn, pertain to the very concept of landscape and are at the heart of Rancière's (2020) recent take on the subject as an extension of his theory of the aesthetic regime of art, whose appearance he dates back to the early eighteenth century. Rancière's point of departure, in this respect, is – as for most philosophers – Kant and the moment he included gardening into his classification of the fine arts, describing it as 'the beautiful arrangement of natural products' (Rancière 2020: 13). As a radical interference into nature, gardening, for Rancière, has the inevitable consequence of imposing limits to it, as Kant (1914: 2nd book, § 23) had also observed when distinguishing the beautiful from the sublime, in his *Critique of Judgement*:

> The Beautiful in nature is connected with the form of the object, which consists in having boundaries. The Sublime, on the other hand, is to be found in a formless object, so far as in it or by occasion of it *boundlessness* is represented, and yet its totality is also present to thought.

Beauty is no doubt a criterion for the selection of the landscapes here, whose compositions are primarily meant to elicit aesthetic pleasure, if one just thinks about the exquisite shots of the desert in *Birds of Passage, Timbuktu* and *The Story of the Weeping Camel,* or the rocky formations in *Winter Sleep*

and *Leviathan.* Beyond their formal beauty, i.e. the selective containment and ordering of their elements, a sense of infinity and formlessness is preserved which Kant associates with the sublime. For Kant, nature is sublime in those phenomena whose comprehension surpasses any stretch of human imagination (§ 26). He names among those phenomena (§ 27):

> Bold, overhanging, and as it were threatening, rocks; clouds piled up in the sky, moving with lightning flashes and thunder peals; volcanoes in all their violence of destruction; hurricanes with their track of devastation; the boundless ocean in a state of tumult; the lofty waterfall of a mighty river, and such like; these exhibit our faculty of resistance as insignificantly small in comparison with their might.

Rocks and ocean such as those described by Kant are a prominent feature in *Leviathan,* as are the deserts and rocky peaks in all the other films, along with the recurrence of the compositional vanishing point, which, as spectacle, claim their own duration. When part of the spectacle, human beings are shown as minute in relation to the boundless landscape. Lylia and Roma, in *Leviathan,* are exemplary diminutive figures in relation to the endless ocean and the whale carcass; in *Winter Sleep,* the protagonist Aydın is first introduced to us as an insignificant figure against the magnitude of the surrounding rocks, and so are the tourists lodging in his hotel who form a thin winding line on top of the rocks (Figures 10.2, 10.3). In *Birds of Passage,* the vanishing point is stressed as such, by means of the parallel tracks of a disused railway on the desert, an artificial addition to the natural landscape apparently aimed at producing, precisely, a vanishing point, on which the ancestral matriarch, a grandmother raised from the dead in her granddaughter Zaida's dream, marches towards the infinite horizon (Figure 10.4). 'The *sertão* is everywhere' and 'the *sertão* is the size of the world', states the narrator of Guimarães Rosa's famous novel, *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands,* and indeed in *Bacurau* the boundless *sertão* is simply what there is, the entire world.

Thus, if processes of selection are necessarily carried out for the formation of landscapes, and further changes are introduced to them to suit the associated fictional narrative, landscapes in these films strongly contribute to the sense of totality or 'worldhood' as Yacavone (2014) has named it. Building upon and modifying what has traditionally been called diegetic and nondiegetic worlds, Yacavone distinguishes between the world 'in' a cinematic work, which is fundamentally representational and denotative, and the world 'of' it, which is connotative and presentational, including

Figures 10.2, 10.3 In *Winter Sleep,* Aydın is first introduced as an insignificant figure against the magnitude of the surrounding rocks, and so are the tourists who form a thin winding line on top of the rocks.

Figure 10.4 In *Birds of Passage,* the ancestral matriarch, raised from the dead, marches towards the infinite horizon.

Figure 10.5 *Timbuktu*: the orphaned adolescent Toya is a minute figure in the endless desert.

and enclosing the former. This connotative property, overflowing the representational world of fiction, could be attributed to the autonomous landscapes in the case studies here, in that they open up a path for fictional and objective reality to communicate. Let us have a look at how landscapes can indeed function as an all-enfolding more-than-fictional, i.e. cultural and historical world.

In *Timbuktu,* landscape is associated with life on it from the opening images, showing a gazelle running on the sand, its colour barely distinguished from the light-brown Sahel soil. Gunshots are heard and the next shots show a pick-up truck full of militia men firing at the gazelle. What comes next are, first, wooden masks piled up in the sand and being destroyed by gunshots fired off-frame, then wooden sculptures of men, women and children, some playing instruments, being equally shot at and turning to dust. As the film progresses, a Tuareg musician family is likewise destroyed, father Kidane and mother Satima killed and the orphaned adolescent daughter Toya turned into a minute figure running aimlessly in the endless desert (Figure 10.5). Thus landscape here is, from the outset, defined as origin and final destination of all life and culture, its connotative resonances extending beyond fiction to the radical Islamist group Ansar Dine who in 2012 took hold of the sacred city of Timbuktu and the surrounding area, destroying many of their mausolea, tombs and historical documents. The colour pattern and figurations in the film produce a near-total identity between landscape, city, animals and people, including the moment in which Ansar Dine leader Abdelkerim, in his unsatisfied lust for Satima, trims the bush between two dunes with gunshots, the dunes appearing to him (and to the spectator) as a naked female body, and the bush, her pubic hair (Figure 10.6). Any expert viewer will infer the postproduction effects that made these images possible, though their factual and historical connotations remain intact.

Figure 10.6 *Timbuktu*: Abdelkerim, in his unsatisfied lust for Satima, trims the bush between two dunes with gunshots, the dunes appearing to him as a naked female body.

This gun attack on the landscape as political act curiously chimes, albeit with a reverse meaning, with *Leviathan,* in which an outing among friends to a beauty spot away from Pribrezhny, gives them the opportunity not only to drown in vodka but also to exercise their fingers on target shooting with an impressive set of weaponry, including machine guns, using as targets empty bottles but also portraits of former leaders of the country.

In *Bacurau,* the worldhood of the *sertão* is signified on different levels. First as a forlorn, boundless scrubland, where the population of a tiny village, called Bacurau (or nighthawk), is starved of water by a scheming, self-serving populist mayor, Tony Jr, the 'junior' in his name indicating a lineage of reckless rulers. The village is yet another world in itself, collecting as it does all minorities of race (white, black, indigenous people), sex (gays, lesbians, transgenders and prostitutes) and social bandits, all of whom are unsuspectingly sold by the mayor to a group of invaders from the US, Europe and São Paulo (a wealthier state in the southeast of the country), practising human hunting for pleasure on the land. This kind of refugee camp, deleted from Google maps by the foreign hunters, is in fact constructed on what had been a *quilombo,* or one of the many settlements established by fugitive African slaves during colonial times, between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Though *quilombo* is not named as such in the film, an azimuth mark on the dirt ground, with the words 'protected by law, please do not remove', leads to the discovery of an underground bunker, testifying to this ancient history. This is where the population hides from the hunters' attack, and where the last of Bacurau's enemies will be buried alive.

If, in *Timbuktu,* the anthropomorphising of the land turns it into the maternal womb and final grave of all beings, in *Bacurau* the burial of an old matriarch, Carmelita, the genetrix of most of the local population, gives

origin to the story of the land itself. In this parodic sci-fi, whose future is a winding back to a time when humans went about naked and talked to plants, matriarchy is a haven of political correctness and general tolerance at war with a corrupt politician and foreign afficionados of gun culture. Given its connotations of political facts in present-day Brazil and of the current governmental support to gun violence in the United States, the film has been celebrated as a political manifesto. More encompassing and generally relevant, however, is the real history embedded in that land, a history of slavery and of social banditry, involving not only Pernambuco but all neighbouring northeastern states and enshrined in Bacurau's local museum, where pictures, documents and weapons from the *cangaceiros,* or social bandits of the early twentieth century, are stained with the blood of the current fighters.

Mixture of fact, fiction and cinephilic citations, *Bacurau* resonates with *Birds of Passage,* where the Wayúu are also governed by a matriarch, Úrsula Pushaina, redolent, as indicated by Cristina Gallego herself, of Úrsula Iguarán, the matriarch of Gabriel García Márquez's foundational magical-realist novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude.* Both films are structured in the form of oral storytelling by means of intradiegetic figures of bard singers, the bard in *Bacurau* being reminiscent of the *cordel* storyteller in Glauber Rocha's Cinema Novo landmark *Black God, White Devil* (*Deus e o diabo na terra do sol,* 1964). *Birds of Passages* is even divided into 'five songs': Wild Grass, The Graves, Prosperity, The War and Limbo. Drawing on oral tales of origin and death, these songs in turn open up for the retelling of the so-called 'Bonanza Marimbera', or the period between the 1960s and 1980s when indigenous populations in Colombia took the lead in drug trafficking, before it became the all-pervading belligerent business that continues to ravage the country up to today.

It has been said about *Birds of Passage* that:

> The colourful and rich indigenous culture shines in impacting images that move away from the western optic of commercial cinema. Nature, animals, skies, the soil, plants, everything shines and reverberates. Even death gains the sublime appearance of a bird and is perfectly attuned to the feeling of such a unique and precious film. (Chang 2019)

Beauty, nature and the sublime are certainly called for in this expansive landscape where humans merge with animals and these with the earth. As in *Timbuktu,* anthropomorphising is part of the world-making of the film and enacted from the beginning by the *yonna* courtship dance. Having emerged

Figure 10.7 *Birds of Passage*: Zaida performs the *yonna* courtship dance.

from her yearlong confinement as she reaches puberty, Zaida performs this dance to her village folks, donning a shiny red silk cape that she opens up on her stretched arms in the form of a giant bird floating in the wind, while moving forward with small steps to the beat of a drum (Figure 10.7). A suitor puts himself forward, the dazzling Rapayet, who marches backwards as she charges him, and survives the challenge without falling over. Still, he has to amass a hefty dowry of 30 goats, 20 cows and five precious necklaces for his marriage proposal to be accepted, and to that end initiates a marijuana traffic, first to quench the craving of hippies working as members of the American anti-communist Peace Corps, then selling wholesale to America via air traffic.

The ensuing violence that decimates the Wayúu clan, after some years of power and prosperity, is announced by birds which represent *yoluja,* or dead spirits, and appear in *Birds of Passage* as the living sign of the reality overflowing the fictional world. The marvellous but sinister blood-red *iishcoo,* or cardinal guajiro, is one of the unique specimens of that habitat, together with a wading bird which circles those about to die or already dead both in the characters' dreams and in their fictional reality. Beauty as bad omen is in fact the film's leitmotiv, one that chimes with the realisation of the impossibility of the inaccessible island of Utopia. In both *Birds of Passage* and in *Bacurau,* the perfectly integrated worldhood of fiction is torn apart by otherworldly invaders, bringing them, so to say, back to Earth and to the political issues of our time. The 'back-to-Earth' theme is in fact literally announced as such at the very beginning of *Bacurau,* which starts with an image of the Earth from outer space, including an orbiting satellite and other space detritus, before plunging into what is referred to as the Pernambucan *sertão*. The music, meanwhile, is 'Não identificado' (non-identified), by Caetano Veloso, about love as a UFO, and indeed the

otherworldly invaders will be heralded in Bacurau by a drone in the shape
of a flying saucer.

Thus, landscape in these films, selected and organised as it must be in
order to exist, points at and gives evidence of the vulnerability and finitude
of its worldhood, but also the indexical historic and political reality within
and beyond it.

The Reality of the Cave

Theorising cinema in connection with the world goes back a long way and
continues to attract strong research interest today. Tiago de Luca (2018:
19) identifies a 'ubiquitous trope' in world cinema, in the last two decades,
of depicting 'not a world, but the world'. De Luca goes on to connect this
trend, derived from the acceleration of globalisation in the digital age, to
the 'global imaginaries' that propelled the very emergence of cinema in the
nineteenth century. According to this vision, therefore, technology is what
impels cinema to represent, or even stand for, the entire world.

Both the questions of realism and totality, as enabled by the technology of
cinema, send us back to Bazin and his pioneering article 'The Myth of Total
Cinema' (1967). As Hassan (2017: 39) has persuasively argued, for Bazin 'the
time of cinema was quite simply the time of the drive to totality, amidst an
epochal experience of modernity as technologically driven dispersal and
democratization of history'. In formulating his concept of 'total cinema',
Bazin was most certainly inspired by science-fiction writer René Barjavel,
whose futuristic book-length essay *Cinéma total: essai sur les forms futures
du cinéma,* written in 1944, has only recently returned to the debate thanks
to the translation and exegesis of his work by Alfio Leotta (2018). Barjavel's
prophetic book imagined a time when technology would enable cinema,
in its relentless search for realism, to 'offer characters in full relief, in full
colour, and even perhaps whose perfume we can detect; a time when these
characters will be freed from the screens and the darkness of the film
theatres to step out into the city streets and the private quarters of their
audiences' (apud Leotta 2018: 375). 3D, 4D, augmented reality, expanded
cinema and even the liberation of film from the theatrical auditorium and
into other spaces including the streets and private homes were prefigured
in his book. Though he most certainly read Barjavel's book before writing
his own essay, Bazin, however, refrains from making any mentions of it.
One possible explanation for this advanced by Leotta (373, 380) is Barjavel's
dubious political credentials, as during the Second World War 'he was

associated with collaborationist intellectuals and publishers, and was himself suspected of collaborating with the Nazi invaders'. However, both Barjavel and Bazin resort to nineteenth-century pre-cinematic technical experiments to explain the human ambition to obtain a complete mimesis of the world, and while Barjavel declares that 'cinema does not yet exist', Bazin exclaims that 'cinema has not yet been invented!' (Leotta 2018: 375). Whatever the case, total cinema as prophesised by Barjavel and formulated as a 'myth' by Bazin continues to be 'a perfect illusion of the outside world in sound, color, and relief' (Bazin 1967: 20), rather than the outside world itself. Tom Gunning (2011: 122) notes that 'The Myth of Total Cinema' 'not only challenges traditional (and even subsequent) historiography but also highlights the fault line in Bazin's realism: its relation to illusion and deceit'. Gunning goes on to say that 'it is striking that nothing in "The Myth of Total Cinema" seems dependent on indexicality or even necessarily on photography', and my explanation of this is simply that here Bazin is not referring to realism as mode of production, but as mode of reception. As such, therefore, total cinema is simply the more advanced form of standard cinema as experienced by means of what Baudry (1986) famously defined as the 'basic cinematographic apparatus', involving the projector, the dark room and the collective audience, whose function is to produce an 'impression of reality', rather than reality itself.

Illusion is therefore at the base of all thought leading to the concept of 'total cinema'. However, illusion may not be as divorced from the phenomenological real as it may seem. Indeed, Baudry's theorising on the ideological effects of the basic cinematographic apparatus is aimed at identifying the moment at which, amidst 'copy, simulacrum, and even simulacrum of simulacrum', between the 'impression of the real' and 'more-than-the-real', truth finally occurs (1986: 299). To that end he resorts, in the first place, to the allegory of the cave, as found in Plato's *Republic* (n/d), in the form of a conversation between Socrates and Plato's brother, Glaucon. As already explained in Chapter 2, the allegory concerns prisoners chained to the wall of a cave who take for real living beings the magnified shadows of artefacts projected by a firelight behind them on a wall opposite them; the sounds produced by those manipulating the artefacts are likewise believed to emanate from the shadows. Therefore, for Baudry, Plato's allegory of the cave constituted the perfect prediction in the smallest detail of the workings of cinema. Now for Plato, of course, this was a thoroughly undesirable situation, and in this passage of *Republic,* Socrates leads Glaucon to understand the advantages of releasing the prisoners from their chains and exposing them, first, to the reality inside the cave and then to the sunlight outside it. As a

result, they can finally recognise the real world beyond the shadows in the cave and the benefits of enlightenment, that is, education. It is however a long process of learning involving pain and disappointment. The prisoners would initially be blinded by the glare of the fire inside the cave, then of the sun outside and, on occasion, wish they were back in their dark cave and looking at their familiar shadows.

In order to pinpoint where 'truth' actually lies, Baudry then resorts to Freud's concept of the unconscious and his call for the conscious mind to return to that obscure place within the 'mental apparatus', rather than liberating itself from it and searching for the light. Here, Baudry points to a similarity in Plato's and Freud's lines of thought in that both encourage their subjects to look at the apparatus and identify its workings in order to recognise the reality of the trick in the first place. What most fascinates Baudry about Freud's definition of the 'mental apparatus' is again, as in Plato, its similarity to cinema. He demonstrates, in fact, that a kind of cinematic apparatus was embedded in Freud's oeuvre as a whole, from his early *Interpretation of Dreams,* written in 1899, to his late *An Outline of Psychoanalysis,* written 41 years later, and cites the following passage from it:

> I [Freud] propose simply to follow the suggestion that we should picture the instrument which carries out our mental functions as resembling a compound microscope or a photographic apparatus, or something of the kind. On that basis, psychical locality will correspond to a point inside the apparatus at which one of the preliminary stages of an image comes into being. In the microscope and telescope, as we know, these occur in part at ideal points, regions in which no tangible component to the apparatus is situated. I see no necessity to apologize for the imperfections of this or of any similar imagery. (apud Baudry 1986: 300)

Considering that Baudry extends the definition of the basic cinematographic apparatus from the recording of images to the moment of its reproduction, the middle point in the microscope or telescope in which an image emerges in the unconscious, according to Freud, could be compared with the moment of truth of a film, though for Baudry this would be purely the moment of the revelation of the reality of the apparatus itself. But could this not also be the moment where evidence of reality, in the form of images and sounds, is collected, a revelatory moment whose truth shines through the entire piece of work, despite all artifice resorted to in a film at both production and postproduction stages?

This question gives me the opportunity for a reflection on *Winter Sleep,* in which the allegory of the cave materialises in two literal caves, serving respectively for a character to abscond from reality and for reality itself to abscond. With clear affiliation to Russian realist literature (see Mathew 2019 in this respect), the film is a self-reflexive meditation on the role of the artist when faced with social issues in the objective world. The central character is Aydın (meaning 'intellectual' in Turkish), a retired actor turned writer, who contributes a regular column to a local newspaper while compiling data for his future magnum opus on the history of Turkish theatre. He is the owner of a hotel, suggestively called Othello, at the top of one of the rocky peaks in Cappadocia where he lives with his much younger wife, Nihal, and divorced sister, Necla. He is also the wealthy heir of many properties in the region.

Aydın works in a study adjacent to his hotel, a repurposed cave inside the top of a rock, from where his eyes command the portentous landscape outside. There he spends most of his time immersed in his literary fantasy, which he occasionally shares with visitors, including his semi-estranged wife and disgruntled sister, whose favourite pastime is to accuse him of 'lack of realism' and inability to see beyond his acting mask. Miles below him, in another cave at the bottom of the mountains, lives the Hodja family, one of his tenants, consisting of unemployed miner and ex-prisoner İsmail, his mother, wife Levda, pre-teen son İlyas and brother Hamdi, an Imam. The Hodjas are going through extreme financial difficulties, living out of the imam's meagre resources and standing in long arrears with the rent. Aydın wouldn't have taken any notice of this family, were it not for young İlyas throwing a stone and breaking the window of his pick-up truck, as he drives on an errand with his chauffeur Hidayet. Hidayet runs after the boy, picks him up just as he accidentally falls into a freezing stream and brings him back to the family. Aydın watches from a distance as Hidayet returns İlyas to his resentful father and is horrified with all the scrap metal and rubbish strewn on what should have been the front garden of the house. This offence to Aydın's aesthetic sense confirms the assessment contained in one of his most popular press articles, 'Urban Ugliness in Anatolia'. This is however just the spilling out of the ugly reality of the Hodjas' cave house that Aydın refuses to approach.

One day, Aydın's wife, Nihal, visits the Hodjas in secret, believing that her husband has gone to Istanbul. She brings with her a great sum of money that Aydın had contributed, rather begrudgingly, to her charity work. Nihal's intention is to donate the money to the needy family, seemingly without realising the enormity of her offer, which could even buy a new house for them. She also has no idea of the outrage her entering the house, clearly against the will of the much-obliging imam, can cause. Her beauty, her loose

long hair in a pious Muslim home, her independence from her husband who the imam expected to be with her, her wealth emanating from every single detail in her attire and attitude, all is a silent act of aggression in a house which has been stripped of its fridge and TV set by the police, on behalf of Aydın's lawyers. Nihal also has to confront Ilyas, suffering from pneumonia after his fall in the freezing stream, who does his homework with a blanket over his shoulders. What she imagined to be a magnanimous gesture is received with indignation by İsmail, a regular drunk and troublemaker, who, to Nihal's horror, throws the money into the flames of the fireplace. The falling of the masks here with the sudden revelation of the unbridgeable gulf between the classes is all the more effective for taking place in the womb-like cave excavated in the rock, the unappealing interior of the dazzling landscape outside, and as effective in the fictional plot as it is in the indexical reality of a vertical society engraved in the natural design of the rocky landscape. The image of the money burning in the fireplace is one that lasts on the screen, resonating with the glaring effect of the fire on the prisoners in Plato's cave as they come to apprehend the treacherous workings of the apparatus of fiction and the truth about their own unconsciousness.

The Reality of the Myth

It is now time to return to Bazin and consider the ways in which he sought to connect total cinema and realism, before delving into my last filmic case study, *The Story of the Weeping Camel.* At the origin of Bazin's article, 'The Myth of Total Cinema' (1967: 21), is the publication of Georges Sadoul's monumental history of cinema, *Histoire génerale du cinéma: L'Invention du cinéma.* What most intrigues Bazin in this book is its description of the invention of cinema, led by obsessive handymen, rather than men of science. In this, and in defiance of Sadoul's staunch Marxist convictions that inform his book, Bazin explains this as a reversal of the Marxist order of causality going from the economic infrastructure to the ideological superstructure, concluding instead that the technical invention of cinema comes 'second in importance to the preconceived ideas of the inventors' (Bazin 1967: 17). He says:

> The cinema is an idealistic phenomenon. The concept men had of it existed so to speak fully armed in their minds, as if in some platonic heaven, and what strikes us most of all is the obstinate resistance of matter to ideas rather than of any help offered by techniques to the imagination of the researchers. (17)

Despite this reversal, Bazin's view continues to be evolutionist, in line with his belief that all technical innovations in the audiovisual media would ultimately benefit realism. Thus, the silent and the sound film were 'stages of a technical development that little by little made a reality out of the original "myth"', this myth being 'an integral realism, a recreation of the world in its own image' (21). However, as Angela Dalle Vacche (2020: 59-60) reminds us, even if he 'pays close attention to technical innovations, for Bazin the person behind the camera and the world in front of it count much more than mechanical virtuosity displaying itself for its own sake'. This is why technological progress will do nothing but take us closer to where it all started: the moment when cinema had not yet been technically invented (Bazin 1967: 21). What Bazin offers by coming full circle, I wish to claim, is the encounter with reality at the opposite end of the illusionist reception, that is, at the point of the film's production. Let us now turn to my final case study in order to explain how this might be confirmed in practice.

The Story of the Weeping Camel was scripted and directed by Byambasuren Davaa and Luigi Falorni, who were at the time film students in the Hochschüle für Fernsehen und Film, or the School of Television and Film (HFF) in Munich, venturing for the first time into the feature-length format. Crew, cast and equipment were thus restricted to the bare minimum to fit their stringent budget, with just the essential footage of 16mm celluloid stock, allowing for hardly any reshoots or waste. Hence Davaa and Falorni's colossal achievement, rather than owing to sophisticated techniques, is entirely thanks to their 'idea', which finally bent the 'obstinate resistance of matter', to use Bazin's vocabulary. The original story came from Davaa's memories of an ancient legend, described in a short educational film she had watched as a child in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia, about the *hoos* ritual. This involves playing the *murin khuur,* a kind of two-stringed violin, that brings a mother camel to tears and makes her reconcile with the offspring she initially rejects. As Farloni explains (Winter 2004), the film was entirely scripted in Munich, before the crew embarked on their 23-day expedition in the desert during the camel birthing season in the month of March, in order to verify the efficacy of the ritual. By a stroke of luck, they found an intact family of four generations, living in three adjacent *gers* (Mongolian tents), owners of 300 sheep and goats and 60 camels, and, in their company, were able to witness the birth of some 20 camels. At long last, one colt, a rare albino, was born after a prolonged labour and rejected by his mother. Even more astonishingly, the mother camel eventually reconciled with her colt after undergoing the *hoos* ritual, an indispensable development for the film to exist.

Figure 10.8 *The Story of the Weeping Camel*: the mother camel's delivery of her colt is finally completed with the help of several members of the protagonist family.

That Davaa and Falorni would succeed so thoroughly in their endeavour, by obtaining full real-life evidence of the legend, is nothing short of a miracle. In fact, the entire film is a collection of miracles, not least the birth and survival of the albino colt, after the camel's two days of excruciating labour, during which the colt's front legs and head remained stuck outside her for hours. The delivery is finally completed with the help of several members of the family (Figure 10.8), but after so much pain the mother refuses to welcome and breast-feed the baby. This unique event of birth is only comparable to death in its irrefutable reality that can never be represented, i.e. repeated, but only re-presented onscreen. This combines with the animals' behaviour which, though scripted, happened entirely spontaneously in front of the astounded crew. Falorni talks about the 'choreography' between the mother camel and her abandoned colt, who desperately approaches her for milk and is repeatedly kicked away (Winter 2004) in the vast desert landscape. The camera was able to capture all this by mere chance, given that, as Falorni discovered, 'it is impossible to direct a camel' (Winter 2004).

Cut and reduced though it may be, this reality is, nonetheless, cosmogonic. In her reading of the film in light of ecocriticism and consilience, St Ours (2011: 397) highlights the 'interdependence of a nomadic people and their domesticated animals within the natural environment upon which both rely for survival'. Indeed, the universe the film confronts us with is composed of inextricably connected elements where the undulating mountains in the horizon of the vast desert mirror the shape of the humps of camels in the foreground (Figure 10.9). Similarly, the sheep with their lambs and camels

Figure 10.9 *The Story of the Weeping Camel*: the undulating mountains in the horizon of the vast desert mirror the shape of the humps of camels in the foreground.

with their fillies and colts entertain mother-child relations identical to those of humans. They are even interchangeable, when a mother, Ogdoo, after feeding her own child, Guntee, feeds the abandoned colt with a bullhorn full of milk. As much as the baby camel, tied to a post, wails in seeing his mother retreat into the desert, baby Guntee screams when she is tied to the leg of a bench in her great-grandmother's *ger* when Ogdoo goes out to work. At the end of the film, before the rolling credits, all characters are introduced to the viewers with medium close-ups and their respective names, in the manner of a slideshow, including Ingen Temee and Botok, the mother camel and her albino colt, who close the presentation in a hilarious frontal shot (Figure 10.10). St Ours (2011) declines to address this procedure in terms of anthropomorphism or anthropocentrism, which are unwelcome terms in ecocriticism. Indeed, what is at play here is much rather a perfect totality of equivalent and complementary elements.

All of this is constructed, evidently, by the expert manipulation of script, camera and editing, which manages to present four generations of a single family living in perfect harmony, all healthy and active, without riffs, jealousy or malevolence, equitably engaged in the house and land work, running the mill, cooking, weaving, breeding, shearing the animals and warmly entertaining occasional guests. Their benevolence towards the animals and their environment is boundless, to the point of this fundamentally carnivore society never once being shown eating meat, but only their milk products and accompanying sweets. Likewise, their ritualistic habits are shared with equally good-willed neighbouring people in collective ceremonies in honour

Figure 10.10 *The Story of the Weeping Camel*: Ingen Temee and Botok are presented at the end as members of the cast, in a hilarious frontal shot.

of nature and its protective spirits. In short, landscape and its human and non-human animal societies live here in utopian peace and harmony similar to that found in *Bacurau,* though without any of the violent disruption and carnage that affect the latter. In all this, selection, composition and, not least, manipulation become evident.

As much as with the other cases examined here, this harmony is entirely dependent on idealistic isolation, on the inaccessible quality of that spot in the vast desert, together with its sparse population. This is how their worldhood is constructed and emphasised at regular intervals with extended shots of the boundless desert, which claims a spectacular time of its own. The interdependence of isolation and harmony is, indeed, stressed by the film producer, Tobias Sieber (apud Winter 2004), who appropriately resorts to the metaphor of a boat in the sea to explain this situation:

> We were at the end of nowhere. It was a four-hour drive from the nearest city. We didn't have a shower. It was a bit like being on a small boat – we were surrounded by endless space but had to pack together in one tiny little place, so it was important that everyone got along.

There is, however, an important suggestion of the encroachment of modernity which places this cosmic harmony under threat, though this is also presented as a natural development. Little Ugna insists on accompanying his older brother Dude on a trip to the nearest urban settlement, Aimak, 50 kilometres away, on camelback, in order to fetch a player of *murin khuur*

to perform the *hoos* ritual. He is so small that he needs to be helped by an adult onto the back of a sitting camel, and yet he demonstrates himself to be an excellent and self-confident rider, in a film where any stunts would be unimaginable. As a representative of the young generation, Ugna is also the one most attracted to the novelties of TV, computer games and ice-cream he becomes acquainted with in Aimak, and it is in his honour that the film ends with the installation of a solar panel and a satellite dish on their *ger,* to power a new TV set inside, signalling perhaps the approaching end of their harmonic lifestyle.

The Story of the Weeping Camel is an oral as much as aural tale. It starts, like *Birds of Passage,* with an elderly storyteller establishing the narrative grounds by retelling the legend of the camel who lent its antlers to a deer and is now forever contemplating the horizon, waiting for the deer to return with his antlers. More than the tale itself, it is the great grandfather's voice and pleasant-sounding Mongolian language that is the focus. Most strikingly, there is perfect harmony between the sound of the wind, the wailing camels and the human singing and playing, which makes the most part of the soundtrack in this rather laconic film. It is also sound that brings the film to its climax. We had already been given ample demonstration of the soothing effect of human sounds and singing, through the family members making an effective 'aah' sound to summon up and calm down the camels, and Ogdoo's beautiful lullaby that sends Guntee to sleep. The onomatopoeic *hoos* ritual then gives us a full display of orchestral harmony between nature, animals and humans.

It starts with the grandfather tying the *khadag* (a blue silk scarf used in sacred ceremonies) (St Ours 2004: 400) to the *murin khuur* and hanging it on the mother camel's front hump. As the wind makes the *murin khuur*'s strings vibrate, the camel, until now very agitated, suddenly calms down and her fearful grunts turn into a more continuous and low pitch mooing in tune with the *murin khuur*'s vibrations. These sounds, together with some dogs barking and the little colt's wailing in the background, make a strangely attuned ensemble. Ogdoo then starts to sing the *hoos* acapella, while stroking the camel's hair on the side of her neck. After a while the violin joins in, at which point we see alternate shots and reverse shots of her hands stroking the camel's hair and the violinist's bow running over the horsehair strings. In the meantime, the entire family and all camels around look at the scene in complete silence, as if hypnotised. The colt is finally brought close to his mother and gradually dares to approach her teats and start suckling. The camera then offers close-ups of the tears that well up to the mother's eyes and fly in the wind. The whole process, extending for

around six hours in reality, is shown in the film in c. 10 minutes of edited stock. However, each of the takes and accompanying sounds burst with irrefutable reality, one that could not possibly be fabricated.

Falorni calls this genre of film a 'narrative documentary', though, as we know, most documentaries are narrative in one or the other way. In fact, *The Story of the Weeping Camel* makes up a genre in its own right, one in which fiction enters in perfect symbiosis with fact. This total realism, through which technology comes second to the idea, is, however, not meant to be experienced as complete illusionism at the point of exhibition and reception, but to be recognised as such at the point of the film's production. No matter how much construction and editing reduced the 23 days of shooting to the final 86-minute film, its core event of truth, the mother camel who, to the sound of music, finally sheds tears and accepts her initially rejected colt, provides an unpredictable and undeniable proof of the reality of an ancestral legend, which, as such, brings the film back to the moment when it had not yet been invented.

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Index

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Index compiled by Judith Acevedo.

This book presents the bold and original proposal to replace the general appellation of 'world cinema' with the more substantive concept of 'realist cinema'. Veering away from the usual focus on modes of reception and spectatorship, it locates instead cinematic realism in the way films are made. The volume is structured across three innovative categories of realist modes of production: 'non-cinema', or a cinema that aspires to be life itself; 'intermedial passages', or films that incorporate other artforms as a channel to historical and political reality; and 'total cinema', or films moved by a totalising impulse, be it towards the total artwork, total history or universalising landscapes. Though mostly devoted to recent productions, each part starts with the analysis of foundational classics, which have paved the way for future realist endeavours, proving that realism is timeless and inherent in cinema from its origin.

Lúcia Nagib is Professor of Film at the University of Reading. Her many books include *World Cinema and the Ethics of Realism* and *Brazil on Screen: Cinema Novo, New Cinema, Utopia*. She is the co-director of the feature-length documentary film *Passages* (2019).

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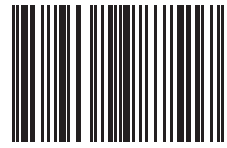
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