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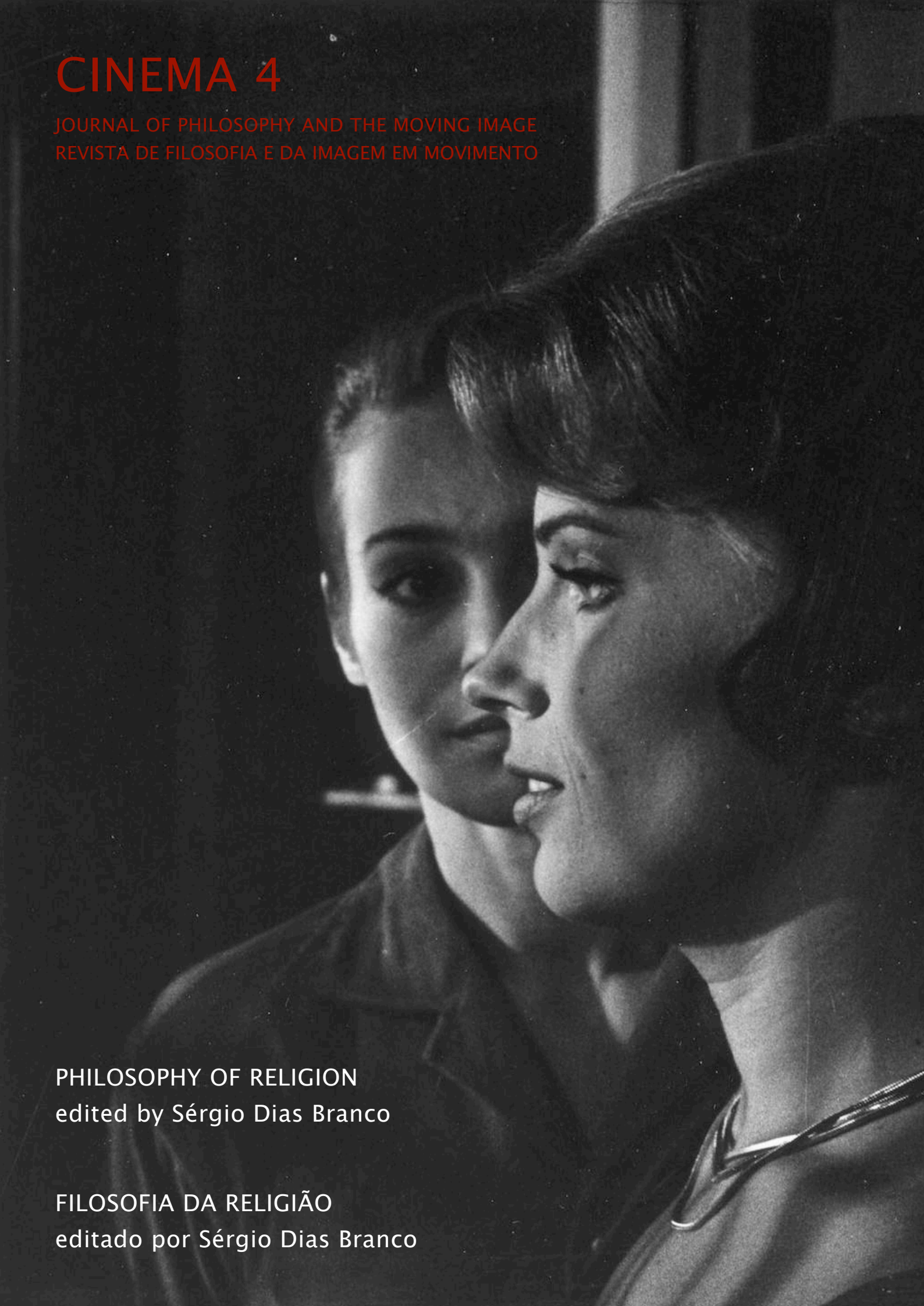

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edited by Sérgio Dias Branco

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EDITORIAL:
CINEMA, RELIGION, AND THEIR PHILOSOPHICAL THINKING

The fourth issue of *Cinema: Journal of Philosophy and the Moving Image* addresses philosophy of religion as a topic and its intersections with cinematic art. In the field of film studies, film and religion have been fruitfully combined as research subject matters. Scholars interested in this combination have focused on periods like that when the Motion Picture Production Code was in place in Hollywood, on films informed by specific religious traditions like Mohsen Makhmalbaf's Sufi-inspired *The Silence* (*Sokout*, 1998), on theoretical approaches such as feminism that problematize works like Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves* (1996), among other options open to researchers. Cinema and philosophy have also had a productive relationship in recent years. Different philosophical fields have addressed the moving image, from the philosophy of art to the philosophy of mind, yet philosophy of religion has been a field lacking in this discussion. This issue contributes to attenuate this absence.

Cinematic art and religion have been thought philosophically, either argumentatively or reflectively, even if not in tandem. This philosophical thinking calls for some distinctions, particularly within the realm of religion — but also within the sphere of art. For instance, it is worth differentiating between philosophy of religion and theology, in the same way that philosophy of art is differentiated from aesthetics, since they can be easily confused or conflated. In the words of Paul Tillich,

> Philosophy of religion is the theory of the religious function and its categories. Theology is the normative and systematic presentation of the concept of "religion." The cultural history of religion acts as a bridge between philosophy of religion and theology. It grasps critically the individual realizations of the concept of religion in history and thereby leads on to a special systematic solution of its own (which can be solution of a group, a "school," or a church). [...] The separation of philosophy of religion and theology is no better founded than the separation of philosophy of art and normative aesthetics, or moral philosophy and normative ethics. [...] And wherever theses separations are made, the mutual dependence of the elements persists, even if it is not recognized. Every theol-

> ogy is dependent upon the presupposition of a concept of the essence of religion. Every philosophy of religion is dependent upon a concept of the norm of religion. And both are dependent upon the comprehension of the cultural-historical material.[1]

This inscribes religion in human history and culture, presenting a panorama in which essence and norm cannot be mistaken for essentialism and normativism. Different definitions of essence and norms co-exist in religion and also within the boundaries of a specific religion — because unity and uniformity are not synonyms. The same can be said about art and cinema, if we call to mind the contrasting ontological views on film and the diverse guiding principles of film movements. Theology as the systematic development of religious practices and articulations does not limit itself to a theistic conception of God (that is, of God conceived as a being that intervenes in the world, shaping its history, and responding to prayerful requests). Buddhism, for example, does not talk about God as such, even though it uses comparable concepts — enlightenment/salvation, for instance. Yet even within those that do use such a term, there have been various understandings of it which are non-theistic and may involve a dialogue with theologians like Tillich,[2] with mystic poets like Angelus Silesius,[3] or with Marxist philosophers like Ernst Bloch.[4]

These considerations about religion connect with cinema in two different ways in this issue. The first group of articles engage with five major religious traditions: Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Taoism, and Christianity. All of them tackle significant topics within the realm of philosophy of religion through film: identity, tradition, experience, emptiness and emptying, and love. Shai Biderman focuses on the Marx Brothers' Jewish cinema and discusses the hermeneutics and reasoning in Judaism as tending towards the absurd, bordering on the absurdist. Daniel Bradley juxtaposes *Up in the Air* (2009) and *Avatar* (2009) to unveil a contemporary need for the sacred considering it through Hossein Nasr's Muslim take on tradition. Anuradha Chandra uses *Khargosh* (2008) to exemplify the similarities between the concept of *dhvani* (suggestion, resonance) associated with Kasmir Saivism, a Hindu strand, and the phenomenology of film experience. Amir Vodka connects kung fu cinema with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's processes of becoming made of intensities and forces that forgo actualisation and Tao's concept of emptiness. Earl Valdez analyses how Ingmar Bergman's film trilogy of faith — *Through a Glass Darkly* (*Såsom i en spegel*, 1961), *Winter Light* (*Natt-*

vardsgästerna, 1962), and *Silence* (*Tystnaden*, 1963) — addresses divine silence and God as experienced through love, in the vein of Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenological theology.

The second set of articles tackle particular topics within a philosophical approach to film where religion is crucial. Catarina Maia leans on George Bataille to discuss sacrificial rituals and the possibility of the sacred in João César Monteiro's cinema, through the humorous, the erotic, and the poetic. Emmanuel Levinas and Amédé Ayfre provide Inês Gil with a framework to inquire into a spiritual film style that eschews explicitly religious themes, as Sergei Loznitsa's *In the Fog* (*V tumane*, 2012) shows. Warwick Mules relies on Friedrich Schleiermacher to make a claim for Terrence Malick's film *The Tree of Life* (2011) as a post-religious film that breaks with the conventions of melodrama. Frédéric Marteau and Christophe Becker examine how cinema rethinks otherness and sameness, humanism and barbarism, centring on cannibalism and its symbolic link with the Thomist understanding of transubstantiation. Aaron Taylor meditates on Hannibal Lecter as a film character and the sympathy it provokes, using Friedrich Nietzsche's writings to see how his cruelty is connected with kindness, fostering moral revaluation.

My conversation with P. Adams Sitney is a fitting complement to these texts. It reiterates two thoughts that the articles, together as well as separately, elicit: that there are many open doors in the meeting between the moving image and philosophy of religion, but also that there are countless doors that remain shut. In this sense, what follows is simultaneously a developed exploration of this interaction in different directions and a mere glimpse. Film and religion scholars and philosophers should take this inviting issue as an invitation.

THIS ISSUE'S EDITOR

Sérgio Dias Branco

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1. Paul Tillich, *What Is Religion?*, trans. James Luther Adams (1969; New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973), p. 33.

2. See, e.g., Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

3. See, e.g., Angelus Silesius, *The Cherubinic Wanderer*, trans. Maria Shrady (1657; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1986).

4. See, e.g., Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*, trans. J. T. Swann, 2nd edn. (1968; London: Verso, 2009).

ABSTRACTS

A NIGHT AT THE OPERA OF TALMUDIC REASONING: THE "JEWISHNESS" OF JEWISH CINEMA

Shai Biderman (Tel Aviv University)

Jewish cinema is a hybrid concept which invites a multitude of interpretations. It can stand for an anthropological or cultural classification, as well as for historical or film-studies perspectives. While all these are valid paths into the nature of the phenomenon, I find the most revealing path to be that which explores Jewish logic and argumentative techniques, as they appear in predominant Jewish texts.

Hence, my main contention rests on a unique analysis of Talmudic reasoning. I detect a paradigmatic inclination, which underlines the Talmudic argumentation and reasoning, which can be characterized as leaning towards the absurd and as a thematic challenge to conventional logic and traditional argumentation. Once established, I use the films of the Marx brothers to demonstrate the way by which Jewish films are uniquely defined by the way they embrace smarty argumentation and subversive reasoning, to create a unique (and challenging) cinematic point of view.

Keywords: argumentation, hermeneutics, Jewish cinema, Judaism, logic and reasoning, the Marx Brothers.

FROM *UP IN THE AIR* TO THE ROOTS OF *AVATAR*'S TREE OF SOULS: HOSSEIN NASR'S ISLAMIC TRADITIONALISM AND THE HOPE FOR WESTERN FUTURES GROUNDED IN THE SACREDNESS OF THE EARTH

Daniel Bradley (Gonzaga University)

In the first half of this article I situate *Up in the Air* (2009) and *Avatar* (2009) within the recent preoccupation in English language cinema with reflections on the future. I then argue that a juxtaposition of Ryan Bingham's world of detachment and isolation, lived in airports and ho-

tels, with the rich and interconnected life of the Na'vi on Pandora powerfully evokes the contemporary need, crucial for any discussion about our possibilities for the future, to overcome alienation by recovering our understanding of the sacredness of the world. In the second half of the article I take up the suggestion, implicit in *Avatar*, that perhaps it will be the peoples in actual battle with Western forces that can provide a model for this renewed encounter with the sacred. This cannot be true in any facile sense, for often the philosophies of so-called fundamentalist Islam that have inspired the fiercest resistance to European and North American capitalist imperialism, prove to be merely the sterile inverse of Western modernity, in which both sides share a common decoupling of the sacred and the profane. However, within the societies of the Middle East we also see a much deeper and richer current of traditionalist Islam that does maintain a powerful connection to the sacredness of the world and thereby may provide an invaluable dialogue partner for recovering the sacred and renewing our hopes for the future. To support this claim and to begin the dialogue for which I am arguing, I then give a sympathetic reading of Hossein Nasr's assertion that it is the commitment to tradition in his strand of Islam that could be of value to a Western world that seems to be yearning for the goods that he believes are deeply intertwined with traditional practice. In his view, tradition grounds the encounter with the sacred in three main ways. First, the exegesis of scripture within a traditional framework reveals that every act of knowing involves an inner illumination by which the human mind participates in the divine intellect. Second, tradition as the handing down of divine truth places this personal experience of divine intellect within a historical and geographical context, thus revealing the worldly aspect of inner illumination. Third, within the bounds of tradition the things in their sensuous materiality can reveal their richly sacramental nature as transcendent symbols manifesting the divine.

Keywords: alienation, Hossein Nasr, Islam, James Cameron, Jason Reitman, sacred.

REVISITING *DHVANI* IN THE CONTEXT OF THE AESTHETICS OF EXPERIENCE IN FILM

Anuradha Chandra (Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay)

In India, film and religion have always been very closely aligned. Early cinema in India was focused on stories from Indian mythology specially stories with religious significance — for

example, the life of Krishna, Sri Pundalik, and Raja Harish Chandra. In more recent years, the concept of *darshana* with its religious connotations has been related to the place that cinema occupies in the national conscience with reference to the role of the "gaze" in Indian cinema; temples dedicated to super stars in the country are a case in point.

In this article I will address a more implicit relationship between religion and film, through the study of a 2008 film in Hindi, *Khargosh*. The film at first simply seems to be a coming-of-age story. But on further exploration it comes through as exploring an image of transcendence in immanence, a central idea in monistic Kashmir Saivism.

Anandavardhana, an important acharya of monistic Kasmir Saivism lived in the second half of the 9th century. He proposed the concept of *dhvani vada*, the philosophy of aesthetic suggestion. *Dhvani* is a key idea in Indian aesthetics. Abhinavgupta, a century later, added important elements to the theory of *Dhvani,* through his ideas of *camatkara* (rapture*)* and *alaukika* (other-worldly*)*. This article will locate the idea of *dhvani* viz-a-viz phenomenological approaches to studying films. A close study of the film *Khargosh* will show how it creates meaning through an "aesthetics of experience" versus an "aesthetics of representation".

The film explores ideas of faith, loneliness and rapture or *camatkara*, an experience of transcendence. I argue that the key idea of *Khargosh* is located in the idea of transcendence in immanence, an approach to spirituality through being in the world more fully rather than through a forsaking of it. The film *Khargosh*, through both its form and content, works to embody the concept of *dhvani* as an aesthetic form of the philosophy of Kasmir Saivism. The article will conclude with the proposition that the concept of *dhvani* can be useful in studying films at large; specially films that share a similar mode of address or cinematic language, an "aesthetics of experience."

Keywords: aesthetics, *dhvani,* experience, film, Hinduism, phenomenology.

THE TAO OF BWO: DELEUZIAN BECOMINGS IN KUNG FU CINEMA

Amir Vodka (University of Amsterdam)

This paper attempts to explore kung fu not just as a fighting technique but as a mode of perception and thought, an image of film and mind. Through kung fu cinema I ask to underline

a relationship between the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and Taoism, established by a link between the concept of the Body without Organs (BwO), which Deleuze and Guattari describe as the zero degree of intensity, and Tao's concept of emptiness.

Deleuze and Guattari described the BwO as unformed matter, a bodily plane which renders the organs formless. "The organs distribute themselves on the BwO, but they distribute themselves independently of the form of the organism; forms become contingent, organs are no longer anything more than intensities that are produced, flows, thresholds, and gradients." Taoism, I argue, forms its own kind of BwO. *Tao* translates as "the way," that is, a plane of movement, which is defined by Lao Tzu as "the shape that has no shape, the image that is without substance." The Tao is conceptualized as emptiness that is the generative ontological process through which all things arise and pass away. Once we inhabit the sourceless source of Tao, we are no longer bound to a concrete form ("man," "woman" or even "human") but become what Deleuze and Guattari call "haecceity," subjectless intensities that spin out of the BwO without ever actualizing an organism.

In order to inhabit the BwO, Kung fu masters often pass through a stage of what appears as masochism. The second part of this paper deals with this apparent masochistic tendency and its justifications from a Deleuzian/Taoist perspective. The concept of BwO is by definition a process of becoming. Deleuze and Guattari describe many becomings, all connected to each other: "On the near side, we encounter becomings-woman, becomings-child […]. On the far side, we find becoming-elementary, -cellular, -molecular, and even becoming-imperceptible." The third part of this paper examines the recurrent theme of becoming-animal in kung fu cinema, while the fourth and last part deals with the notion of perceiving the imperceptible in contemporary virtual kung fu cinema.

Keywords: Deleuze and Guattari, kung fu cinema, Taoism.

SILENCE AS THE SPACE FOR LOVE: BERGMAN'S TRILOGY AND THE ABSENCE OF GOD

Earl Allyson P. Valdez (Ateneo de Manila University)

Among the works of the iconic filmmaker Ingmar Bergman, his famous trilogy of films consisting of *Through a Glass Darkly* (*Såsom i en spegel*, 1961), *Winter Light* (*Nattvardsgästerna*, 1962)

and *Silence* (*Tystnaden*, 1963) became the subject of much intrigue and controversy from a religious standpoint. These three films portray different situations which refer to God's withdrawal from the human being, which is something that challenges the human being's faith and his view of God. Given this, Bergman asks: *What shall the believer do when God withdraws Himself, out of one's reach?* This work answers the question by pointing out that God's silence provides the space to experience God in another way, making Himself manifest in the relationships that exist between human beings. Through Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenological investigation of Divine Revelation and religious experience, this work interprets God's silence as a withdrawing that manifests God as otherwise than Being, surpassing the human being's metaphysical view of God centered on mere presence and within human categories. This withdrawal eventually calls the human being to dwell on that silence and be open to God's revelation, in his own ways and according to His own terms. And given that God reveals Himself as Love, what Bergman points out that only in the exercise of love for others and the nurturance of meaningful relationships can God, in His silence, be truly experienced.

Keywords: Christianity, divine silence, Ingmar Bergman, Jean-Luc Marion, phenomenological theology.

A LINGUAGEM E OS RITOS SACRIFICIAIS NO CINEMA DE JOÃO CÉSAR MONTEIRO [THE LANGUAGE AND SACRIFICIAL RITES IN THE CINEMA OF JOÃO CÉSAR MONTEIRO]

Catarina Maia (University of Coimbra)

João César Monteiro shares with George Bataille many ideas, perhaps one could even say that they share a certain worldview where violence has not abandoned us, but remains a part of our DNA. We are fierce beings, wounded beings in search of a lost continuity. For both authors, only through violence can we communicate with that which is outside of the immediate, the useful, outside the sphere of knowledge.

In this article we will be exploring the tensions between the profane and the sacred, a central dichotomy in Bataille's thinking, something that instigates the movement in which the violence of the sacrifice of blood is transferred in all its intensity to the field of lan-

guage and words are shown capable of opening wounds in reality. Shepherded by Christianity, this is symptomatic of the plastic impulse of sacrificial rites and of the performative power of words and art. In the particular case of the work of Monteiro, we will analyse how his films can serve the experience of continuity, putting us in communication with the sacred.

The experiences of laughter, eroticism, or poetry, also known as *sovereign* experiences (i.e., independent of the rational and instrumental logic of language that governs our daily lives), are presented as the last bastions of the sacred in modern societies. These are the manifestations César Monteiro explores in his work as discourses of not-knowing, which as experiences of continuity can only be known through our participation in the excess that characterizes his cinema.

Keywords: communication, Georges Bataille, João César Monteiro, language, sacred, transgression.

APPROCHES D'UN STYLE SPIRITUEL AU CINÉMA : *DANS LA BRUME* DE SERGEI LOZNITSA

[APPROACHES TO A SPIRITUAL STYLE IN FILM: SERGEI LOZNITSA'S *IN THE FOG*]

Inês Gil (Lusófona University)

The relationship between cinema and religion has always existed. Film history is littered with explicitly religious films and implicitly spiritual films. It is this second category that interests us because it never imposes, but proposes.

How can we define the spiritual style of a film? Is there a spiritual cinematographic style? How does it manifest? Several theorists, Amédée Ayfre, Robert Bresson, Susan Sontag and Paul Schrader tried to answer this difficult question, because the spiritual is an intangible concept and still *in becoming*. We propose to analyze their thoughts and see how it is possible to apply them to the very spiritual *In the Fog* (*V tumane*, 2012) directed by Sergei Loznitsa, involving the issue of the ethics of the other proposed by Levinas which is inseparable from the aesthetic of the film.

Keywords: Emmanuel Levinas, realism, Robert Bresson, Sergei Loznitsa, spiritual style.

HOW FILM CAN CARRY BEING: FILM MELODRAMA AND TERRENCE MALICK'S *THE TREE OF LIFE* AS A POST-RELIGIOUS FILM

Warwick Mules (University of Queensland)

This paper argues that Terrence Malick's film *The Tree of Life* (2011) can be read as a post-religious film that offers its audience an experience of the "beyond" of the non-cinematic real. In order to make this argument, the paper employs Schleiermacher's concept of religious experience as the beyond of human existence, experienced in moments of openness to the infinite-divine otherwise blocked in the natural state of finite human being. In western culture, cinematic experience is enclosed within the apparatus of melodrama, serving a quasi-religious function by offering audiences an amelioration of human existence in a world from which God has withdrawn. Hollywood melodrama subjectifies the audiences' belief in the moral good within the mythic presentation of a world defined by ideals of historical progress linked to the power of industrialised capitalism and the nation state. The cinematic real is simply this reality presented as an experience of an ameliorated state of being unfolding in the film melodrama itself. Terrence Malick's film *The Tree of Life* breaks with the apparatus of melodrama, and opens into the non-cinematic-real — the nothing of the cinematic world opened up by the film breaching its own framework. My reading will show how *The Tree of Life* presents human life as an evolved way of being blocked in a masculinised mode in mid-twentieth century America. The film releases this blocked way of being through the unwilling of the will of masculinised power, shown in visions of nature as the "beyond" of the cinematic real. These visions of nature, appearing through cracks in the film frame, enable the feminine way of being, otherwise blocked by the masculine will to power, to lead the way into the beyond of the non-cinematic real.

Keywords: film melodrama, Friedrich Schleiermacher, post-religious film, Terrence Malick.

DES FILMS CANNIBALES, OU L'HUMANISME MIS À MAL
[CANNIBAL MOVIES, OR HUMANISM CHALLENGED]

Frédéric Marteau

Christophe Becker

If the question of the body is often predominant in movies, it is mainly because directors have always been obsessed with the idea of filming the Other and the Same.

Does filming the Other mean that we recognize someone of the same kind as ourselves? To answer this question, we will study a phenomenon, or rather a symptom, that is at the core of "extreme cinema," namely cannibalism.

Two moments seem to respond to each other throughout history. The first one linked with the writing of Michel de Montaigne's famous text *Des Cannibales* published in 1580, a text that exerted a fundamental influence on Western philosophers (Voltaire, Rousseau, Emerson among others) while asserting a definition of Humanism and the relativity of the notion of barbarism. The second one linked with the growing interest of filmmakers around the world in anthropophagy, especially with the production of cannibal movies in Italy in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but also with a tradition of American movies from Scott Sidney's s *Tarzan of the Apes* (1918) to recent "Hillbilly movies." These films, quite a few of them considered duds, are important to us as they seem to contradict, or even parody, the ethnological tradition emphasising the existence of a "noble savage."

While studying the theological questioning arising with the first stories of anthropophagy as well as the symbolical links between transubstantiation and cannibalism as it was established by Thomas Aquinas, we will show this series of movies "beyond help" (as Roland Barthes once said of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salo*) echo a philosophical and theological tradition which turns the cannibal into a unique phenomenon, both seducing and frightening at the same time.

We know that for Montaigne and Voltaire the cannibal is first rejected as inhuman before being turned into an object of thought that challenges our own humanity; it is, to them, an opportunity to criticize society, its inner violence, as well as the notion of Otherness. Such questioning can also be found in Italian cannibal movies shot during years of political uprising in the country, movies whose subtext seems to be entirely different and very much contradictory. In these films, often seen as misogynous or racist, displaying images that seemed

unbearable at the time, one can find the negation of Montaigne's Humanism, namely the inanity of considering the Other as part of humanity as a whole.

Keywords: anthropophagy, barbarism, cannibalism, Humanism, Thomas Aquinas.

A CANNIBAL'S SERMON: HANNIBAL LECTER, SYMPATHETIC VILLAINY AND MORAL REVALUATION

Aaron Taylor (University of Lethbridge)

Sympathizing with villains in horror cinema seems to present us with a kind of moral paradox: we occasionally form allegiances with these immoral individuals despite the prohibitions against condoning behaviour we know to be despicable. Confronted with the challenge that so-called "perverse allegiance" seems to present to one's moral integrity, a viewer may contend with this paradox by locating pragmatic moral value through this very act of taxing sympathy. Through a close study of *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and *Hannibal* (2001) that employs the Nietzschean concept of *revaluation*, it is suggested that horror cinema occasionally represents characters whose evil actually represents a valuable critique of specious moral norms. The figure of Hannibal Lecter seems to transcend those limited (and limiting) ethical strictures, and in so doing, reworks a conventional moral framework informed by outmoded Judeo-Christian values.

Rather than being conceived of as antithetical to the good, Lecter's cruelty may be recognised as an important albeit neglected aspect of our conception of kindness.

Keywords: Friedrich Nietzsche, Hannibal Lecter, horror, narratology, sympathy.

ARTICLES | ARTIGOS

A NIGHT AT THE OPERA OF TALMUDIC REASONING: THE "JEWISHNESS" OF JEWISH CINEMA

Shai Biderman (Tel Aviv University)

THE PROBLEM OF DEFINITION

Jewish cinema is a hybrid concept which invites a multitude of interpretations. It can stand for an anthropological or cultural classification, as well as for historical or film-studies perspective. Inasmuch as the term exists independently as a meaningful cinematic classification, the attribution of Jewishness to cinematic work is still murky and ambivalent. For it is often unclear what we should take the word "Jewish" to mean, and, accordingly, what it have to say about cinema.

What, then, is *Jewish cinema*? Two complementary approaches might apply here. First, one can take the word "Jewish" to allude to *the cultural (or anthropological) identity (and heritage) of an agent (or agents), whose mark on the cinematic end-result is singular and distinctive*. In this category we might include filmmakers such as Woody Allen, Billy Wilder, Mel Brooks, Steven Spielberg, Joel and Ethan Coen, Roman Polanski and Fritz Lang, who are known to be Jewish. Similarly, the Jewish heritage of dominant leading men like Danny Kaye, Adam Sandler, Marty Feldman, Peter Sellers and Chaim Topol is sometimes detected in their performance. Or, we can think about some of the most influential film producers in the American film industry — most notably Louis B. Mayer, William Fox, Harry and Jack Warner, Irvin Thalberg and David O. Selznick — whose stronghold over mainstream Hollywood, at least in certain points in history, has flamed the anti-Semitic dread of a Jewish conspiracy.[1] This list of film-industry agents, whose (sometimes rather loose) ties with the Jewish faith or heritage exists on a personal level is anything but conclusive. Their arbitrary natures, as well as its historical fluidity, suggest that this list is an insufficient way to approach the definition in question. A different way is needed to make sense of the term.

Turning elsewhere for a concise definition, we may take the word "Jewish" to mark *a group of topics, issues and problems that are, in one way or another, distinctively "Jewish."* The overarching title, "Jewish cinema," unites films that engage such topics in their narrative,

plotline or settings. In this category we would include, first and foremost, films about the Holocaust as the major traumatic event in recent Jewish history. While maintaining the historical perspective, ancient and modern alike, a long list of meaningful events (constructing both personal Jewish-identity and national entity) may be added, such as anti-Semitism, community life in the diaspora, the founding of the state of Israel, etc. From a theological perspective, we may list the various rituals, traditions and practices that are synonymous with the Jewish faith, such as the Passover "Seder," Shabbat dinner, ritual circumcision (bris), the Jewish wedding, as well as some "Jewish" artifacts (like the yarmulke, mezuzah, and the distinctive fashion choices of orthodox Jews). A partial list of films that tackle these "Jewish" related themes includes films like *Annie Hall* (1977) and *Barney's version* (2010), as depictions of Jewish communal life and individual growth; *The Dybbuk* (1937) and *The Chosen* (1981), as delving into Jewish mysticism; *The History of the World: Part I* (1981) and *The Hebrew Hammer* (2003), as parodying Jewish traits and histories; *Schindler's List* (1993) and *Jakob the Liar* (1999), as portrayals of Jews in the Holocaust; and *Pi* (1998), as a cinematic homage to Jewish intellectualism; to name a few. Nonetheless, the fact that we can construct such a list, of films with "Jewishly" related themes, is not, by itself, a sufficient reason for tagging films that introduce such themes as being distinctively "Jewish." Just like we would not call a film that introduces a scene held in a church "a Christian film" — we should be reluctant to do the same when it comes to synagogues.

Despite objections, both approaches seem to supply a more-or-less adequate account of "Jewish cinema," insofar as we understand the "Jewish" attribute to stand for a cultural classification. However, and as noted before, this classification employs a rather narrow sense of "Jewishness," which naturally overlooks other important aspects of the term. A broader sense of the term might include other constituting elements, such as theology, jurisprudence and psychology. Because such elements are not "cultural" per-se, they are ultimately overlooked by the above mentioned accounts. It is therefore imperative that we broaden the scope of our investigation, in order to elicit a broader sense of "Jewishness," and, accordingly, a more comprehensive account of Jewish cinema.

In this light, I wish to claim that such an account cannot reside in Jewish history and culture alone, and must therefore acknowledge other important traits, most notably that which is often referred to as "Jewish intellectualism." In other words, I wish to suggest that the possibility of "Jewish cinema" lies well within a broader sense of "Jewishness," which in-

cludes the distinctively unique attitude that Jewish thought takes towards logic and argumentation. Accordingly, the distinctive trademark of "jewish" film is not to be found in their Jewish-related content, nor is it to be found in the personal identity of those whose effort elicited their production. Instead, what fleshes out the most essential characteristic of "Jewish" films, epitomizes not only the Jewish tradition, but most importantly the metaphysical and epistemological uniqueness of Jewish argumentation. In what follows, I will pursue this distinction further, and will elicit a new definition of the term at hand.

REASONING BY CONTRARINESS: THE TALMUDIC CANON AND ITS UNDERTAKINGS

The Magnum opus of Jewish law, the *Talmud* (both Palestinian and Babylonian versions), is a prime source for rabbinical argumentation and hermeneutics. By argumentation, I refer to the polemic nature of the text, and to the means by which the various schools of thought — most predominantly the rival schools of *Hillel* and *Shamai* — employ logic and argumentative techniques in their debates. Accordingly, by making reference to Talmudic hermeneutics, I adopt the assumption that Talmudic argumentation, in whatever way it is practiced, is always underlined by a set of guiding rules of interpretation and authority. That is to say, any argumentative strategy employed in the Talmud is at all times committed to a given (and theologically oriented) hermeneutical framework. This hermeneutical structure is governed by the Talmud's main goal, namely, to supply an adequate way by which the scriptures should be extended and interpreted.[2]

The Talmudic hermeneutical system is anchored in seven (or, in other counting, thirteen) guiding rules, that determine the ways by which a position should be argued, as well as the proper authority which is liable to make arguments. This list is partly conventional and partly oriented to engage the unique requests of Jewish theology. The so-called conventional part validates the hermeneutical role of prioritized argumentative mechanisms, like syllogisms, analogies, warrants and justifications — all within the respective strengths (and weaknesses) of deductive and inductive reasoning. Complementarily, the theologically oriented part focuses on the authoritative roles (and limits) of the interpreter, as he engages the divine words of the scriptures, but, and even more importantly, as he engages other inter-

preters (contemporary peers and ancestors alike). This part of the list includes precedents, the roles of explicit meanings versus implicit warrants, and the authoritative role of majority positions (as opposed to minority ones).[3]

This hermeneutical structure has been subjected to an incisive scrutiny, mostly by contemporary scholars, but also, somewhat surprisingly, by the Talmudic text itself. The most indicative case in this regard appears in one of the Talmudic debates, famously known as *Tanuro shel Achnai* ("Achnai's oven") debate.[4] A debate over the purity of a specialized oven leads to a dialogue between two contradictory positions, a minority position (held by Rabbi Eliezer) and a majority position (represented by Rabbi Joshua). The former presents numerous arguments in support of his position, only to be constantly rejected by the latter. Rabbi Eliezer, upon being rejected, turns away from the conventional Talmudic argumentative means and elicits the forces of nature in his defense. He commands a tree, a stream of water, a wall, and, finally, the mighty heavens, to defend his minority position. Whereas they all oblige, Rabbi Joshua stands firm in his refusal, claiming that the tree, the stream and the wall had no authority in the debate. Employing a similar stand towards the heavenly voice, Rabbi Joshua famously proclaimed that the scriptures, despite being a divine text, are an earthly matter, and so, it is for the majority opinion, and not for the heavens, to decide such matters. Upon hearing this, the heavenly voice exclaims with delight, "my sons have defeated me, my sons have defeated me!" Punished for his stubbornness, but mostly for his attempt to break away from the hermeneutical constrains, Rabbi Eliezer was excommunicated from the group.

I bring this fascinating tale in order to flesh out the severity of the Talmudic hermeneutical stand, but also, and even more importantly, in order to discuss the punishment imposed on Rabbi Eliezer. The punishment of excommunication is, undoubtedly, harsh. However, it fits the Talmudic lack of tolerance towards individuals who challenge the system and defy rabbinical authority. It is worth noting that Rabbi Eliezer is not the only one to suffer such a punishment. Though possibly unprecedented before his time, others, in later generations, were excommunicated, most notably a Talmudic interlocutor by the name of Rabbi Yirmiya. The circumstances surrounding the excommunication of Rabbi Yirmiya are of the utmost importance to our examination of Talmudic hermeneutics, and so I will recite them here.

Rabbi Yirmiya is mentioned as a predominant interlocutor in several Talmudic cases, where he is known for his vexing and somewhat provocative argumentative style. In one

such case, a young pigeon, found on the ground within fifty cubits from a cote, stirs a discussion regarding the nature and limits of private property.[5] The debaters form a majority opinion, which sets the mark of fifty cubits as that which determines ownership (within this mark, the pigeon belongs to the owner of the cote; beyond this mark, it belongs to the finder). In addition, if the pigeon is found half-way between two cotes, it should equally be shared by the two cote-owners. Responding to this debate, Rabbi Yirmiya raises a question. Supposing, he asks, that one of the pigeon's feet is within fifty cubits and the other beyond. How do we decide who is its rightful owner? Still hanging in the air, the question is left unanswered. Instead, the Talmud is clear to mention, almost laconically, that Rabbi Yirmia was excommunicated for asking this question.

On face value, it seems that both the story of Rabbi Eliezer and the story of Rabbi Yirmiya follow a similar pattern regarding the structure of Talmudic reasoning. Both interlocutors challenge the hegemony of canonical hermeneutics, by pursuing a line of argumentation which exceeds and defies the rabbinical authority. As seemingly befit this stand, both are excommunicated from further debates. However — and here is where the two stories depart — Rabbi Yirmiya, after being excommunicated, is later readmitted to the group, and is even praised for his knowledge and wisdom. This dramatic change in plot overrides our previous notion regarding the similarity between the stories. What, one might ask, is the reason of this dramatic change of events? What is it that makes the challenge posed by Rabbi Eliezer so inexcusable? Similarly, what is it that makes the challenging style of Rabbi Yirmiya more tolerable (or, maybe, less threatening), to the point of readmission?

How are we to answer these questions? One possible way is to assume that the difference between the two challenges is a difference of degree, namely, that Rabbi Eliezer's challenge is more severe (and more harmful to the cause) than that of Rabbi Yirmiya. However, this assumption, whereas reasonable, does not give us a full account of the stories at hand. For if the difference between the stories is merely a difference of degree — why do we need the second story at all? In other words, if the moral of the story of Rabbi Eliezer is to set the boundaries of rabbinical authority, the story of Rabbi Yirmiya becomes redundant, as it supposedly aims for the same conclusion.

My point here is that the story of Rabbi Yirmiya advances something which is missing from the story of Rabbi Eliezer. Hence, the difference between the stories is not, as previously argued, a difference of degree, but a difference of type. Rabbi Eliezer challenges the

rabbinical authority by stepping outside the hermeneutical framework. To put it bluntly, his argumentative strategy dismisses the mere structure which sustains the Talmudic argumentation as a whole. Such an "external" attack on the fabrics of proper argumentation is, of course, irrefutably unacceptable. Therefore, and despite the fact that his position in the specific debate (regarding the purity of the oven) is ultimately the right position to take, his entire argumentation is categorically dismissed. As he refuses to accept the premises of canonical argumentation, the rabbinical authority has no option other than casting him away.

This, by far, is not the case with Rabbi Yirmiya. Though delving in smarty argumentation and border-line sophistry, the argumentative strategy of Rabbi Yirmiya *is kept within the margins of proper argumentation at all times*. Contrary to the "external" challenge of Rabbi Eliezer, the challenge of Rabbi Yirmiya is held "internally." Rabbi Yirmiya accepts the premises of the discussion, and then confronts these premises with an absurd case, thus challenging the system from within instead of challenging it from the outside. I take this to be a fundamental difference between the two attacks on the majority opinion, a difference which is important enough not only to justify the different punishment, but also a good enough reason for the mere inclusion of Rabbi Yirmiya's story in the Talmudic corpus. In other words, we need the story of Rabbi Yirmiya to teach us something we cannot learn from the "external" attack of Rabbi Eliezer, namely, the vital importance of self-reflection, constant examination, and intellectual engagement with the system itself (up to the point of *reductio ad absurdum*).[6]

The "editorial" decision to leave Rabbi Yirmiya's question inside the Talmudic corpus is hence a strong indication for the self-reflective nature of its argumentative methodology. Talmudic argumentation has an undeniable hold on logic and syllogistic reasoning. But this would be the more congenial half of the glass. The second, more subversive (and much more demanding) half, amounts to self-criticism, robust intellectualism and to the constant reexamination of logical foundations. And we owe it all to Rabbi Yirmiya, and to his "smarty" questions (which are much more than that).[7]

Talmudic argumentation thus embodies a dynamic tension. On the one hand, it rests on the employment of mainstream logic to conduct its argumentative discourse. On the other hand, it acknowledges its own limits, and is constantly aware of the absurdities which inhabit therein. With this conclusion, I turn now to discuss the ways by which Jewish cinema earns its title.

JEWISH CINEMA AND TALMUDIC HERMENEUTICS: THE CASE OF THE MARX BROTHERS

In a musing, aptly titled "Nothing Goes without Saying," Stanley Cavell explores the unique philosophical sense exhibited in the films of the Marx brothers. This sense, which Cavell identifies as a "recurrent reflexiveness," epitomizes the brothers' thorough engagement with the limits and self-destructive forces of language. This engagement, which more often than not is reflected in the obsessive and manic mannerisms of the characters (especially, yet not exclusively, Groucho), is, according to Cavell, the most distinctive trademark of the Brother's cinematic craft. In the films of the Marx brothers, characters are always in a manic "linguistic" mode, whether in form of an unstoppable stream of one-liners (Groucho), an incomprehensible and misleading dialect (Chico), or in form of an utter and intentional silence, combine with indistinguishable honking noises (Harpo). In short, the brothers, in whatever way they choose to express it, are constantly "thinking about words, to the end of words, in every word — or, in Harpo's emphatic case, in every absence of words."[8]

Noticing this, Cavell goes on to argue for the entanglement of this philosophical approach to language with the American ethos, most notably that which embodies the works of Emerson (as well as Brecht and Beckett) with the immigrant culture which founded the American dream.[9] Whereas I find Cavell's analysis illuminating, I wish to add what I take to be missing in his analysis, namely, the Marx Brother's everlasting debt to their Jewish heritage. Their engagement with language, whereas very much "American" (in ways depicted by Cavell), is, even more so, a compulsively maniacal manifestation of the tension presiding in Talmudic logic. The rushed pace, the aesthetic turmoil, and the constant leap from one absurd dialogue to another, are all but a cinematic way to implement (and amplify) this tension. With this, the brothers challenge the most basic structure of sense and meaning, and, following that, the most substantial fabrics of proper argumentation.[10]

Take, for instance, a memorable sequence from *A Day at the Races* (1937). Chico, an ice cream vendor at the race track, is trying to fool a gullible customer (Groucho) with a "hot tip" on a horse. In order to decipher the tip (which comes up as a code), the customer is required to purchase a proper code book, then a master code book (to decipher the codebook), then a guide, then a sub-guide supplementary to the guide, and so on and so forth. By the time the scene ends, the vendor's tray — which, for some odd reason, inhabited

code books instead of ice cream — is empty, the race is long over, the tip is worthless (as it has always been), and Groucho collapses under the unnecessary burden of superfluous books, that exhibit nothing but their own demolishing redundancy. Noticing this comic extravagance, Cavell describes this scene as "a scrupulous union, or onion, of semantic and monetary exchanges and deferrals to warm the coldest contemporary theorist of signs." [11]

As much as I concur with his assessment, the need to acknowledge the Talmudic heritage presiding in the scene is, in my mind, imperative.[12] The scene begins with the promise of a tip, a valuable insight to the upcoming horse race, a dream come true for gamblers and sports fans alike. However, as the tip (which supposedly triggers this scene) is long forgotten, we are immediately drawn to the redundancy (and circularity) of the framework which allows the tip to exist in the first place, namely, the coding and decoding mechanism (which seem to negate itself in every step of the way). The inspiring hope that the tip will finally be unveiled, and that the knowledge it encapsulates will be unleashed, turns up as a farce. Our expectations are defied, inasmuch as the entire realm by which we formulated these expectations is turned upside down. The practice of coding, recoding and decoding *ad-absurdum*, echoes, in its indispensable futility, the challenge of Rabbi Yirmiya to the hegemony of canonical Talmudic argumentation.

Many such zany sequences inhabit the films of the Marx brothers, from the famous mirror scene from *Duck Soup* (1933) to the packed cabin sequence from *A Night at the Opera* (1935). I wish to stay with this latter film, as it includes one of the most paradigmatic examples to the way by which the absurd spirit of Talmudic reasoning infiltrates and then conquer the argumentation of the brothers. In this scene, Groucho and Chico are negotiating a deal to sign an opera singer (which Chico supposedly represent) to perform in a new-York theatre (which Groucho supposedly owns). The brilliant dialogue, which is brought here in full, is a masterful adaptation of the complexity of Talmudic thinking:

GROUCHO: Here are the contracts. You just put his name at the top, and you sign at the bottom. No need of you reading that because these are duplicates.

CHICO: Yeah. Is a duplicate. Duplicates?

GROUCHO: I say, they're duplicates. Don't you know what duplicates are?

CHICO: Sure, those five kids up in Canada.

A Night at the Opera.

GROUCHO: I wouldn't know about that. I haven't been in Canada in years. Go ahead and read it.

CHICO: What does it say?

GROUCHO: Go on and read it.

CHICO: You read it.

GROUCHO: All right, I'll read it to you. Can you hear?

CHICO: I haven't heard anything yet. You say anything?

GROUCHO: I haven't said anything worth hearing.

CHICO: That's why I didn't hear anything.

GROUCHO: That's why I didn't say anything.

[…]

GROUCHO: Here we are. Now I've got it. Pay particular attention to this first clause because it's most important. It says, "The party of the first part shall be known in this contract... as the party of the first part." How do you like that? That's pretty neat, eh?

CHICO: No, it's no good.

GROUCHO: What's the matter with it?

CHICO: I don't know. Let's hear it again.

GROUCHO: "The party of the first part shall be known in this contract... as the party of the first part."

CHICO: Sounds a little better this time.

GROUCHO: It grows on you. Would you like to hear it once more?

CHICO: Just the first part.

GROUCHO: What? “The party of the first part”?

CHICO: No. The first part of “the party of the first part.”

GROUCHO: It says, “The first part of the party of the first part... shall be known in this contract as the first part of the party...” “Shall be known in this contract...” Why should we quarrel about this? We’ll take it out.

CHICO: Yeah. It’s too long anyhow. Now what do we got left?

GROUCHO: I got about a foot and a half. It says, “The party of the second part shall be known in this contract... as the party of the second part.”

CHICO: I don’t know about that.

GROUCHO: Now what’s the matter?

CHICO: I don’t like the second party either.

GROUCHO: You should have come to the first party. We didn’t get home till around 1 a.m. I was blind for three days.

CHICO: Why can’t the first part of the second party... be the second part of the first party? Then you got something.

GROUCHO: Look, rather than go through that again, what do you say... [Tearing a piece of the contract] Fine. I've got something you're bound to like. You'll be crazy about it.

CHICO: No. I don’t like it.

GROUCHO: You don’t like what?

CHICO: Whatever it is, I don’t like it.

GROUCHO: Don’t let’s break up an old friendship over a thing like that. Ready?

CHICO: Okay. [Tearing another piece of the contract] The next part, I don’t think you’re going to like.

GROUCHO: Your word’s good enough for me. Is my word good enough for you?

CHICO: I should say not.

GROUCHO: That takes out two more clauses. [Tearing two more pieces of the contract] “The party of the eighth part...”

CHICO: No, that’s no good.

GROUCHO: “The party of the ninth...”

CHICO: No, that’s no good, too. [Tearing two more pieces of the contract] How is it my contract is skinnier than yours?

GROUCHO: I don't know, you must have been out on a tear last night. We're all set now, aren't we?

CHICO: Sure.

GROUCHO: Just you put your name down there, and then the deal is legal.

CHICO: I forgot to tell you, I can't write.

GROUCHO: That's all right, there's no ink in the pen. But it's a contract, isn't it?

CHICO: Sure.

GROUCHO: We've got a contract, no matter how small it is.

CHICO: Wait. What does this say here?

GROUCHO: That? That's the usual clause. That's in every contract. That just says, "If any of the parties... participating in this contract... are shown not to be in their right mind... the entire agreement is automatically nullified."

CHICO: I don't know.

GROUCHO: It's all right. That's in every contract. That's what they call a sanity clause.

CHICO: You can't fool me. There ain't no Sanity Claus.

How can one even begin to analyze such a brilliant exchange of empty gestures, linguistic bombshells, and meaningless meanings? A closer look at this scene reveals what I take to be the major influence of Talmudic argumentation on the tendencies and approaches which reside in Jewish cinema. The focus of this scene is (obviously enough) the contract, a legal document which presumably stands for the coherency and substantiality of the juridical system. The contract is a legally binding structure, an instrument of law, which, as such, is expected to hold the agreement between the parties to be binding and congenial. When a contract exists (and is validated), we understand this to mean that the parties have reached the point of agreement, and that the various disagreements (which inhabited the preliminary negotiations) were settled. However, and contrarily, this conventional understanding of the way by which proper argumentation should lead to the signing of a contract is systematically challenged by the Marx brothers. This challenge exists in two ways: first, the negotiations (namely, the disagreements and the argumentation which supports the confronting positions) follow the already completed contract (instead of preceding it). Secondly, and more importantly, the contract itself is validated by ceasing to exist. The document is ripped, bit by bit, but, against all reason, is validated through and through with each tare. "Your word's good enough for

me. Is my word good enough for you?" asks Groucho. "I should say not," Chico answers, and another piece of the contract cease to exist. However, and despite its rapid demise, it is obvious (to Groucho, at least) that "we've got a contract, no matter how small it is."[13]

With this, the Marx brothers mirror the kind of meta-philosophical approach made famous, in the Talmudic context, by Rabbi Yirmiya. Notice that the breaking down of the various concepts which holds this structure — namely, the contract itself, the idea of parties, the practice of reading a contract (and hearing it), the idea of duplicates, etc. — is matched only by the final clause of the alleged contract, namely, the sanity clause. Both clauses, as is so common in the legal practice, depict the contextual framework of the contract. That is to say, these sections do not apply to the actual matter of the contract (the topic at hand, the issue being discussed, or, in our case: the future of the poor, yet promising, opera singer). Instead, these sections deal with abstract definitions, with constructs and concepts, or, to put it more accurately, with *the contract itself*. It therefore comes as no surprise that these exact clauses — the clauses which have nothing to say about the subject matter but only about the argumentative structure which allows it to be discussed — are the clauses which are deconstructed, reconstructed, mocked and ridiculed, by way of being torn down (literally) by the undefined parties.

The strength of this scene hence lies well within its absurdity. The one contract is duplicated, then united, then read (and reread) then torn, then revived, then signed (without being signed) — and then undermined by the need to face a sanity clause, which simultaneously challenges the sanity of the signees as well as the existence of Santa Claus. This Kafkaesque understanding of legal matters (and the conceptual framework which sustains them) is masterfully performed (or, shall I say: argued), to the point of utter destruction and complete annihilation of any logical or argumentative anchor. Once again, the challenged posed by Rabbi Yirmiya to the constructed structure of Talmudic argumentation is written (so to speak) all over the place.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I aimed to elicit a revised definition of "Jewish cinema." Following Talmudic guidelines, I offered a paradigmatic analysis of Jewish engagement with logic, the sustain-

ability of conceptual frameworks, and the versatility of knowledge. Once established, I used the films of the Marx brothers to demonstrate the way by which Jewish films embrace the Talmudic tendency to engage with smarty argumentation and subversive reasoning.

Evidently, the Marx brothers are only a case in point. Other instances of Jewish intellectualism, smarty argumentation and absurd logic, might include Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* (1977), the cinematic interludes of Israel's "The Pale Scout" comedy group (*Ha'gashash Ha'hiver*), the Coen Brothers' *Intolerable Cruelty* (2003),[14] and predominant scenes from the TV sensation *Seinfeld*. I leave the thorough analysis (and utter enjoyment) of these instances for others.[15]

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1. See, e.g., Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1988) as well as the amusing portrayal of the Jewish film producer in the Coen brothers' *Barton Fink* (1991).

2. See, e.g., Isaiah Sonne, "The Schools of Shamai and Hillel Seen from Within," in *Essays in Greco-Roman and Related Talmudic Literature*, ed. Henry Fischel (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1977), 94-110; Menachem Fisch, *Rational Rabbis: Science and Talmudic Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

3. See, e.g., Louis Jacobs, *Studies in Talmudic Logic and Methodology* (Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006). See also Hanina Ben-Menahem and Neil S. Hecht, *Authority, Process and Method: Studies in Jewish Law* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998); Moshe Ḥayyim Luzzatto and David Sackton, *Sheloshah Sefarim Niftaḥim: halo hemah derekh ha-ḳodesh be-yam ha-Talmud* (Jerusalem: Feldhaim, 2004); Jacob Neusner, *Talmudic Thinking: Language, Logic, Law* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992); Aviram Ravitsky, "Talmudic Methodology and Aristotelian Logic: David ibn Bilia's Commentary on the Thirteen Hermeneutic Principles," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 99.2 (2009): 184-99; Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Andrew Schumann, ed., *Judaic Logic* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010); Avi Sion, *Judaic Logic: A Formal Analysis of Biblical, Talmudic and Rabbinic Logic* (Geneva: Éditions Slatkine, 1995).

4. *Babylonian Talmud*, Bava Metzia 59a-b.

5. *Babylonian Talmud*, Bava Batra 2, Mishna 6.

6. The term *reductio ad absurdum* often stands for the argumentative strategy of reducing an opponent's position to absurdity by assuming the opposite. However, I wish to stress a more congenial sense of the term here, namely, the general idea of an argument being made absurd. There are various Talmudic examples that fit this particular meaning. See, e.g., Fisch and Yitzhak Benbaji, *The View from Within: Normativity and the Limits of Self-Criticism* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011); David Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

7. See J. Bright, "Jeremiah's Complaints – Liturgy or Expressions of Personal Distress?," in *Proclamation and Presence: Old Testament Essays in Honor of G.H. Davies*, ed. Jon I. Durham and J. Roy Porter (London: John Knox Press, 1970).

8. Stanley Cavell, "Nothing Goes Without Saying: Reading the Marx Brothers," in *Cavell on Film*, ed. William Rothman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 183-92, 185.

9. It is worth noting here that Cavell's reading of the Marx Brothers, while loyal to the influence of early 20th century immigrant culture on the (mostly Jewish) post-vaudevillian comedies, is nevertheless original in putting philosophy of language front and center. As much as the vaudeville tradition is adamant in the brother's films — especially as it appears in their physical comedy, slapstick antics and visual gags — we are not to be fooled by its alleges centrality. The physicality of the brothers has led some interpreters to see their comedy as anti-intellectual. This, according to Cavell, cannot be further from the truth. For further discussion, see David Marc, *Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997); Lawrence J. Ep-

stein, *The Haunted Smile: The Story of Jewish Comedians in America* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001); Richard J. Anobile, *Why a Duck?: Visual and Verbal Gems from the Marx Brothers Movies* (New York: Darien House, 1971); Martin A. Gardner, *The Marx Brothers as Social Critics: Satire and Comic Nihilism in Their Films* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009).

10. See Maurice Charney, *The Comic World of the Marx Brothers' Movies: "Anything Further Father?"* (Cranbury, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007); Alan S. Dale, *Comedy Is a Man in Trouble: Slapstick in American Movies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Allen Eyles, *The Complete Films of the Marx Brothers* (New York: Citadel Press, 1992); Martin A. Gardner, *The Marx Brothers as Social Critics: Satire and Comic Nihilism in Their Films* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009); Thomas H. Jordan, *The Anatomy of Cinematic Humor: With an Essay on the Marx Brothers* (New York: Revisionist Press, 1975); Paul A. Taylor, *Žižek and the Media* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2010).

11. Cavell, "Nothing Goes Without Saying," 186.

12. For further analysis of the scene, see Gardner, *The Marx Brothers as Social Critics*, 150ff.

13. See also Dale, *Comedy Is a Man in Trouble*, 132-60.

14. In *Intolerable Cruelty* (2003), we are introduced to Miles Massey (George Clooney), a successful and arrogant Los Angeles divorce attorney. After completing a long list of victories in the courtroom, Massey endeavors to achieve a challenging winner-take-all battle against Marylin Rexroth-Doyle-Massey (Catherine Zeta-Jones), a beautiful and ambitious femme fatale whose goal is to con a man out of his money in order to gain her own financial independence. Massey and Marylin then meets in court, as Massey represents Marylin's battered husband, Rex Rexroth (Edward Herrmann). However, and before the battle even begins, we witness a humorous back-and-forth banter among Miles, his second-chair Wrigley (Paul Adelstein), and their client Rex. Rex questions whether or not Miles has ever sat before the presiding judge in their case. The answer he receives from Miles and Wrigley, might as well have been formulated by Groucho and Chico:

REX: Have you sat before her before?
MILES: No. No, the judge sits first. Then we sit.
REX: Well, have you sat after her before?
WRIGLEY: Sat after her before? You mean, have we argued before her before?
MILES: The judge sits in judgment. The counsel argues before the judge.
REX: So, have you argued before her before?
WRIGLEY: Before her before, or before she sat before?
REX: Before her before. I said, before her before.
WRIGLEY: No, you said before she sat before.
REX: I did at first, but...
MILES: Look, don't argue.
REX: I'm not. I'm...
WRIGLEY: No, you don't argue. We argue.
MILES: Counsel argues.
WRIGLEY: You appear.
MILES: The judge sits.
WRIGLEY: Then you sit.
MILES: Or you stand in contempt.
WRIGLEY: And then we argue.
MILES: The counsel argues.
REX: Which you've done before.
MILES: Which we've done before.
REX: Ah.
WRIGLEY: But not before her.

For further analysis, see: Shai Biderman and William J. Devlin, "Justice, Power, and Love: The Political Philosophy of Intolerable Cruelty," in *The Philosophy of the Coen Brothers*, ed. Mark T. Conard (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 109-24, 123.

15. Another example, which reflects, somewhat unexpectedly, a similar attitude towards the Jewish intellectual corpus, is Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980). In a recent essay, film studies scholar Nathan Abrams employs a Jewish Midrashic reading of the film, claiming that this mode of interpretation is practically embedded in all (or most) of Kubrick's features. See Abrams, "'A Double Set of Glasses': Stanley Kubrick and the Midrashic Mode of Interpretation," *De-Westernizing Film Studies*, ed. Saer Maty Ba and Will Higbee (New York: Routledge, 2012), 141-51.

FROM *UP IN THE AIR* DOWN TO THE ROOTS OF *AVATAR'S* TREE OF SOULS: HOSSEIN NASR'S ISLAMIC TRADITIONALISM AND THE HOPE FOR WESTERN FUTURES GROUNDED IN THE SACREDNESS OF THE EARTH

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Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic themes are perennial favorites for script writers and directors in the world of English language film; however, recent projects, both those aiming only for commercial success and those attempting higher artistic expression, seem to reveal a particular pre-occupation with portrayals of a dark and menacing time to come. The unifying theme of many of these films is the call to hold onto what is beautiful and good in our humanity in the face of grave dangers that threaten to darken the human spirit.

In Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2009), Vigo Mortensen's character shares a miserable post-apocalyptic existence with his son scavenging for food and avoiding cannibals, but he makes it clear to the boy that mere survival is not the goal. Instead, his son must always "carry the fire" in his heart and thus hold onto his humanity in a world that threatens to reduce human beings to the level of pure savagery. In the *Book of Eli* (2010), Denzel Washington plays the part of a prophetic hero who carries the last remaining copy of the Bible through the dangers of a world turned to chaos and finally arrives at the sanctuary of Alcatraz where a tiny band of men and women have created a library and are nurturing the collective wisdom of humanity through the disordered times into which the world has fallen. The film *2012* (2009) was clearly less artistically ambitious than *The Road* or even *The Book of Eli*, and our impatience at its rather clumsy storyline can perhaps obscure the fact that the film is referencing the oldest surviving apocalyptic tales we know, the Near Eastern flood stories that that were molded through Hebraic inspiration into the teaching of "Noah's Ark." It is on the power of this tale that *2012* wants to hitch a free ride, and if the film fails artistically, it succeeds in revealing a certain spirit of our times. For us today, the perennial theme of the prophet calling his or her people to remain resolute and steadfast in the midst of impending

moral and social disorder, so that at least a few may be inspired to "carry the fire" through the coming dark, seems to resonate in a powerful way and well beyond the realms of Jewish covenantal theology.

A particularly powerful version of this cultural anxiety over the future focuses on the threat of powerful new technologies to destroy human life or the human spirit. However, unlike many of the great classic science fiction tales, such as those from H. G. Wells, the technologies explored in recent English-language film seem to envision, not a radical break with the present, but a reflection on the uncertain implications of technologies we already possess or can imagine on the near horizon. In *Moon* (2009), Sam Bell's two characters are both clones forced to work as slaves on the moon for a large corporation mining a rare isotope of Helium that has become the solution to humanity's energy problem. However, by the end of the film the deceit is discovered and presumably the abusive practice of cloning is put to a stop, thus reasserting our humanity in the face of dehumanizing technologies. In *Gamer* (2009), humanity is threatened by a mind control technology that has been adopted to allow computer game players to control real people as the characters in their gladiator games. In the end, however, the main character is able to kill the mastermind of the plot, thus once again defeating a dehumanizing technology and returning the world to safety and normalcy. The science behind the story is quite unrealistic, but it provides a vehicle for reflection on an internet world of social interaction mediated by fictional avatars little connected to the humans at home in front of their computer and a ubiquitous corporate presence within that world that is increasingly a part of our lives. The film ends with the main character driving off with his wife and daughter, safely back in "our world" that existed before recent and imminent technologies threw humanity of course. The plot of *Surrogates* (2009) is similar, although virtual reality game players control not other human beings, but rather robotic surrogates through which they live their own life in a mechanical body that never ages and is immune from physical harm. At the end of this film as well, the hero destroys the technology that has threatened to enslave and dehumanize us.

At first glance Jason Reitman's *Up in the Air* (2009) follows a somewhat similar model. In this film George Clooney's character, Ryan Bingham, also acts as a "conservative" voice holding onto a threatened way of life when his company tries to adopt internet technologies that would allow a worker to be fired via remote teleconference. Like the characters of *The Book of Eli, The Road,* and *2012,* he is holding onto something of our world that seems threat-

ened, and like the characters of *Moon*, *Gamer,* and *Surrogates,* he is able to do so by defeating a de-humanizing technology and re-asserting the importance of unmediated human contact.

Yet that, of course, is not the real story to be told about *Up in the Air*. When Bingham wins his battle and the hateful technology is defeated, he returns to his lonely, insipid, rootless life, from which we see no possibility of redemption. In many ways Bingham is the embodiment of much of contemporary society; thus, without any doomsday scenarios, this film is more terrifying than any of its apocalyptic siblings from the last couple of years. For according to its vision, the degeneration of the human being that we are facing is not the result of technology gone astray, but of modern *ideas*, and it is already here. We are right to have anxieties about the future, and in particular about the dangers we face from recent and imminent technologies. But if the message of this film is correct, we will not be able to secure a bright future merely by combating the misuse of these technologies or by bravely 'carrying the fire' through the darkness to come. Rather a bright future is possible only if we are able to address the philosophies that are the foundation of Ryan Bingham's alienated life.

Bingham works for a company whose service is to inform employees who are no longer needed by their own organizations that they have been fired, thus sparing the local managers this unpleasant task. Bingham has an acute sense of human psychology and a remarkable knack for saying just the thing to thwart the most emotional and violent responses an employee might have upon learning this news. So, as we learn in the film, Bingham does have a real skill for helping these unfortunate people avoid hurting themselves or others. However, he does so by giving them at least a taste of the sort of detached freedom and self-contained individualism that is the philosophy by which he lives. When Bingham is not busy at work firing people, he sidelines as a motivational speaker giving a talk in which he asks the members of his audience to imagine wearing a backpack filled with everything they own, every relationship to which they are bound by obligation and expectations, and every attachment to which they are tied. He asks the audience to imagine the weight of all these things bearing down on them as the straps of the backpack cut into their shoulders. Finally, he asks them to set their burden down and go out to live a life of complete autonomy, free from all ties. Bingham's life is very much the embodiment of this ideal.[1] He has designed his world so that he spends most of the year on the road, living out of hotels and chasing his dream of ten million frequent flier miles. He has successfully freed himself from any attachment to material things or even to any place, but he has also freed himself from any attachment to human

relationships. His only contact with others seems to include the few minutes he spends with employees severing them from any emotional ties they may have had to the company that has just fired them, the phone calls from his sister that he is unable to avoid, and perhaps the romances he finds on the road.

In Vera Fermiga's character, Alex Goran, Bingham finds his perfect such romance. Goran also spends a good deal of time in hotels across the country and is happy to have a sexual relationship without any emotional attachments. As Bingham and Goran schedule their trysts over the tops of their calendar carrying laptops, they look just as if they are conducting a business deal, and of course in a sense they are. Bingham and Goran each understand their relationship as a type of transaction free from any limitations other than the requirement that each negotiator treat the other as a properly rational agent looking for ways in which a deal will be mutually beneficial according to the interests of both.[2] However, as is expected when the selfish, successful man meets a beautiful woman in a Hollywood film, Bingham falls in love with Goran, and eventually as the film progresses he comes to the formulaic moment of crisis where he decides that it is worth sacrificing his freedom and modifying his self-regulated life to fulfill his passion to be with Goran always. The twist that makes this film refreshingly realistic comes when Bingham discovers Goran is married and has only been enjoying a bit of sexual pleasure and companionship without commitment in the way Bingham has always lived and preached. But this is the only possible honest ending. A life dedicated to autonomy and freedom from ties can no more be mended by a bit of romantic passion than can a culture, and so we are left with this haunting and moving picture of a man trapped in the emptiness and alienation of a life adrift, lacking all meaningful connection to place or to people. Evoking this feeling is very much the conscious intention of Reitman's project. According to the synopsis of the plot on the film's official website, "Ryan [Bingham] has long been contented with his unencumbered lifestyle lived out across America in airports, hotels, and rental cars. He can carry all he needs in one wheel-away case; he is a pampered elite member of every travel loyalty program in existence — and yet… Ryan has nothing to hold onto."[3] He is a man "with an unrecognized emptiness behind his confident swagger and supposed joy at being 'baggage-free.'"[4] This official interpretation of the film goes on to say, Bingham's story is

> about a man who is instantly, poignantly recognizable — a charming, decent man who has enthusiastically embraced our world of speed, technology, comfort, individual am-

> bition and material perks; a man who leads a smooth, enjoyable life; a man who has it all and yet, finds something vital is missing. His tale raises intriguing questions: in an age of global travel and machine-mediated conversations, how do we get to the real, lasting connections that once sustained American communities? And what happens when we avoid them? [5]

This recognition of a general malaise in the modern world, particularly as linked to the loss of relation to place and other human beings, is captured in a particularly powerful way in *Up in the Air*, but it is clearly a prevalent theme in many areas of contemporary culture. James Cameron's film *Avatar* (2009) is also a reflection on a western, modern people living a life of alienation. However, his vision goes beyond the powerful descriptions of the symptoms of alienation we see in *Up in the Air*, to an attempt to account for their cause. In *Avatar*, it appears that the malaise of contemporary America is due to a spiritual disconnect from the sacredness of the world. The foil to the American worldview, that of the Na'vi, offer us a vision in which the alienations of contemporary life do no hold. The life of an individual Na'vi is interwoven with that of others in a rich communal life bound together by sacred ritual and rooted in place through a deep recognition of her connection to the sacredness of the natural world. This provides a stark contrast to the isolated and disconnected life of Ryan Bingham. The power of film brings this contrast to life in a visually intoxicating flood of images as we compare the cold, hard, clean lines of Bingham's nightly hotels, loyalty cards, and individually packaged food containers to the warm, soft, lush world full of green in which Jake and Neytiri and their tribe hunt, ride, and love.

These differences in the style of a life portrayed in the comparison between *Avatar* and *Up in the Air* are much more fundamental than some accidental variation that could be accounted for by either something like genetic drift or the trappings of idiosyncratic artistic genius (depending on which of C. P. Snow's two camps you prefer as a source of metaphor). Rather, they are manifestations of a clash between the deepest values that form the very essence of a society's form of life. Bingham's world is rooted in a philosophy that values unfettered autonomy of will over all else. In contrast the life of the Na'vi is rooted in a community interwoven with certain traditional and hierarchical structures. This is particularly true in the areas of their life most relevant to our inquiry, namely the experience of the sacred. Na'vi spirituality is governed by ritual and taboo, but these can never be reduced to a set of rigid

laws to be followed mechanically. Rather, they are expressions of a collective wisdom that governs various ways of interacting with society and nature that is passed on from one generation to the next in a living tradition. We see this clearly in the ways Neytiri teaches Jake about hunting. At one point Jake complains, "it's been a month and I'm still not allowed to make a kill. She [Neytiri] says the forest hasn't given permission."[6] Neytiri is not helping Jake memorize a set of rules to maximize sustainable use of a resource of the kind enforced by a nation's Department of Fish and Game; she is introducing him into a traditional way of life. In setting her this task, Neytiri's mother tells her, "daughter, you will teach him our way, to speak and walk as we do."[7] Cameron could not be more explicit in linking Jake's growing awareness of the sacred to the wisdom embodied in a traditional way of life. This example also reveals the close connection between tradition and interwoven structures of hierarchy for the Na'vi. It is only by accepting the authority of Neytiri and following her instruction that Jake is able to be initiated into the traditions of her people. Further, Neytiri herself is acting under the authority of her mother Mo'at, the great spiritual leader, or "*Tsahik* — the one who interprets the will of *Eywa*."[8] Our first introduction to Mo'at comes when Jake has just been brought before the tribe's chieftain, Eytukan, and there is great general commotion. But, according to Cameron's script, "they all FREEZE as — A commanding FEMALE VOICE echoes through the chamber." In Na'vi, Mo'at says "*Step back!... I will look at this alien,*" and "there is an expectant hush as Mo'at descends."[9] Clearly, as the commotion gives way to quiet and calm from on high, we are meant to recognize Mo'at's authority. This is strengthened later in the scene when Mo'at decides, against the wishes of many, including her daughter, that Jake will be spared and even taught the ways of the Na'vi by Neytiri. However, her authority is not primarily political. She is a spiritual leader, and Neytiri is referred to several times as assisting her in the role of "acolyte."[10] Her authority is integral to and indeed deeply integrated with the tradition that makes possible her people's experience of the sacred.

Cameron's vision has been incredibly appealing. World-wide *Avatar* is the highest grossing film of all time.[11] Of course each ticket was more expensive than for films of the past. Differences in ticket pricing make international numbers for ticket sales very difficult to ascertain. However, even according to conservative estimates, within the U.S. the film ranks within the top 30 in terms of numbers of viewers, and more tickets were sold for *Avatar* than for any film since *Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace* in 1999.[12] The film's detractors, such as Russell Moore, Dean of the School of Theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, claim that

the record breaking numbers for the film merely reflect curiosity about the new 3-D technology employed.[13] However, this ignores the powerful emotional draw the film seems to elicit for many people. The *Wall Street Journal* ran an article earlier last year suggesting that part of the film's great economic success is due to the great beauty and complexity of Pandora that draws viewers back to see the film for repeat viewings despite the high ticket prices.[14] But, I would suggest that it is more than just the beauty of Pandora that gives *Avatar* such emotional power. Surely, people are drawn to a movie on this scale for diverse reasons, but it is plausible that for many, it is the spiritual connection of the Na'vi to the sacredness of their world that makes the film so poignant. In an article in *CNN Entertainment*, titled "Audiences Experience 'Avatar' Blues," Joe Piazza describes a web forum entitled, "Ways to cope with the depression of the dream of Pandora being intangible." Less than a month after the release of the film, the thread already had over 1000 posts from people dealing with feelings of depression and even suicidal thoughts after leaving the theater. The comments on this site make it clear that it is not only the beauty of a fantasy world, but more powerfully the way that the life of the Na'vi connects to that beauty, that so enthralls these viewers. One contributor quoted by Piazza writes, "it's so hard — I can't force myself to think that it's just a movie, and to get over it, that living like the Na'vi will never happen."[15] However, if *Avatar* is successful in inspiring a deep yearning for an experience of the sacredness of the world and perhaps pointing to the connection between this experience and the importance of tradition, it does not sate this hunger. It would be unreasonable to expect a two and a half hour film to do so, but perhaps *Avatar* does more than merely arouse a desire in its audience that it cannot fulfill. By setting the struggle on Pandora so clearly within the context of the American lead wars of western Europe against Iraq and Afghanistan, Cameron points to the possibility of looking to Islam to find a real people who might provide a more sustained and richer inspiration in the quest for the sacred as an alternative to the modern, western alienation encountered so often in recent cinema.

I suggest that we take up Cameron's hint and look to see if perhaps the hunger in the West for a recovery of the sacredness of the world can, indeed, find resources in the traditions of Islam. In the 12th century the encounter with Islamic philosophy and theology helped to sparked a great revival in the West, and perhaps it can help in at least some small way to do so again. This is a project that has been underway for a hundred years through the pioneering work of early students in the renewed encounter with Islam such as René Guénon and Frithjof Schuon, but it is a conversation that is only beginning to take off in main-

stream academic circles. As a part of that emerging conversation, I suggest we look to Hossein Nasr and his argument for *why* being a part of a tradition is such a powerful path for coming to see the sacredness of the world, for it is this claim that speaks directly to both the alienation so hauntingly portrayed in *Up in the Air* and the spiritual hungers that are revealed in our love for the people of Pandora and their connection to the Tree of Souls.

The first thing to note about Nasr's claim that in contact with Islam the modern west has great potential resources for recovering the importance of tradition is that, in his view, we will not find these riches among the contemporary counterparts to the Na'vi armies. He claims that a commitment to tradition has been abandoned as much by what we, in the West, often call fundamentalist Islam as by modern secularism. For him these "fundamentalist" philosophies fail precisely because they believe that the entire truth of a religion can be encapsulated in its founding documents. A tradition, on the other hand, requires being handed down from generation to generation and spread from place to place by living persons and in ways that adapt to changing circumstances and different cultures under the continuing guidance of divine wisdom. Nasr believes this notion of traditional religion is under great threat within Islamic countries. He goes so far as to claim that "politically speaking all the governments in the Islamic world today, even those that possess a traditional structure, are controlled by either the modernists or by so-called fundamentalists."[16]

In Nasr's view a great deal of these "fundamentalist" tendencies, which have captured our attention with their violent resistance to the west and that are so hostile to a living and growing Islamic tradition, can be traced to a line of influence that begins in the alliance between Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab and the house of Sa'ud in the 18th century, goes on to inspire Sayyid Qutb's version of the Muslim Brotherhood in the mid 20th century, and then radiates out to the various members of the Mujahedeen and al-Qaeda through Wahhabist schools and mosques financed by Saudi Arabian oil over the last 50 years.[17]

This is not the place to evaluate Nasr's claim,[18] but it is worth a brief look at Qutb and Wahhab, regardless of our ultimate judgment about their place in the history of Islamic thought, as examples of what Nasr sees as paradigmatic of anti-traditional thinkers that have been so destructive of the nobler aspects of Islam. Wahhab and Qutb are among the few leaders in the history of Islam to call for *jihad* against their fellow Muslims, for they both believed that Islamic culture in many places had been irredeemably corrupted by innovation. For these two, strict observance of the Qur'an (as dictated to Muhammad by the angel of

God) and the Hadith of al-Salaf as-Saleh (the divinely inspired sayings and doings of Muhammad written by the first three generations of his followers) alone are all that is needed to guide a person's life. Thus, they reject any teachings not found in these texts as *bid'ah*, or innovation. This means that the processes of tradition or the handing down of truth from one generation to the next and the ongoing revelation of the divine through the natural world must both be rejected as the source of innovation and distortion of a message that is already fully contained in the text of the original sayings. From this it follows for both Wahhab and Qutb that good Muslims must submit to no human judgment or authority, for their behavior and belief must be guided only by their religious texts. As Qutb writes in his most influential work, *Milestones*, "it is first necessary that a Muslim community come into existence which believes that 'There is no deity except God,' which commits itself to obey none but God, denying all other authority"[19] and again:

> When, in a society, the sovereignty belongs to God alone, expressed in its obedience to the Divine Law, only then is every person in that society free from servitude to others, and only then does he taste true freedom. This alone is "human civilization," as the basis of a human civilization is the complete and true freedom of every person and the full dignity of every individual of the society. On the other hand, in a society in which some people are lords who legislate and some others are slaves who obey them, then there is no freedom in the real sense, nor dignity for each and every individual.[20]

Thus, it would seem that Western modernity and Qutb's fundamentalist Islam that battles with it are both rooted in a common rejection of tradition and the authority of traditional leaders. It is for this reason that Nasr claims, "in many ways, Islamic 'fundamentalism' and modernism are two sides of the same coin."[21] If he is right, the philosophy behind the military resistance to American forces of "shock and awe," which in the real world of Afghanistan correspond to the fictional Na'vi, will not provide the in-depth dialogue partner for building a cultural encounter with the sacred that Cameron invokes in *Avatar* and for which his fans yearn. The hope for inspiration from the Muslim world for overcoming alienation and the loss of the sacred in the modern west looks even more doubtful if Nasr is correct that "politically speaking all the governments in the Islamic world today, even those that possess a traditional structure, are controlled by either the modernists or by so-called fundamentalists."[22]

However, Nasr argues that there is a third strand to Islam that is on the defensive and is not represented officially in any current political state, but is nonetheless still a living influence within the Muslim world. This strand he calls traditional Islam, and he explicitly argues that *this* strand of Islam can, indeed, be a model for the recovery of the sacred in the West and thereby a recovery of our relationships to other people and to the world. In fact Nasr opens his Gifford Lectures from 1980 claiming that his aim is to aid "in the resuscitation of the sacred quality of knowledge and the revival of the veritable intellectual tradition of the West with the aid of the still living traditions of the Orient where knowledge has never become divorced from the sacred."[23]

Nasr's argument can be summarized by three basic trajectories. (1) When human beings take the material world to be a self-contained reality to be known in-itself and thus lose their understanding of the world as sacred creation to be understood fully only in the light of the divine, then they become lost in a market place without true sustained relationships to other people or the world. (2) The sacredness of the world is revealed through the light of a sacred knowledge rooted in tradition. (3) This understanding of a sacred knowing is threatened in the Muslim world but is still alive, and therefore it may be a model for a western culture in which this sacred knowledge, and thus sustained connection to the sacred, has been lost.

Nasr's first trajectory, his argument for the causal relation between the abandonment of the sacred and the experience of alienation, relies on the claim that when we, as human beings, refuse to acknowledge the dependence of creation on a higher divine reality, we refuse our role as "pontifical man" or bridge between earth and heaven and become "Promethean man" in an attempt to define our human world as the ultimate reality. Paradoxically, this does not raise the world that is now to be valued for its own sake and not merely as a reflection of something else; rather, it strips the world of meaning and severs our relations to it and to one another. "Such a man [the Promethean] envisages life as a big marketplace in which he is free to roam around and choose objects at will. Having lost the sense of the sacred, he is drowned in transience and impermanence."[24] A careful analysis of Nasr's argument lies beyond the scope of this article, but the general alignment between his position and the themes of *Up in the Air* and *Avatar* should already be beginning to appear. But the key to Nasr's relevance for our discussion is his account of *why* an encounter with the sacred that would overcome our alienation must be rooted in a tradition, a theme that is only hinted at in *Avatar*.

In *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Nasr gives three main reasons for the importance of tradition. First, the exegesis of scripture within a traditional framework reveals that discovery of the divine is not primarily achieved in thinking or reading about God or God's revelation as if we were learning some external fact; rather, traditional exegesis reveals that every act of knowing involves an inner illumination by which the human mind participates in the divine intellect. Second, tradition, as the handing down of divine truth, places this personal experience of divine intellect within the context of historical and interpersonal relations. In other words, tradition reveals the worldly aspect of inner illumination. Third, according to Nasr, it is within the bounds of tradition that the things of the physical world can be seen in the most universal and richest possible way as manifestations of the divine nature.

Nasr's first argument emerges from a reflection on the conditions necessary for an encounter with the sacred among practitioners of a scriptural religion, but opens onto a hermeneutics of the sacred that embraces all acts of knowing. He writes, "without reviving spiritual exegesis, it is not possible to rediscover *scientia sacra* in the bosom of a tradition dominated by the presence of sacred scripture. Scripture possesses an inner dimension which is attainable only through intellection operating within a traditional framework."[25] Nasr's insistence on the importance of understanding a holy text in the context of tradition is designed to resist the temptation to reduce divine revelation to an external relation on two fronts. On the one hand, a radically fundamentalist interpretation of scripture reduces a text to an already constituted totality to which one merely conforms by the outward observances of correct belief, ritual, and conduct. On the other, a radical historical-critical method reduces the text to a set of social and moral commentaries that reveal only the conditions of the time and place in which it emerged. Again, the text becomes a merely external object that one appropriates. Against these two tendencies, a properly hermeneutical tradition reminds us that a holy text speaks directly to the inner spirit of a listener by a divine act of illumination of the intellect. Thus, the meaning of the text cannot be thought about, even as a limit idea, as external to the reader. Meaning always merges from the relation between knower and text. For Nasr this is not only the model that maintains the tie between scriptural exegesis and the sacred, but the model for all knowing able to recognize the sacredness of its object. According to Nasr, in each act of intellection, the mind is illuminated by the rays of divine intellect.

> Spiritual hermeneutics is the means whereby the intelligence, sanctified by revelation, is able to penetrate into the heart of revelation to discover the principial truth that is the very root and substance of intelligence itself. In this process the microcosmic manifestation of the Intellect, which is the source of inner illumination and intellection, unveils the inner meaning of that macrocosmic manifestation of the Intellect which is revelation or more specifically, sacred scripture. Moreover, the same truth pertains *mutis mutandis* to the interpretation of the inner meaning of that other revealed book which is the cosmos itself.[26]

Thus in protecting the truths of sacred scripture from being reduced to external facts by either fundamentalism or historicism, tradition, the handing down of spiritual and pastoral hermeneutic wisdom, provides the model that protects knowledge of the natural world from being reduced to a positivism that posits truth as a self-contained reality within the material thing, to which the human remains external, or a constructivism that posits truth as merely the beliefs of a certain people or the expression of the social and economic conditions of a particular historical situation, to which the nature of the thing itself remains external. Rather, in all instances of knowing, whether the discovery of the relations in the Pythagorean theorem or the optimal foraging strategy of bees, the knower and the objects of knowledge are held together in an internal relationship interwoven by the light of the divine intellect that orders all things. Thus, for Nasr, the act of knowing binds the nature of the mind to nature of the thing as both are elevated towards the divine.

Second, while Nasr believes that participation in a tradition can help avoid the reduction of all acts of knowing to individual empirical and psychological facts, thus preserving the transcendent or metaphysical aspects of knowing, he also believes that it has the ability to avoid the philosophical temptation toward a "vulgar" Platonism that sees truth as requiring a disregard of the sensuous and particular. This philosophical temptation is perhaps most acute in times of religious pluralism and can emerge from the very attempt at intercultural and inter-religious dialogue that both Nasr and I want to promote. He writes that this attempt,

> has lead certain scholars and philosophers engaged in "comparative philosophy" in the context of East and West to speak of "meta-philosophy" and a meta-language which

> stands above and beyond the language of a particular tradition. *From the traditional point of view, however*, the language of metaphysics is inseparable from the content and meaning it expresses and bears the imprint of the message, this language having been developed by the metaphysicians and sages of various traditions over the ages.[27]

So, tradition, the handing down of wisdom from one generation to the next, ties us to an origin, a founding event in which the divine reality is revealed in a unique way. But it also preserves a certain historical and worldly "thickness" in which that revelation is constantly renewed through a specific temporally and geographically embedded community. As Nasr argues, "tradition extends the presence of the sacred into a whole world, creating a civilization in which the sense of the sacred is ubiquitous. The function of a traditional civilization may be said to be nothing other than creating a world dominated by the sacred."[28]

Finally, for Nasr, tradition is most specifically tied to the sacredness of the world in the way it reveals the symbolic nature of sensuous reality. Nasr writes, "since *scientia sacra* is expressed outwardly and does not remain only on the level of the inner illumination of the heart, it is necessary to understand something of the kind of language it employs. The formal language used for the expression of *scientia sacra*, and in fact nearly the whole spectrum of traditional teachings, is that of symbolism."[29] We have just seen that tradition plays an important role, in a general way, for Nasr in protecting his neo-platonic illuminationism from collapsing into a private psychological experience. Now, with regard to the symbolism of things, tradition plays a more specific role. The final goal, for Nasr, is to move beyond the recognition that knowing things is a participation in the divine intellect, to seeing things as immediate manifestations of the divine reality in symbolic form.[30] This recognition is not an automatic part of the human condition. On the contrary, we have deep tendencies, enshrined in the deepest levels of our thinking and manifest already at the very level of grammar, to see things as self-contained, discreet objects bearing properties as if those properties were their own independent possessions. And yet some things appear with such richness and as so pregnant with meaningful connections that they over-power our objectivist tendencies and draw us toward seeing these things as manifestations of divine power and grace. For examples of these natural and universal symbols we might think of the sun, the morning star, a kiss, a storm, a glass of red wine and all the poetic descriptions these things call forth from us. However, according to Nasr, outside of tradition this way of encountering things

tends to be both rare and rather inchoate. Through initiation into tradition this way of encountering the world can be broadened and deepened as certain sensuous things become privileged within the liturgical life of a particular people and thus points of orientation and exemplars for the encounter with the rest of the sensuous world. As he explains,

> There are, moreover, symbols which are "natural" in the sense of being inherent in the nature of certain objects and forms through the very cosmogonic process which has brought forth these forms upon the terrestrial plane. There are other symbols which are sanctified by a particular revelation that is like a second creation. The sun is "naturally" the symbol of the Divine Intellect for anyone who still possesses the faculty of symbolic perception and in whom the "symbolist spirit" is operative. But the same sun is sanctified in a special manner in solar cults such as Mithraism and gains a special significance in a particular traditional universe as has wine in Christianity or water in Islam. The Sufi poets may use the symbolism of wine in the first sense of symbol but it is the Christic descent which has given that special significance to wine in the Eucharist as a sanctified symbol that remains bound to the particular world which is Christian. *Scientia sacra* makes use of both types of symbolism in the exposition of its teachings but is always rooted in its formal aspect in the tradition in which it flowers and functions and by virtue of which the very attainment of this sacred knowledge is possible in an operative manner.[31]

Thus, in Nasr's view, it is the specificity of a particular tradition that trains us to see particular ordinary things around us as symbols that elevate us to the divine, and gradually we are lead to see all of reality as full of sacred and particular natures drawing us towards the eternal.

As we contemplate our prospects for the future in the light of the disconnected and lonely wasteland revealed in *Up in the Air* and the deep spiritual hunger revealed in *Avatar*, it seems clear that our task is almost inestimably more challenging and graver than merely standing firm against dangerous new technologies and somehow finding the courage to build an arc that will gather up what we have and hold onto it through the dark time to come. Rather, we must confront the very ideas that undergird our contemporary culture and find a way to rekindle a thriving spiritual way of life that recognizes the sacredness of a

world. Nasr makes a strong case that integral to this life immersed in the sacred must be a thriving tradition of spiritual interpretation at the heart of all knowing. It remains to be seen in what ways and to what degree his vision of Islam in which "the very substance and existence of everything is ultimately the Breath of God in God's aspect of compassion and mercy"[32] will be successful in inspiring renewal within the broader cultural life of the west. But I believe it is a conversation well worth having.

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1. There is a strange tendency within a capitalist logic, already noticed by Marx in "The Meaning of Human Requirements," to valorize a seemingly strange combination of frantic consumption and monk-like asceticism. But while the monk embraces the rigours and detachment of the ascetic life for the purpose of achieving nirvana in the union with Being or the fulfillment of desire in the union with the divine, Bingham's has no point other than the purely abstract and hauntingly meaningless goal of collecting frequent flier miles that he has no intention of using to actually get anywhere.

2. See also Alain Badiou, "Bodies, Languages, Truths" (lecture delivered at Victoria College of Arts, 9 Sept.), http:// www.lacan.com/badbodies.htm, in which he diagnoses modern alienation with the term "democratic materialism" and argues that detachment from obligations in one's sexual life is the paradigmatic modern freedom. "For democratic materialism, truth is clearly definable as the (negative) rule of what there is. One is free if no language comes to prohibit to individual bodies to deploy their own capacities. Or again: languages let bodies actualize their vital possibilities. This is why, in democratic materialism, sexual freedom is the paradigm of every freedom. It is in effect clearly placed at the point of articulation of desires (bodies) and linguistic, prohibitive or stimulating legislations. The individual must see recognized its right to 'live his or her sexuality.' The other freedoms will necessarily follow. And it is true that they follow, if we understand every freedom from the point of view of the model it adopts with regard to sex: the non-prohibition of the uses that an individual can make, in private, of the body that inscribes it in the world. It is nevertheless the case that, in materialist dialectics, in which freedom is defined in an entirely different manner, this paradigm is no longer tenable. It is not a matter in effect of the bond — of prohibition, tolerance or validation — that languages entertain with the virtuality of bodies. It is a matter of knowing if and how a body partakes, through languages, in the exception of a truth. We can put it as follows: being free is not of the order of relation between bodies and languages, but, directly, of incorporation (to a truth)."

3. "Production Notes: About the Film," *Up in the Air: Official Movie Site*, accessed 15 Jul. 2011, http://www.theupin theairmovie. com/up-in-the-air-film#/aboutTheFilm/productionNotes.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. James Cameron, *Avatar*, 65, accessed 1 Jun. 2011. http://web.archive.org/web/20100525105437/http://www.foxscreenings.com/media/pdf/JamesCameronAVATAR.pdf.

7. Ibid., 47.

8. Ibid., 46.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., 46, 80, 122.

11. "All Time Box Office," *Box Office Mojo*, http://www.boxofficemojo.com/alltime/world/.

12. Ray Subers, "*Avatar* Strikes DVD," *Box Office Mojo*, 21 Apr. 2010, http://www.boxofficemojo.com/news/? id=2728&p=.htm.

13. Russell D. Moore, "Avatar: Rambo in Reverse," *The Christian Post*, 21 Dec. 2009, accessed 10 July 2011, http:// www.christianpost.com/article/20091221/avatar-rambo-in-reverse/index.html.

14. "As 'Avatar' Sets Box-Office Record, Fans Make Return Trips to Pandora," *The Wall Street Journal*, 26 Jan. 2010, accessed 10 Jul. 2011, http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2010/01/26/as-avatar-sets-box-office-record-fans-make-return-trips-to-pandora/.

15. Jo Piazza, "Audience Experiences 'Avatar' Blues," 11 Jan. 2010, accessed 10 Jul. 2011, http://articles.cnn.com/2010-01-11/entertainment/avatar.movie.blues_1_pandora-depressed-posts?_s=PM:SHOWBIZ.

16. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam at the Dawn of the New Christian Millennium," http://www.allamaiqbal.com/publications/journals/review/apr00/01.htm.

17. See, e.g., Nasr, *The Heart of Islam* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2002), 69-70; Samuel Helfont, *The Sunni Divide: Understanding Politics and Terrorism in the Arab Middle East* (Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2009), 21, accessed 10 July 2011, http://www.fpri.org/pubs/Helfont.SunniDivide.pdf.

18. The literature on the topic is vast, but for examples of support for Nasr's argument for a corruption of Islamic traditionalism along the Wahhab-Qutb axis see Tamera Albertini, "The Seductiveness of Certainty: The Destruction of Islam's Intellectual Legacy by the Fundamentalists," *Philosophy East and West* 53.4 (2003): 455-70. See also Helfont, *The Sunni Divide*, 21. For an opposing view, see Pope Benedict XVI's controversial Regensburg Address, "Faith, Reason, and the University: Memories and Reflections," 12 Sept. 2006, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html, in which he cites scholars who situate the extreme anti-rationalism and anti-traditionalism that mar today's fundamentalists as early as Ibn Hazm, writing just before Al Ghazali in the early 11th century. Sanford Lakoff argues that at least some of these problems exist already in the Qur'an itself, in "The Reality of Muslim Exceptionalism," *Journal of Democracy* 15.4 (2004): 133-39.

19. Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones,* 15, http://www.kalamullah.com/Books/MILESTONES.pdf.

20. Ibid., 50.

21. Nasr, *Islam in the Modern World,* 428.

22. Nasr, "Islam at the Dawn of the New Christian Millennium."

23. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 1.

24. Ibid., 72.

25. Ibid., 68.

26. Ibid., 69.

27. Ibid., 59.

28. Ibid., 36.

29. Ibid., 70.

30. In the Christian tradition, this would be called "sacramental" form. For a sample of recent work on the philosophical significance of this sacramental theology and its relation to the notion of symbol, particularly in engagement with many of the same philosophical sources in Platonism and phenomenology that inspire Nasr, see Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001); Robert Sokolowski, *Eucharistic Presence: A Study in the Theology of Disclosure* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994); Michael G. Lawler, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Contemporary Sacramental Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996); and Felix O'Murchadha, *A Phenomenology of Christian Life: Glory and Night* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

31. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 70.

32 Nasr, *The Garden of Truth* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 44.

REVISITING *DHVANI* IN THE CONTEXT OF THE AESTHETICS OF EXPERIENCE IN FILM

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In this paper, I explore an approach to cinema through some key ideas in Indian poetics. While there is a recent resurgence in India of films dealing explicitly with ideas from Indian philosophy, here I wish to locate a more implicit relationship between a mode of address in cinema (or aesthetics) and religious thought. When one turns attention to Indian aesthetics, the ideas of *rasa* and *dhvani* dating back to at least the 2nd century BC stand out as arguably the two most influential concepts throughout the centuries. These aesthetic formulations in their most evolved form were informed by insights from religious thought. These formulations I suggest can be located through certain forms of cinematic works and their mode of being in the world. Here I will look at one such example: the recent feature film in Hindi *Khargosh* (2008).

Khargosh, I argue, works towards constructing a narrative *through* experience rather than *of* experience. As I will show, the film reworks cinematically some of the key principles of the *dhvani* theory, originally formulated in the context of poetry. *Khargosh* works towards creating a viewing experience that takes the viewer closer towards *wholeness* rather than the alienated and divided self, often associated with the experience of film viewing, even while telling a more normative story.

The film is a small-budget independent production and it ran the festival circuit, gathered awards, but did not see theatrical release. It is an adaptation of a short story about the coming-of-age of a young boy, Bantu, who lives with his mother in a small town in north India. His only other companion is Avinash, a young man who lives upstairs. We see Bantu lonely and in search of playmates. The puppet-seller is his hope of being able to populate his world with companions. Bantu buys puppets from him with the assurance that they will speak soon. While he waits for this magic to happen, we see Bantu incessantly seeking out his only friend, the much older Avinash. When he does manage to catch up with him, Bantu must work hard at cajoling Avinash to leave his studies and spend time with him in some companionable activities. We see them flying kites or going out to the street corner to have

ice-lollies. As the film progresses this latter activity becomes regular and it finally dawns on Bantu that the lure for Avinash was something quite different from the simple pleasure of an ice-lolly. Avinash fancies a woman and is trying to woo her. Soon Bantu is embroiled in the courtship, carrying love notes back and forth, helping the two to meet. The affair begins to take its toll on Bantu who feels left out from this adult world and soon finds himself obsessed with Avinash's girlfriend, nicknamed Mrityu (death). With this, Bantu becomes sexually aware and moves towards the world of adulthood. The film ends with Bantu having a sexual encounter with Mrityu.

On a casual viewing, the film is a typical coming of age story. Yet there are elements in the film that stick out, refusing to fit neatly into the normative frame of such a story. These unruly elements act as those niggling thoughts at the back of one's head that do not allow one to rest, instigating a refusal to take things at face value, pushing one to take a second look. There is however another possibility of viewing. A viewer who brings her or his full attention and a desire to engage fully with the viewing process is likely to encounter a very different film; rendering the aforementioned review of the first impression of the film unnecessary.

The mode-of-address of the film begins from a slightly alienated tone, something we often identify with art film. It slowly moves towards an increasingly sensuous, embodied mode of address, attempting as it does to etch out the coming of age of a young boy and his waking up to desire, love and competition. The film contains some sections of powerful expressive imagery. Even while at times the frames communicate a sense of self-conscious formal construction and feel a little "wooden." The film is light on the story and dialogue front, but quite elaborate on exploring a "sensory narrative." The film creates a dreamlike texture, a fantasy, rather than a dramatic story within the coordinates of time and space.

I. RASA AND DHVANI

In trying to account for this film in a more holistic manner, I find it useful to turn to the ideas of *rasa* and *dhvani* in the context of Indian poetics. The concept of *rasa* can be traced as far back as at least Bharata's *Natyashastra* (and earlier). The *Natyashastra* is a seminal text on drama in Sanskrit, which among other things explains at some length the concept of *rasa*

(juice, sap, relish, essence). It has been argued that this formulation is extensible from the performing arts to the visual arts.[1]

B. N. Goswamy in the introduction to his book *The Essence of Indian Art* writes that "the word *rasa* is variously rendered."[2] He explains that many of the terms were not used in the same way as in the common manner of speaking, especially as the rhetoricians had expounded in some detail as to the particular meaning/s with which they were employing the terms. Alberuni in his commentary on India, *Ta'riqh al-hind,* based on his 13-year travel in India in the 11th century expressed bewilderment in his encounters with the usage of language in the sub-continent. He complains that the same word refers to different things and different words refer to the same thing![3] A similar phenomenon is at work when we try to locate the ideas of *rasa*[4] and *dhvani*. Yet, translations into other languages have created further resonances. Ironically, these multiple resonances add a certain depth which may perhaps be lost in the context of strict academic discourse that aims at being specific. This multiplicity may also be keeping in line with the thought of Anandavardhana who proposed the *dhvani* theory and held that good poetry (and prose) should offer many possible interpretations.[5]

Dhvani (suggestion, reverberation, sound, resonance) is especially challenging in its multiple usages and contexts. The *dhvani* theory can be traced back to 9th century Kashmir and attributed in its initial formulation to Anandavardhana. The reinterpretation by Anandavardhana of the concept of *rasa* from the *Natyashastra* led to the expansion of the idea of *dhvani* from its more or less literal meaning of sound in the context of the Vedas as well as the arts towards an understanding of it as the heart of poetry. With Abhinavagupta's significant contribution in the 11th century, these ideas were further expanded into a universal concept, lying at the heart of the aesthetic experience. Anandavardhana drew upon the idea of *sphot,* comprehension in a flash, from Bharathari's philosophy of language, to develop his idea of *dhvan*i — suggestion in a flash. One of the key aspects of this aesthetic theory is the way it bridges the dichotomy of subject and object, word and meaning. Prior to Anandvardhan's re-interpretation, the arts and their systemization were diverse and recorded in different *sastras* —— *natya , silpa, sangita* as well as *kavya* (dance, craft, music and poetry). While there existed large overriding concepts like *purusartha, pratibha, laksana, rasa*, which were by and large understood as relevant across the arts, "they were not emphasized in their univer-

sality to constitute a general aesthetic."[6] Anandavardhana marked a significant change in the approach to the subject of poetics.

> Anandavardhan turned around and told the traditionalists to their face: You have been analyzing and analyzing, adding to the divisions of *gunas* and *alamkaras*. But I tell you that the essence of poetry is that which baffles analysis in your way. I agree that no one can beat you on your own ground; but the truth about poetry lies another way. You may be good logicians and great grammarians; but you are not *sahrdayas* (sensitive listener) at all. You have been dissecting the body of poetry and missing its soul all the time.[7]

Anandavardhana locates the principle of suggestion as the essential element to create poetry. He argues that even the usage of metaphors would not be enough if a poet is required to follow the dictates of logic in his use of language. The true poet, he believes, uses language creatively. His usage must be necessarily unique in order to create the kind of resonance essential for good poetry. Such usage of language lends itself to creating *dhvani* or suggestiveness. And without the element of suggestion there can be no poetry.

Anandavardhana proposes three levels of poetry in terms of excellence, the highest form of poetry is when the suggested meaning (*vyanjana*) is dominating the expression vis-a vis that of the literal meaning (*abhida*) or the metaphorical meaning (*lakshana*). Second-level poetry is where the suggested meaning is subordinate to the literal meaning and third-rate poetry exists when there is negligible human emotion or evocativeness and is purely a technical exercise in the use of language.

Besides this categorization of the levels of excellence, Anandavardhana also proposed a tripartite structure for the kinds of *dhvani*, *vastu* (object) *dhvani*, *alanakar* (ornamentation) *dhvani* and *rasa dhvani*.[8] It is this last, which is considered the real *dhvani*, hence the most important to creating "true poetry." Here the affective and semantic functions are unified and part of the same articulation. Henceforth, my usage of the term *dhvani* will refer to this *rasa dhvani*. "According to Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta, the language of poetry crosses the bounds of empiricism, it crosses the realms of both *abhidha* (literal meaning) and *laksana* (external characteristics of the expression which mean something deeper)."[9]

II. KASHMIR SHAIVISM

The *dhvani* theory is an aesthetic theory with important religious links. Both Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta belonged to the sect of Kashmir Shaivism, a non-dualist religion. Abhinavagupta drew on key ideas of the mystical experiences of this religious sect to expand the *dhvani* theory into a universally applicable one. Yet it was not just mystical ideas that influenced aesthetic formulation. He held that the nature of the aesthetic experience was analogous to the mystical experience, though the aesthetic experience offered only a temporary experience of transcendence, the mystical experience offered a permanent one. He introduced larger, arguably metaphysical, concepts like *alaukika (*otherworldly*), camatakara (*pleasure of wonderment/aesthetic rapture*),* and *ananda* (bliss), specially useful for their universal relevance. *Dhvani* became a universal concept applicable to all forms of art.

The school of Kashmir Shaivism is dated to the 8th century with the revelation of the *sivasutras* to Vasugupta. The school's central belief is that the macrocosm of the universe is echoed in the microcosm of the body and that the two are one and the same. This idea principally informs the non-dualist philosophy of this religious sect. This branch of thought does not negate the world as unreal in the tradition of Shankara who reinterpreted the Upanishads and the Vedas to give shape to what is now know as the *Advaita Vedanta*, another non-dualist philosophy, dating back to 8th century Kashmir. The school of Advaita Vedanta considers the phenomenal world an illusion. On the other hand, there were the Buddhists who believed the phenomenal world was real though it was external and impersonal. They denied the existence of a supreme self, or a universal consciousness. The guiding philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism can be understood as the possibility of achieving bliss in the here and now, from within the world, rather than through a renunciation of it. This philosophy can be seen as a dialectical amalgamation in the manner of Hegel. The philosophy of the Carvaka school (extreme phenomenologists who denied any higher purpose to life except life itself) and the Advaita Vedantins who believed in transcendence, but at the expense of a full engagement with the world around (on a physical embodied level). Extreme opposites clash and bring about a positive synthesis in the form of the Trika school of Kashmir Shaivism.

It is pertinent here to note that Tantra, a part of the earlier Agamic tradition was crucial in the development of the philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism specially in its doctrine of affirmation of immanence. The tantra has been called a "spiritual science"; its wide-ranging influence is evident in the similarities between Tibetan Buddhism, Sufism as well as the Bhakti movement, the key being the emphasis on music, rhythm and poetry as a path to awareness or a higher consciousness or a merging with God.

The school of Kashmir Shaivism locates its key mystical experience in echoing the creative principle of the universe, in a ritualized sexual union between woman and man[10]— as representing the union of the active and passive principles in nature or that of *shiva* and *shakti*. This idea is also contained in the image of the seed of a grain, which is made of two parts until it germinates or comes to life. This coming to life is the moment of *sphota.* The contributions of Abhinavagupta in developing the *dhvani* theory emerge from a philosophical understanding of this mystical experience. He understood the central act of salvation, the remembrance of wholeness, or ultimate consciousness, as being a bodily felt process. Thus, Abhinavgupta marked the path to consciousness through *vimarsa*, the boldily felt awareness of the "pulsating heart." The *dhvani* theory grounded in this philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism is an essentially sensuous, and even erotic, phenomenology, which is also based on social relations. The key mystical experience in Kashmir Shaivism focuses on the elucidation of achieving wholeness within and without, i.e., not only in the individual but also in social communion. This is what makes this idea specially transferable to aesthetics, given the social context of theatre, poetry, and finally cinema.

> We see that among the treatises devoted to the four pursuits of human existence (purusarthas), the arts are classified under kamasutra. *Kama* is defined by Vatsayana as the disposition to feel pleasure in the experience of the five senses of hearing, touch, vision, taste and smell.[11]

Instead of asceticism, Kashmir Shaivism arguably proposes an aestheticism based on corporeal sensuousness, which is essentially a dynamic principle from stasis to movement and hence life, from *shiva* to *shakti.*

III. PHENOMENOLOGY

"'Sense experience' has become once more a question for us" writes Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception*.[12] The field of phenomenology is vast as well as ancient. Thousands of years ago, when *rishis* reflected on states of consciousness through meditation — they were practicing phenomenology. This approach towards studying first hand experience achieved an academic, methodical articulation with Husserl in Germany to give us what is today understood as classical phenomenology. The *dhvani* theory informed by Kashmir Shaivism can be seen to have close parallels to some key ideas in classical phenomenology in Western philosophy, specially existential phenomenology. The parallels in fact are suggestive of seeing "phenomenology" as a Western engagement with a manner of thinking associated with Eastern religions.[13] This contextualization is useful in moving the ideas of *dhvani* from a sacred space, sometimes reserved for the initiated and highly cultured, to a more profane one where the insights contained within this ancient articulation can become a source of active engagement in the everyday at the present moment.

Classical phenomenology is considered to have started with Husserl's transcendental idealism, where his aim was to study experience towards being able to discover its structures in order to find the essence of consciousness. But towards the end of his life, his position had begun to shift. In his last unpublished work, he can be found to be moving away from his earlier Cartesian approach towards a more existential position in a new approach "via the life world."[14] This is an unfinished work and only fragments are available, but it is arguable that he was moving away from his earlier central idea of "essence."[15] Merleau-Ponty moved further in this direction in showing that consciousness was essentially embodied (incarnated in the "body"). For Merleau-Ponty, the question was not essence, but existence. For him, consciousness lies in the embodied awareness of primal experience.

The phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty is marked by a conscious movement away from the Cartesian separation of subject and object, body and mind. He proposes a dialectical conception of consciousness. He locates the idea of an embodied existence, where there is no separation between inside or outside. This is similar to the idea in Kashmir Shaivism that the microcosm of the body resonates identically with the macrocosm of the universe and hence the two are essentially the same. Both are invested in non-duality. For both, the idea of "synthesis" is a central one. For Abhinavgupta, consciousness is the result of communion be-

tween two opposing (dialectical) principles of the active and the passive. For both philosophies, consciousness is the process of embodied awareness.

> We pass from double vision to the single object, not through an inspection of the mind, but when the two eyes cease to function each on its own account and are used as a single organ by one single gaze. It is not the epistemological subject who brings about the synthesis, but the body [...].[16]

A "fundamental amazement"[17] informs Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in its ability to embrace change and variable realities of existence. His phenomenology becomes life affirming in a similar tenor as the *dhvani* theory, which is based in an appreciation of the natural world's incessant movement as the basis for creation. The concept of *camatkara* resonates with this fundamental amazement. Instead of trying to remove this variability, the movement is to be immersed within it, and in this vital relationship find the "truth," transcendence in immanence.

IV. NEW SCHOLARSHIP

It is possible to further contextualise the *dhvani* theory in relation to the relatively recent scholarship informed by Merleu-Ponty' phenomenology. In a new line of scholarship within film studies, there is an approach to studying cinema in the context of "sensuousness," a study of the way the senses engage in different cinematic articulations to make meaning beyond the strictly textual.

The 1985 cinema books by Deleuze, the 1990 thesis by Vivian Sobchack's *The Address of the Eye* and the 2000 book *Skin of the Film* by Laura Marks have chalked a path to a new approach to studying the phenomenon of film. This phenomenological approach to film studies, sometimes referred to as the "sensuous turn," adds a dimension to the understanding of film that has mostly been absent within academic film discourse. There is a notorious difficulty in articulating that which is almost intangible, the phenomenon of experience, which can be understood as being located primarily in the body's being in the world (the body, itself an irrevocably intertwined conglomeration of the physical and the mental), which

through attempts at articulation is often rendered facile or incomprehensible and sometimes purely trite. Laura Marks writes "Cinema is not fundamentally verbal and thus does not carry out lines of reasoning the way written theory does. Cinema exists on the threshold of language, and language must bring it across in order to have a conversation with it."[18]

The *dhvani* theory, with its emphasis on immanence, synthesis, and the idea of consciousness as a dialectical embodied process belongs, I believe, among these sensuous approaches to studying films. Sobchack describes the film viewing process, or what she calls *cinaesthesia*, this way:

> these bodies also subvert their own fixity from within, commingling flesh and consciousness, reversing the human and technological sensorium, so that meaning, and where it is made, does not have a discrete origin in either spectator's bodies or cinematic representation but emerges in their conjunction.[19]

The *dhvani* theory was able to expand the idea of *rasa* towards a more universal aesthetic ideal applicable to all art forms — dance, drama, poetry, music, sculpture, and painting. Here, I attempt to extend the *dhvani* theory to an understanding that encompasses film, through a more varied cinematic mode of address. A mode of address or "cinematic language" that is suggestive as well as sensuous (*rasa dhvani*).

V. DHVANI IN FILM

While Anandavardhana formulated the idea of *dhvani* in the context of poetry, he agrees that even prose when it is suggestive can be called *dhvani*.[20] *Rasa* can be understood as an affective theory, whereas *dhvani* is primarily semantic in conception. And hence ideas of language, syntax, and meaning, or modes of address within the different arts, require some attention.

To be able to further expand the concept of *dhvani,* so that it may even include cinema, we must attempt to answer the question: what is the "suggestive" or *vyanjana* in the language of cinema? This question poses unique problems given this medium's connection with reality. The nature of "filming" and cinematography is such that all aspects are already captured, and hence given, and so to further create suggestion offers some difficulty. Generally,

the suggestion available in cinema is of the order of Anandavardhana's second-level poetry, where the element of suggestion is secondary to that of the literary meaning and maybe studied under the idea of "metaphor" or "sub-text." Or, at the most, it is of the order of Barthes' third meaning, where the "filmic" always exceeds our ability to comprehend and hence it is only available through the study of the still-image. But what of the highest level of poetry as proposed by Anandavardhana, where, once the implied meaning flashes through, the literal meaning recedes into the background?

VI. THE "SUGGESTIVE"

Laura Marks' development of the idea of haptic visuality in the context of cinema offers one possibility of the suggestive in cinema. These images are so "'thin' and unclichéd that the viewer must bring his or her resources of memory and imagination to complete them. The haptic image forces the viewer to contemplate the image itself instead of being pulled into the narrative."[21] The fact that such an image is able to communicate at all is based on the body's synaesthetic mode of perception.[22] The idea of synaesthesia is here a concept informed by gestalt psychology, "the co-operative modalities and commutative system of the bodily senses that structure existential perception are called synaesthesia."[23] This idea is usually thought as something associated with specially "gifted" people, such as the painter Kandinsky, who is believed to have this facility. Synaesthesia is thought of as an anomaly rather than a commonly occurring phenomenon. Sobchack suggests that it is rather that we have become so used to this function of "co-operative modalities" in our perceptual system that it has become transparent to us and only in "extreme occurrences" of it do we notice it.[24]

Describing the function of the haptic image, Laura Marks writes that "fundamentally, haptic images refuse visual plenitude," "when we find there is nothing to see, there may be a lot to feel, or smell. Cinema may not bring forth these missing senses, but it can certainly evoke them."[25] Merleau-Ponty's description of the human perception of sound is also uniquely resonant with Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta's idea of *dhvani:* "when I say that I see a sound, I mean that I echo the vibration of the sound with my whole sensory being — my body is a ready-made system of equivalents and transpositions from one sense to another."[26]

Dhvani seeks precisely to charge the body thus to be able to remember its essential wholeness. Relevant here may also be Walter Benjamin's understanding of language. He argues that language is inseparable from the physical body. It is a form given through the sounds and gestures that the body uses to communicate. Despite the sophistication in language that gives rise to the iconic and symbolic, the indexical remains at the heart of language and its representation is inextricable from its embodiment. He writes, "the coherence of words or sentences is the bearer through which, like a flash, similarity appears for its production by man — like its perception by him — is in many cases, and particularly the most important, limited to flashes. It flits past."[27] His idea of coherence in a flash is deeply resonates with the idea of *sphot* as it is contained in the *dhvani* theory.

This embodied basis of language and perception locates it as being essentially sensuous. Anupa Pande explains how the arts are classified under the *kamasutra* by Vatsayan, but the aesthetic pleasure through sensuous engagement with works of art is detached and free from desire. It is erotic, but not something that titillates the senses and generates desire in the beholder.[28] Similarly, Laura Marks qualifies "haptic visuality" as essentially erotic, when she writes that

> regardless of their content, haptic images are erotic in that they construct an intersubjective relationship between beholder and image. The viewer is called upon the fill in the gaps in the image, to engage with the traces the image leaves. By interacting up close with an image, close enough that figure and ground commingle, the viewer relinquishes her own sense of separateness from the image — not to know it, but to give herself up to her desire for it.[29]

VII. *KHARGOSH* (RABBIT)

Clearly, then, film viewing is not the process of a disembodied vision, but a synaesthetic and embodied one. The theory of *dhvani* was formulated from a critic's point of view; in drawing out the criteria of identifying excellence in poetry, the *dhvani* theory also suggests approaches towards creative expression that tend towards wholeness rather than fragmentation. This, hence, directs one to cinematic works that approach cinematic language from this point, the

position of consciously addressing, not just the disembodied eye, but the whole sensory being — in other words, films that take their sensuousness seriously.

Khargosh starts with a shot that is very red. This opening frame is occupied completely by six puppets, dangling in close proximity to the lens (a wide shot with the subject placed quite close to the lens, but not enough to create distortions). There is a morbid stillness in the shot; all the puppets are bereft of motion, except for one puppet that is rotating slowly, but regularly, at the corner of the frame. The duration of this shot is significantly long, 25 seconds. It is unusual to begin a film with such stasis. Yet, the strong redness of the frame and the uncanny image of puppets hanging, deathly still, effects the coming to attention of the viewer.

This opening shot cuts to a close-up of a young boy of eight or nine gazing at the puppets with a broad grin of amazement. His buck-teeth are strongly reminiscent of a rabbit (*khargosh*). Then a second shot comes as a bit of a surprise for the viewer, as the still, unreal, close-up first shot does not quite prepare us for another shot equally close and still, but animated and real. The worlds are synoptically connected. One would have expected a wider shot to contextualize the tight shot of the puppets. The second shot provides contextualization, but it is unexpected in moving from a close-up shot to another equally or even tighter close-up shot. This movement from viewing to seeing from another's point of view so quickly and without preparation throws one off a little bit, especially given the extreme tightness of the shot. There is just a touch of claustrophobia. The redness of the frame seems to have lightened with the bright yellow-green shirt of the boy and little bits of white light streaming into the frame. The second shot lifts the films from the somber note that the first shot had created.

The third shot reveals the puppeteer whose voice we hear from off screen. He inquires of the boy:"Child, is there anything you want?" To which the boy asks: "Do they speak?" "They all speak," the puppet-seller replies. Finally the boy asks: "When will they speak?" And he answers: "The maker of these, almighty, is tired and is sleeping. When he awakes, he will put life in them, then all these will speak."

The puppeteer is seen through a cluster of puppets, white hair, white beard, with a streak of white light falling on the right side of his head, contrasting with the otherwise redness of the frame. He seems almost other-worldly. The next shot is a close-up of hands and an exchange of money; clearly, the boy has been satisfied with the promise of the puppets

speaking soon. The lack of conventional continuity in the logic of the shots is apparent in the absence of an establishing shot as well as in the forgoing of the shot/counter-shot protocol or of shots matched on action.

This first sequence is marked with a strong sense of artifice and theatricality. It seems to be "constructed" in order to defy the sense of naturalness that many films strive to achieve. *Dhvani* emphasizes that for poetry to be excellent, the language must be unique to the poet and must not follow the logic of everyday language. Similarly, cinematic language will always be less than natural or realistic in the manner of mainstream or classical narrative feature films. The artifice here is laboured and it is not in order to be stylish, which can be seen in films working to create visual spectacle through unusual angles, colours, and frames.

The next two shots quickly introduce the other key characters of the film: the boy's mother, who we see praying alone before her personal temple, and Avinash, the young man living upstairs. We see Bantu calling out to him, but he does not show up. The door of Avinash's room is deep blue and textured, as seen from the outside, and a little later from the inside, dark, with a deep texture and angular chinks of light. Earlier, the colour *red* had become dominant in the film with the opening scene, from the previously mentioned first shot to the last shot of red chillies drying in the sun as the shadow of the boy, passing by on a bicycle, crosses over it while returning home. In the first sequence, between the mother and the son, Bantu is sitting in the centre of a courtyard eating food and his mother has come in to join him. The top-shot emphases the squareness of the space. Symmetrical in its composition, with multi-coloured pillars of red and blue on either side of the frame, the shot highlights the squares of colourful cement of the courtyard. It is reminiscent of the surface of a child's board game.

The idea of play occupies a central role in the beginning of the film. Board games, puppets, cycles, and kites take up significant space in the narrative. Just as we see Bantu several times throughout the film, running up and down, calling out to his adult playmate, "Avinash Bhai, Avinash Bhai," often to no avail. This theme of play is not without a sense of looming heaviness just beyond the frame, suggested through the slow pace, extreme angles of the shot and highly composed frames — or maybe just the loneliness of the little boy seeking for speaking friends in dead puppets, otherwise caught in a world populated only by his mother and the young man who lives upstairs.

There is a day-night logic to the film. The sensuous shots of the night contrast with the stark blandness of the day. The first time we encounter night, we see the boy creep out of the bed he shares with his mother to play with his little animal toys, after which he steals out of the house and runs into the forest. The forest at night is not a scary place for the young boy. We see him running without restraint through the forest. This shot then cuts unceremoniously to a shot of children playing in the courtyard of a school. The film becomes diurnal, bland and white. While the forest is often associated with sexuality, it is friendly and exciting even at night. It is an adventure: the staircase leads up to Avinash's room (which we do not see until after he is involved with Mrityu) is dark, steep and sharp edged, even during the day. Ascending the staircase is heady and life threatening, akin to the danger of falling off a cliff.

The film is strewn with sensuous images, mostly close-ups, lush with texture and colour. These images appear abruptly, in that they appear isolated, different in tone from the images that follow or came before. These shots are clearly different to the wider shots of white walls and sunlight often seen in the film. While these shots are repeated throughout the film, there is no evident reason for their appearance. They remain a mystery (until much later). As the film progresses, the incidence of these sensuous shots begin to take precedence over the other more objective, mundane, informational shots.

It is possible to see *Khargosh* primarily structured through opposites. Most of the key motifs in the film work between opposites like day/night, colour/monotone, bored/obsessed, play/work, childhood/adulthood. Similarly, the film can also be seen to be working with two registers of visual language: one, more objective, though hardly "natural," where the camera angles are oblique and the framing tends to create a sense of artifice or discomfort, or pure theatricality; the other, using a much more subjective style where the affective is given precedence over objectivity.

In fact, a significant element in the film is the manner in which it builds on the sensuality of images and the sense of a body rising to sensuality through them. We see the boy in deep sleep rubbing one hand over the other. It is an unconscious gesture shown through a close-up. This shot occurs shortly after he has accompanied Avinash a few times to the street corner, waiting for the girl to pass by. The images of the sensuousness of skin against skin resonates further with other sensuous close-ups throughout the film — the shots of cooking *chappatis*, a hot smoking dish, the mother's massages. The film's construction shows a pro-

gression where the film moves from a primarily objective view (even though constructed, unreal, and full of artifice) towards a largely sensuous one. In this process, the film gently leads the viewer towards learning to respond to the sensuous images, in a synaesthetic wholeness, towards reading the resonances within the film based on a bodily response.

This motif of sensuousness begins to take definite form with a sequence that marks the move to the film's denouement. This sequence involves a *tonga*, a horse-pulled carriage, with a red canopy carrying Mrityu and Bantu. Sitting side by side, almost touching but not, until slowly, accidentally but perhaps consciously, the boy's arm brushes against her stomach, and from this point on the film picks up pace. From this moment on, the images are largely of a highly sensuous nature. There is a long scene where we see the two of them running through the forest. This building sensuousness of the images at a fast pace culminate with the last shot. Bantu encounters Mrityu in the dark staircase and, as Bantu reaches for her, she draws him towards her. A spiraling, rising camera in the very dark staircase capture the jagged, textured, shards of blue light sneaking in. Extreme top angle shots highlight the edginess as well as the excitement of the scene. The film ends with this frenzied movement as opposed to the stillness of the first shot. If the opening shot is red, the closing shot is black, blue, dark. Both shots lack white light — but the very last f*rame* is also red.

Towards the end of the film, in the middle of these intensely sensuous scenes, in keeping with the cinematic logic of the film, we cut almost abruptly to an uncanny high-angle shot announcing the death of the puppet seller. We look down from above as the corpse is carried on a bier, sliding through the frame, evoking water flowing. This is followed by shot of puppets burning. The motif of "play" will no longer surface. Bantu no longer believes that the puppets will speak — in fact, he no longer looks to them for companionship. This sequence marks a break in the film, the end of childhood, the loss of innocence, the death of the magical world order and hence the impending adulthood and dawn of sexuality.

The first 20 minutes stand against the final 20 minutes. The red motif at the beginning and end is strewed throughout the film and emphasizes the emotion of passion, even perhaps the erotic in different spaces and times as a continuous thread running through the narrative. The passion for play of a child is transformed into the sexual passion of an adult.

The film, as shown earlier, works through contrasts, the sharp whiteness against the textured colour shots and the dark, blue night shots. White heat and sapping blandness is experienced at school, in the mother's kitchen, courtyard, and **terrace.** With the first sexual expe-

rience of Bantu, the world has been energized and the theme of opposites is dissolved. Correspondingly, the style of the film leads the viewer to experience wholeness via the elimination of duality. Form and content, image and meaning are united in the manner of Walter Benjamin's description of primitive language as essentially mimetic.[30] The meaning and experience coincide. The film tells a story through experience as the viewer is taken through a similar experience as Bantu, in his rising awareness of sensuality and eroticism. The film's suggestiveness lies primarily in the gradual change in the nature of images from the descriptive towards the expressive.

Anandavardhan took from Bharatahari's theory of language the idea of *sphot* or understanding in a flash. According to the theory, only the whole sentence makes sense and it is the last sound of the word in the sentence that gives meaning to the utterance. The words cannot be taken separately in trying to understand the meaning of the sentence. Transposing it to films, the last shot of the film takes on an unusual importance. It is this shot, able to be experienced and not merely seen, that holds the key to making sense of the film on different levels.

The state of loneliness is a metaphor for the feeling of purposelessness. This sense of alienation and disconnection is echoed by the artificial and constructed mode in the beggining of the film. The arrival of the girl, Mrityu, gives the boy a real sense of purpose. He had earlier played with his toys, but was clearly bored with them and was often seen waiting for a chance to "play" with his adult friend. The old puppet seller, quixotic and ethereal, gives significance to the young boy's life and is emblematic of a magical world order. For that reason, he must pass away for the boy to grow up, or more accurately, to achieve consciousness. The puppeteer, I suggest, is the priest who speaks for God and who is tired and asleep. Only when he awakens, does he tell the young boy that the puppets will speak and that things may come to life. When he dies, the boy loses his guide to "salvation" and must find his own path to a meaningful life. In the episode in the stairway, he finally finds it. The viewer is unable to decipher much in this sexual encounter. The image is of the order of the "experiential," of the mode of the "expressive." It is difficult to get a clear sense of what is happening in any objective sense. The viewer can only try to relate to the image through a subjective, synaesthetic engagement, that is, through the body so as to be able to partake of its meaning. The image must be felt in order for us to get at its sense. The subject merges with the object and the duality inherent in language is erased. The final image can be seen as essentially the image of a "sense of movement" and it is both physically and psychically affective. Within Kashmir Shaivism, crea-

tion is a ceaseless movement and the rise of consciousness is a bodily experience, whose image is of a serpent rising up the spine. The "sphot" of understanding of the last utterance turns the meaning of all the things that has preceded into a "flash" that "flits past."

The experience of the image is its meaning. In the *dhvani* theory, it is the last word. Here it is the last image, which enables making sense of the entire utterance given that the images (and the words) cannot be taken separately. Just as this theory contradicts the use of logic in the creation of poetry, *Khargosh* opts for a cinematic address that breaks the logical relationship of shots as exemplified in classical filmmaking and continuity editing.

Dhvani can be understood as a philosophy of transcendence in immanence. The achievement of unity is the moment of transcendence. Unity erases dualities and therefore must not be understood as occurring only in a person, but also in a community, between people. Community-based activities of culture can be understood as emerging from an intuitive understanding of this principle. As a result, the *dhvani* approach to cinema opens up the possibility towards a greater consciousness of living.

Dhvani offers a unique approach to studying films, especially those that use a subjective visual language, as these films evoke in the viewer a rising awareness of the synaesthetic, holistic perceiving self. If this relationship can be found to have a discernible pattern and is able to reveal its larger meanings with a key final image, as in *Khargosh*, the films may offer the possibility of transcendence in accordance with *dhvani* theory, offering wholeness in the face of an essentially fractured human existence in contemporary times. *Dhvani* aids the recovery of the ability to feel and perceive with the body as much as with the mind and to head towards wholeness and pulsating, dynamic life rather than still oneness.[31]

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1. B. N. Goswamy, *Essence of Indian Art* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, 1986), 19-20.

2. Ibid., 21. At one point, Coomaraswamy uses for it the term "ideal beauty". While "tincture" or "essence" are not employed in the context of aesthetic experience, the word commonly favored is "flavour." Manmohan Ghosh, in his translation of the text of Bharata's *Natyashastra*, preferred the term "sentiment." Other writers have used the term "relish" for *rasa*.

3. Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Bīrūnī, *Alberuni's India*, vol. I, trans. Edward Sachau (London: Trubner & Co., 1888), 17.

4. K. Krishnamoorthy, *Studies in Indian Aesthetics and Criticism* (Mysore: D.V.K. Murthy, 1979), 126-27.

5. K.M. Tharakan, "Theory of Synaesthesis in the Perspective of Rasa Siddhanta (Synaesthesis and Santa Rasa)" (PhD diss., Mahatma Gandhi University, 1995).

6. Abhinavagupta, *Abhinavabharati* , trans. Anupa Pande (Allahabad: Raka Prakashan, 1997), 15. This was basically because of the fact that the incommensurable diversity of the media for the different arts acts as a limit to those whose perception remains concentrated on the characteristic form and practices of the different arts.

7. Krishnamurti, *Indian Aesthetics and Criticism,* 89.

8. S. S. Toshkhanni, "Kashmir's Contribution to Indian Aesthetics," in *Cultural Heritage of Jammu and Kashmir*, ed. K. Warikoo (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2009), 27: "If an idea or material image — distinct subject — is suggested, then it is is to be called *vastu dhvani.* If the suggested sense is imaginative and relates to a figure of speech, we have *alankar dhvani*. But if a mood or state of mind or feeling is suggested, we have *rasa dhvani* — the highest category which establishes, the supremacy of *Rasa* or feeling on elements of form and structure."

9. Tharakan, "Theory of Synaesthesis in the Perspective of Rasa Siddhanta," 111.

10. The space here does not permit discussing this ritual in its practical conception, which clearly raises ideological as well as ethical issues, especially from a feminist perspective. However, it might be useful here to say that aesthetics informed Abhinavagupta's ideas of religion as much as religion informed aesthetics. In this context the ritual, central as it arguably is, ultimately may be seen as a ritual materialization of a principle that is intuited a priori.

11. Rekha Jhanji, *The Sensuous in Art* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1989), 66.

12. Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, The Phenomenology of Perception,* trans. Colin Smith (New York: The Humanities Press, 1962), 52.

13. It I also possible to draw interesting parallels between transcendental phenomenology and Vedanta.

14. H. Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction,* 3rd rev. and enlarged edn. (New York: Springer, 1982), 548.

15. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (1936; Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press 1970).

16. Merleau-Ponty*, The Phenomenology of Perception*, 208.

17. Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 551-52. Eugen fink had spoken of the "awakening of an immense amazement at the mysteriousness of the belief in the world." As the foundation for the operation of suspending it. Merleau-ponty sees in this account of the fundamental amazement (an amazement which is never to be overcome) the "best formula of the reduction" itself. Hence "the great lesson of the reduction is the impossibility of complete reduction." Thus, oddly enough, in Merleau-ponty's hands the phenomenological reduction becomes the means of refuting constitutive or phenomenological idealism.

18. Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), xiv.

19. Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture (*Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 67.

20. Krishnamurti, *Studies in Indian Aesthetic and Criticism*, 92. This theory admits that even common ideas of prose become poetry when they get suggested instead of being directly stated.

21. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 163.

22. Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience (*Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 77.

23. Ibid.

24. "We could add that we are also unaware of synaesthetic perception because it *is* the rule, and we have become so habituated to the constant cross-modal translations of our sensory experience that they are transparent to us except in their most extreme instances." — Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 70.

25. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 177, 231.

26. Merleau-Ponty, 234-35.

27. Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," in *Reflections:* Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Hartcourt, 1968), 333-36.

28. Jhanji, *The Sensuous in Art,* 66.

29. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 183.

30. Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," 336. Nature produces similarities; one need only think of mimicry. The highest capacity for producing similarities, however, is man's. His gift for seeing similarity is nothing but a rudiment of the once powerful compulsion to become similar and to behave mimetically. There is perhaps not a single one of his higher functions in which his mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role (cf. 336).

31. I would like to thank my guide Prof. Raja Mohanty for his comments and suggestions in helping steer my research work through difficult terrain. I would also like to thank my research committee panel in pushing me to put my thoughts on paper cogently. My classmates for their help and advise. IDC and IIT for supporting my work. Besides friends and family, all who have helped in countless ways in supporting my work. Last but not the least, the editor Sérgio Dias Branco who has gone beyond the call of an editor in the patience and perseverance in getting this article fit enough for publishing in this journal.

THE TAO OF BWO:
DELEUZIAN BECOMINGS IN KUNG FU CINEMA

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Kung fu cinema is no longer a specifically Chinese genre, neither is it solely Asian. Big budget blockbusters such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (*Wo hu cang long*, 2000), the *Rush Hour* series (1998, 2001, 2007), *Kill Bill* (2003, 2004) and many others demonstrate that kung fu today represents a dominant form of action which is not confined to a specific region or culture. As *The Matrix* trilogy (1999, 2003) suggests, kung fu is not just a fighting technique, but the main way of seeing, thinking and functioning in the near future world. While keeping in mind the Chinese origins of kung fu, this paper asks to explore kung fu cinema through the philosophy of Taoism, a Chinese philosophy that influenced both practical and cinematic kung fu to a great extent. However, the reading I am offering here takes the philosophical perspective of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who created their own understanding of Tao and integrated it into their unique conceptual world. I do not ask to offer a comparative analysis of Deleuzian philosophy and Taoism (which would be counterproductive from a Deleuzian perspective as it would go against the Deleuzian sensitivity to difference), but to complement them as *yin* and *yang* complement each other by constantly creating something new. I find Deleuze's thought most suitable for a philosophy of kung fu cinema first of all because of its emphasis on movement, and secondly because of its deterritorializing force, which opens Western philosophy to new directions. Deleuze's thought is connected to a specific line of thinkers in the Western history of philosophy, which since Plato is dominated by a logocentric, metaphysical thinking that seeks to establish truth in being and identity. Philosophers to whom Deleuze related himself, such as Nietzsche and Bergson, were seekers of another truth — that of life as change, movement and becoming. These philosophers were rare in the Western tradition, which seem to have repressed its pre-Socratic past. For Deleuze it was natural then to seek an alliance with Eastern thought, which never ceased to be a philosophy of becoming. Indeed, while Deleuze and Guattari view transcendence as "a specifically European disease,"[1] they recognized the Chinese Tao as "an

intensive body without organs […] a field of immanence in which desire lacks nothing and therefore cannot be linked to any external or transcendent criterion."[2]

I turn to Deleuze and Guattari in order to find possible answers to the following questions: Why do so many kung fu masters appear to be masochists? Why do so many cinematic and real kung fu fighters adopt animal styles? What is the philosophy behind the recent trend of virtual kung fu films, and what is the point in kung-fu hand-to-hand battles in a virtual world dominated by technology? Through various examples taken from highlights of kung fu cinema I attempt to demonstrate the relationship between Deleuze and Guattari's concept of body without organs (BwO) and Taoism. In the first part of this paper I draw a theoretical link between the Deleuzian BwO and Tao's concept of emptiness. In order to make themselves a BwO, Kung fu masters often pass through a stage of what appears as masochism. The second part of this paper deals with this apparent masochistic tendency and its justifications from a Deleuzian/Taoist perspective. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of BwO is by definition a process of becoming. Deleuze and Guattari describe many becomings, all connected to each other on a scale of becoming: "On the near side, we encounter becomings-woman, becomings-child […]. On the far side, we find becoming-elementary, -cellular, -molecular, and even becoming-imperceptible."[3] The third part of this paper examines the recurrent theme of becoming-animal in kung fu cinema, while the fourth and last part deals with the notion of perceiving the imperceptible in contemporary virtual kung fu cinema.

THE TAO OF BWO

Deleuze and Guattari described the body without organs as "nonstratified, unformed, intense matter, the matrix of intensity, intensity = 0."[4] This zero is a plane which renders forms (organs) formless. "The organs distribute themselves on the BwO, but they distribute themselves independently of the form of the organism; forms become contingent, organs are no longer anything more than intensities that are produced, flows, thresholds, and gradients."[5] The BwO is not opposed to the organs *per se* but to the organization of the organs in a form which imposes an identity that restricts the becoming of the body (as for instance, the human form prevents a becoming-animal).[6] In *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and

Guatarri dehumanize the body and describe it in machinic terms according to which everything is a machine, everything is a multiplicity of machines. The mouth for instance is an eating machine, a speaking machine and a breathing machine. One machine is always attached to another in an endless process of coupling. A mouth machine is attached to a breast machine, a flow producing machine (milk, but also desire and capital) and a machine which connects to it and draws a portion of the flow: "For every organ-machine, an energy-machine: all the time, flows and interruptions."[7] The BwO works with the organs as a connection of organ-machines and desire-machines which makes the body an open experiment in constant flow, but it can also work against the organs when they organize to a fixed form which arrests the possibility of becoming. On the one hand, the plane of organization endlessly labors on the BwO, trying to arrest the lines of flight, stop the deterritorialization of the body and form a subject in a depth dimension. The BwO or the plane of consistency, on the other hand, pulls itself from the organized body and its points of reference, releasing particles from the territories of type and species. The BwO is a smooth body like an egg, sterile and shapeless. It is the platform on which — or more accurately, through which — the organ-machines exist. Strictly speaking, the BwO is not a support for things to pass, but what causes them to pass not as forms but as intensities. "A BwO is made in such a way that it can be occupied, populated only by intensities. Only intensities pass and circulate."[8] In a way, the BwO is equivalent to the unconscious, but contrary to the Freudian unconscious it is not a metaphor (a sign denoting something else) but an empirical reality. It is not a transcendent idea, far and external, nor a deep and internal essence, but immanent metaphysics or matter itself — before its solidification into shapes and organs.

Taoism forms its own kind of BwO. *Tao* translates as "the way," that is, a plane of movement, which is defined by Lao Tzu (or Lao Zi) in the central text of Taoist philosophy, the *Tao Te Ching*, as "the shape that has no shape, the image that is without substance."[9] The Tao is conceptualized as emptiness which is the generative ontological process through which all things arise and pass away. Emptiness in Tao should not be confused with lack as it actually means fullness. According to Lao Tzu "the way is empty, yet use will not drain it."[10] Chuan Tzu (Zhuang Zi) asks, "What can be poured into without ever overflowing? What can be drawn from without ever emptying?"[11] This is the Tao. Once we inhabit the sourceless source of it, we are no longer a concrete form ("man," "woman" or even "human") but what

Deleuze and Guattari call "haecceity," subjectless intensities that spin out of the BwO without ever actualizing an organism. The notion of *tzu-jan* comes here as an occurrence appearing of itself, a self emerging order. The "ten thousand things" (a Chinese phrase to denote the infinite multitude of life) unfold spontaneously from the generative force of Tao, each according to its own nature. The (re)creation of this Taoist BwO is what Taoism calls *wu-wei* — emptiness' own doing, acting as a spontaneous part of *tzu-jan* rather than with self-conscious intention. As David Hinton explains, "It is the movement of *tzu-jan*, when we act according to *wu-wei* we act as the generative force itself." [12]

The main problem Taoism asked to confront is dualistic thinking. The dualism-machine is not only formed of two opposing terms, but in fact relies on a third term, a transcendent principle of judgment, which gives positive value to one side of the opposition while devaluating the other. Truth and man, for instance, are valued positively over the false and the woman via a third term which judges the opposition, such as the idea of self-identical being. The dualism-machine forms a triangle where each term in the opposition relates to its opposite through the third term which gives value to the whole system from a higher or deeper plane. Tao forms a completely different machine: a circle with two complementary sides (two interconnected opposites), each with the other at its center. In Taoism, man and woman or heaven and earth do not represent an opposition but a relation in movement, symbolized by the *yin* and *yang* which are the interrelated feminine and masculine forces of the universe.

Every aspect of life is governed by this relation — the tides of the sea, breathing, the cycle of life and death. According to Taoism, *yin* and *yang* do not create an opposition, but are rather conceptualized as interdependent forces. As can be seen in the *yin-yang* symbol, a little *yang* dot appears at the center of the *yin* and a little *yin* dot appears at the center of the *yang*. This indicates that each term on its own does not have an essence within itself, but rather have the other at its center, as each term's self-identity is in the field of the other. According to Peter Payne, concerning the principle of *yin-yang* circulation in martial arts, *yin* and *yang* are not related by a procedure of dialectics: 'this integrated state is not simply a balance or alteration between two separate functions; it is not "half one, half the other" or "first one, then the other,"[13] but rather the emergence of a new kind of energy, a new principle, which is a generating force in itself (*tzu-jan*). The *yin-yang* symbol should actually be rotating in order to show *yin* and *yang* in their ceaseless active alteration, as in natural cyclic processes. Lao Tzu stressed this interrelation throughout *Tao Te Ching*: "Is not the way [Tao] like the stretching of a bow? The high it presses down, the low it lifts up […] 'Bowed down then preserved; Bent then straight; Hollow then full; Worn then new […][14] The heavy is the root of the light; the still is the root of the restless […]," etc.[15] There is no relation here to any third fixed term which serves as an external criterion, but only a constant movement of opposing terms which push each other, replace each other and give birth to each other while spinning opposites beyond opposition. What would be seen if the *yin-yang* symbol would rotate is the dissolving of the *yin* and *yang* into a shapeless circle without contours: the total emptiness of Tao.

According to Deleuze and Guattari the BwO has two phases, "one phase is for the fabrication of the BwO, the other to make something circulate on it or pass across it."[16] The first phase of making a Tao BwO is the destruction of the dualistically organized body. The second phase is the circulation of intensities, the motion of *yin* and *yang* which flow on the smooth surface of the BwO as pure intensities. The BwO is a zero without negativity, without opposites at all, but it is at the same time the motion reactor of organs which spin on it as pure lines of movement or formless intensities (that can nonetheless form into an organism). The way of Tao is to go beyond, or more accurately — before the dualism appears and organizes the body in a state of binary opposition (for instance, the organs of woman *or* the organs of man). As Chuang Tzu said: "Life is born of death, and death of life […] Where *that*

and *this* cease to be opposites, you'll find the hinge of the way. Keep that hinge at the center of things, and your movements are inexhaustible."[17]

In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari refer to Tao in a passage that describes a Japanese compilation of Chinese Taoist sex:

> We see in it the formation of a circuit of intensities between female and male energy, with the woman playing the role of the innate or instinctive force (Yin) stolen by or transmitted to the man in such a way that the transmitted force of the man (Yang) in turn becomes innate, all the more innate: an augmentation of powers. The condition for this circulation and multiplication is that the man not ejaculate. It is not a question of experiencing desire as an internal lack, nor of delaying pleasure in order to produce a kind of externalizable surplus value, but instead of constituting an intensive body without organs, Tao, a field of immanence in which desire lacks nothing and therefore cannot be linked to any external or transcendent criterion.[18]

Unlike other machines which gather energy to a maximum point which results in emission (the sexual reproduction machine for instance), the Tao machine in principle never releases its energy, but keeps circulating the flows of desire in a field of immanence. In this way, the exchange of yin and yang will not produce a discharge but a BwO, which is a "plane of consistency proper to desire."[19] The BwO is in conflict with the plane of organization — which Deleuze and Guattari also call "a teleological plan(e)" and "a plan(e) of transcendence," a plane of "forms and their developments, and subjects and their formations" that relies on transcendent unity or a hidden principle.[20] The BwO, in contrast, is plane of consistency or composition, "a plane of immanence and univocality' in which 'form is constantly being dissolved, freeing times and speed."[21]

The influence of Taoism on the field of Chinese warfare is evident already in Sun Tzu's (or Sunzi) military treatise *Art of War*, in which he often relates to the Tao of warfare: various military aspects which he explains according to the Taoist *yin* and *yang* principle of active alteration and interdependence. As Sun Tzu writes, "chaos is given birth from control; fear is given birth from courage; weakness is given birth from strength";[22] because warfare is "the Way [Tao] of deception," the army must always retain the movement of alteration between these terms.[23] The battle field is in a state of flux and constant change, and therefore "a

victorious battle [strategy] is not repeated, the configurations of response [to the enemy] are inexhaustible."[24] The virtual field of inexhaustible movements corresponds to what may be called Sun Tzu's military BwO. This Taoist war-machine is powerful because it is formless. As Sun Tzu wrote, "The pinnacle of military deployment approaches the formless. If it is formless, then even the deepest spy cannot discern it or the wise make plans against it."[25] The Tao war-machine should be like water: a formless matter that can take all forms. As Sun Tzu had put it, "Water has no constant shape. One who is able to change and transform in accord with the enemy and wrest victory is termed spiritual!"[26]

Sun Tzu's warfare principles are applicable to the smaller scale of kung fu fighting, which focuses on the individual's body rather than the military organization. This can be attested by the writings of Bruce Lee, who was not only a major kung fu cinema performer, but also a gifted theoretician of modern day martial arts. His own kung fu "system" *Jeet Kune Do* (JKD actually rejects any one method, style, school or any constant strategic configuration of power) was developed as a practical way to survive in a battle, incorporating even "dirty" street-fight maneuvers in order to achieve this goal. In his book *Tao of Jeet Kune Do*, Lee describes the proper state of mind of the kung fu practitioner as a zone of "voidness" or "thusness." He describes it as

> that which stands right in the middle between this and that. The void is all-inclusive, having no opposite — there is nothing which it excludes or opposes. It is living void, because all forms come out of it and whoever realizes the void is filled with life and power and the love of all beings.[27]

This theoretical discourse acquires a very practical meaning in a kung fu battle, where one can react to the attacks of her/his foe as an organism which gathers movement to the point of emission in a form of counter-attack, or as Lee suggests, never release the energy in a formed blow or kick but keep circulating it, "instead of creating resistance, enter straight into the movement as it arises."[28] In order to enter straight into movement Lee recommends to "know the emptiness and tranquility of your mind. Be empty; have no style or form for the opponent to work on."[29] During a battle the mind should be in emptiness, without distinction of "I" and "other." Being selfless in battle gives the opponent nothing to strike against and opens an infinite field of possible movements. The practitioner of kung fu should

enter into a state prior to the formation of organs; a priority which is not precisely chronological as logical, for this state is actually one with the organs. As Deleuze and Guattari wrote, "we treat the BwO as the full egg before the extension of the organism and the organization of the organs, before the formation of the strata,"[30] but at the same time, "The egg is the BwO. The BwO is not 'before' the organism; it is adjacent to it and is continually in the process of constructing itself."[31] Emptiness does not mean that the organs cease to exist but that they are no longer organized, and hence can move freely with the changing conditions of the battle field.

KUNG FU MASOCHISM

In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari ask: "is the Tao masochistic?"[32] If judgment could be made based on kung fu films, the answer would be definitely yes. In each of his four official films, Bruce Lee goes into his most intense state only after his bare chest receives a few bleeding scars. Only then, one sees the true wrath of Lee. When Lee tastes the blood from his scars, it seems as if he was waiting for this moment of pain in order to transform into a pure energetic state. In other cases we see a young kung fu apprentice who, in order to become a master, is put through the harshest physical training. Other examples include Jackie Chan, tortured by his mentor in *Drunken Master* (*Jui kuen*, 1978), or Gordon Liu going through severe physical pain tests in *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin* (*Shao Lin san shi liu fang*, 1978). In other instances we see kung fu masters placed in complete physical restraint, for instance — the hero of *The Delightful Forest* (*Kuai huo lin*, 1972) who goes throughout the entire film with hands chained to a heavy wooden plate which is placed around his neck, or Jet Li tied to a leash like a dog in *Unleashed* (2005). Why all this pain, torture and restraint? Or in Deleuze and Guattari's words, relating to masochists and other suffering bodies without organs: "why these examples, why must we start here? Emptied bodies instead of full ones. What happened?"[33]

As Deleuze and Guattari explain, "The masochist uses suffering as a way of constituting a body without organs and bringing forth a plane of consistency of desire."[34] Desire is the opposite of pleasure, a field of immanence opposed to the search for pleasure, which is "an affection of a person or a subject; it is the only way for persons to 'find themselves' in the

process of desire that exceeds them; pleasures, even the most artificial, are reterritorializations."[35] According to Deleuze and Guattari, there is no outside to the masochistic desire, and hence it is necessary for the masochist "to annul the organs, to shut them away so that their liberated elements can enter into the new relations."[36] In Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* it is said that in order to achieve the Tao it is necessary to "[b]lock the openings, shut the doors."[37] Many kung fu styles follow this advice and advocate the minimum moves possible — the closer you get to complete immobility the better. In the words of Tai Chi Master Kuo Ling Ying: "Big moves are not as polished as short moves. Short moves are not as polished as stillness."[38] Wu Sung (Lung Ti) from *The Delightful Forest* and Danny (Jet Li) in *Unleashed* are interesting cases: The more their physical movement is limited, the stronger they become. Danny, however, is closer to what Deleuze and Guattari described as the Confucian version of a BwO, one that circulates desire in order to emit it at the right moment — the "procreative ends," which in Danny's case amounts to beating up whoever his gangster boss and owner Bart (Bob Hoskins) wishes to hurt. The similarity between Danny and the Confucian BwO is the patriarchal law which governs the flow of energy — this is the function of Bart, the only person that can control Danny's wild energy by tying or untying his leash (every time the leash is untied Danny bursts into a violent fit of destructive kung fu).

> But this is true only for one side of the assemblage of desire, the side facing the strata, organisms, State, family […]. It is not true for the other side, the Tao side of destratification that draws a plane of consistency proper to desire.[39]

This other side is represented by Wu Sung in *The Delightful Forest*, which circulates desire only on the immanent plane of his tied up body, without ever emitting it for external purposes. Danny's constraints hold him closed upon himself in what seems to be a gathering of energy waiting to explode. He is most dangerous when unleashed, but tied up he is nothing but a harmless puppy. Wu Sung in contrast prefers to stay tied up, and exactly in this state he is most powerful. Wu Sung rejects the authority of the state strata (represented in the film by the military government) and parallel to that he denies his own organs, which are held tied throughout most of the film. The military officials who chain him, lock him in a prison, deny him food and beat him up, only increase Wu Sung's strength (he kills dozens

with hands tied up, using only the big wooden plate that binds his body). The military commander finally devises a plan: to release Wu Sung and treat him like a king, to give him convenience, luxurious foods and wine. What can you do against the masochistic BwO? Give him pleasure.

Why, then, does Bruce Lee always need to bleed before entering his most intense state? It is not what psychoanalysis might interpret as a relation of phallic potency to castration (that might well be Rambo's case), but a degree of destruction towards the organized body in order to open up to a larger field of becoming. The BwO is defined by its connectivity ("connection of desires, conjunction of flows, continuum of intensities"[40]) which is not that of a self, "for it is not 'my' body without organs, instead the 'me' (moi) is on it."[41] In Bruce Lee's words,

> It is not, "I am doing this," but rather, an inner realization that "this is happening through me," or "it is doing this for me." The consciousness of self is the greatest hindrance to the proper execution of all physical action.[42]

Where psychoanalysis says "Stop, find your self again," the schizoanalytic logic of the kung fu master therefore says "Let's go further still, we haven't found our BwO yet, we haven't sufficiently dismantled our self."[43] According to Bruce Lee, "[p]unches and kicks are tools to kill the ego";[44] and so, in the final duel of *Enter the Dragon* (1973) Lee fights his enemy in a room full of mirrors while smashing his own reflections, for the real enemy to dismantle is the self.[45]

BECOMING ANIMAL

Once a BwO is formed — through masochism or by other means — one is by definition in a process of becoming. There are many possible becomings, many possible ways to move and play with the organs once they are free of the occupation forces of the organized body. A recurrent theme in kung fu cinema is becoming-animal. Many kung fu film titles feature animals: *Deadly Mantis* (*Tang lang*, 1978), *The Thundering Mantis* (*Dian tang lang*, 1980), *Snake in the Eagles shadow* (*Se ying diu sau*, 1978), *Snake in the Monkey's Shadow* (*Hou hsing kou shou*,

1979), *Mad Monkey Kung Fu* (*Feng hou*, 1979), *Five Deadly Venoms* (*Wu du*, 1978), *Iron Monkey* (*Siu Nin Wong Fei Hung Chi: Tit Ma Lau*, 1993) and countless more. Many kung fu styles involve a becoming animal. The Shaolin developed five animal styles: the dragon, snake, tiger, leopard and crane. Sometimes two animals or more are combined as in the tiger-crane style; and even in styles which are not animal based, one can find animal maneuvers or postures such as the very basic horse stance.

Becoming-animal should not be confused with an imitation of an animal. As Deleuze and Guattari write:

> Becoming is not to imitate or identify with something or someone [...]. Starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are *closest* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes.[46]

Becoming is not a leap from one being to another, as the prince becomes a frog. Becoming is the movement between the terms which emits certain molecules of speed and slowness, singularities that are not reducible to persons and individuals. Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari stress that "Becoming-animal are neither dreams nor phantasies. They are perfectly real […]. What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes."[47] One does not turn into an animal, leaving her/his human form behind, but in becoming-animal one moves between the terms as that movement itself. Becoming dragon in kung fu, for instance, is followed by a hissing sound that is emitted by the practitioner, releasing a sound of a dragon which re-arranges the whole body assemblage to something which is neither man nor dragon, but the block of movement between them. The white crane practitioner's hands extract the movement of the long beak of the crane, as the practitioner raises his hands in pecking positions while concentrating on head shots, the crane's favorite point of attack. Becoming is a multiplicity by definition, and "[e]ach multiplicity is symbiotic; its becoming ties together animals, plants, microorganisms, mad particles, a whole galaxy."[48] By entering a block of becoming with an animal one enters an assemblage with its surroundings and the symbiotic relations it has with it. The monkey style practitioner enters into a relationship with trees, masterfully

hanging and bouncing between them. When in *Drunken Master* Wong Fei Hong's (Jackie Chan) father say that his son "is nothing more than a wild animal," he means it allegorically as saying "my son behaves *like* a wild animal." But Fei Hong's becoming-animal has nothing to do with imitation or identification; his becoming "is not a correspondence between relations,"[49] but *a zone of proximity*, "a notion, at once topological and quantal, that marks a belonging to the same molecule, independently of the subjects considered and the forms determined."[50] When Jackie Chan is becoming a monkey it is not just acting like a monkey or imitating one, but entering a zone of proximity with a monkey which releases monkey molecules in Chan's body. This is not an allegory or a phantasy. As Chan's legs and back bend and his hands loosen, he enters the speed and balance of a monkey. Without being a real monkey, nor a human for that matter — the reality of becoming is the movement between the terms ("There is a reality of becoming-animal, even though one does not in reality become animal").[51]

Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between three kinds of animals: individuated animals — "family pets, sentimental, Oedipal animals […]"; animals with characteristics or attributes — "genus, classification, or state animals"; and demonic animals — "pack or affect animals that form a multiplicity, a becoming, a population."[52] Jackie Chan as Fei Hong clearly falls in the third category, while a kung fu practicing animal like the panda bear in *Kung Fu Panda* (2008) clearly belongs within the first and second categories: an "all too human" animal, an anthropomorphic imitation of human qualities. Deleuze and Guattari write that "[y]ou become animal only molecularly. You do not become a barking molar dog, but by barking, if it is done with enough feeling, with enough necessity and composition, you emit a molecular dog […] all becomings are molecular."[53] Kung fu panda, in contrast, is a molar animal, an imitation of a human being. It is a personified representation of an animal, whereas a becoming-animal is always multiple and independent of subjects. Bruce Lee is not identifying with a cat but is becoming-cat. His famous high pitched howls are not an imitation of cat's howls but an intensity which comes to proximity with a cat, releasing cat molecules of flexibility and elusiveness. In Lee's case this becoming sometimes takes monstrous proportions, as he becomes more of a demon than an animal (see for instance the blood-spattered final duel of *The Big Boss*). Like the case of Gregor Samsa in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, becoming often takes the shape of a monster "because it is accompanied, at its origin as in its undertaking, by a rupture with the central institutions that have established

themselves or seek to become established."[54] As becoming embarks a line of flight, one never knows where it will end.[55] The protagonist of *The Thundering Mantis* gets so carried away with becoming a praying mantis, that in the final scene he actually eats his opponent (the American tag-line for the film was aptly *Mad, Bad and Insane*).

VIRTUAL KUNG FU

According to Deleuze and Guattari, on the "the far side" of becoming we find becoming-elementary, -cellular, -molecular, and even becoming-imperceptible.[56] "The imperceptible," as they write, "is the immanent end of becoming, its cosmic formula."[57] Kung fu cinema has reached this stage with what may be called virtual kung fu, most famously exemplified in *The Matrix*. What I call cinema of "virtual kung fu" does not necessarily deal with virtual reality in its content, but includes any film which incorporates a "virtual style," for instance *Romeo Must Die* (2000), *The One* (2001), and other recent kung fu films which use digital animation in order to take the viewers both to molecular and cosmic dimensions of reality. *Romeo Must Die*, for instance, features the effect of digitally animated zoom-in into bodies which receive a blow, exposing their internal injuries on a molecular level. *The One* presents the cosmic dimension of the virtual with what the film calls "The Multiverse," a sort of a plane of consistency which gathers all parallel universes.

The concept of the virtual in Deleuze's philosophy is not to be confused with virtual reality. As Slavoj Zizek describes it,

> Virtual Reality in itself is a rather miserable idea: that of imitating reality, of reproducing its experience in an artificial medium. The reality of the Virtual, on the other hand, stands for the reality of the Virtual as such, for its real effects and consequences.[58]

In Deleuzian terms, the virtual is not at all in opposition to "real," but to the actual. The virtual is not a substitute for the real, an imitation of the real, but as Brian Massumi explains, "the virtual is the mode of reality implicated in the emergence of new potentials. In other words, its reality is the reality of change: the event."[59] While the actual expresses states of affairs and beings on a plane of organization, the virtual expresses incorporeal events,

singularities and becomings on a plane of consistency. The actual, nonetheless, stems from the virtual, yet the virtual is always more than its actualization — a pool of potentialities which are selected but never exhausted by the actual. The virtual in this sense is the durée and élan vital of the real. The virtual dimension of the body is the BwO.

It seems odd that in the extremely technological world portrayed in *The Matrix*, the war against the machines takes the form of kung fu hand-to-hand combat. One would expect to see Neo (Keanu Reeves) learning how to hack computers, or shoot a gun and use explosives, but the first thing he learns after waking up in "the desert of the real" is kung fu. Kung fu might be inferior to a gun in the real world, but according to *The Matrix* it is the most suitable form of survival in the virtual, because the virtual is where movement can be perceived. Deleuze and Guattari say two seemingly contradictory things on the perception of movement: on the one hand it cannot be perceived, as "perception can grasp movement only as the displacement of a moving body or the development of a form" (that is, according to what Bergson defined as false time, which replaces duration with space to cover); but on the other hand — they write — "movement also 'must' be perceived, it cannot but be perceived."[60] As we see in *The Matrix*, regular people who live in the virtual reality generated by the matrix perceive according to the narrow limits that the matrix dictates. Their perspective is restricted to the strata, from which perception perceives only beings and measured time (the false substitute of real movement, which according to Bergson is undivided duration). The kung fu master, however, is a BwO that can plug into the matrix as the virtual dimension of time or a plane of consistency, and therefore can see through the illusion of the strata and perceive pure durations.

Deleuze and Guattari write that "movements, becomings, in other words, pure relations of speed and slowness, pure affects, are below and above the threshold of perception."[61] The movement of a flying bullet is above the threshold of normal perception, but the kung fu master in *The Matrix* can perceive this movement (and so can the spectators, with the help of the "bullet time" digital effect). The flying bullet has its own duration or becoming. As Deleuze and Guattari write "there is a reality specific to becoming (the Bergsonian idea of a coexistence of very different 'durations,' superior or inferior to 'ours,' all of them in communication)."[62] The kung fu master perceives the superior duration of the bullet (superior in the sense of being too fast, above the threshold of normal perception) because for him/her all durations coexist on a shared plane of consistency. The digital effects of *The*

Matrix exemplify this notion in battle scenes where we see two or more durations at once: The way Neo perceives the fight, movements are too slow (leaving enough time to dodge a speeding bullet), but for his foe, Neo's movements are too fast to perceive. The film thus functions as a plane of consistency which gathers durations which are at once too slow and too fast, and hence is "precisely where the imperceptible is seen and heard."[63]

The Matrix contains a tension between two conceptions of "the one," and two conceptions of "the whole," as closed or open. Becoming, by definition is a (de)composition of the whole. However, the Deleuzian whole should not be understood as transcendent plane, a meta-term, or the sum of all parts. This would be The One, while the Deleuzian whole is more like the Taoist zero. The Deleuzian whole is not based on the phallic notion of the self-identical One that is closed upon itself. On the contrary: the whole is what connects everything through openness and becoming. Discussing the whole in cinematic terms, Deleuze writes in *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* that the whole

> is not a set and does not have parts. It is rather that which prevents each set, however big it is, from closing in on itself, and that which forces it to extend itself into a larger set. The whole is therefore like a thread which traverses sets and gives each one the possibility, which is necessarily realized, of communicating with another, to infinity. Thus the whole is the Open, and relates back to time or even to spirit rather than to content and to space.[64]

Deleuze refers to the whole as the set of sets, the frame itself, which is not what closes the set on itself, but on the contrary — connects every set to every other. The whole is the deterritorialization of the image. In *The Matrix* we see a tension between the whole as a Deleuzian/Taoist concept of immanence without exteriority on the one hand, and the dualist approach which polarizes the real and the virtual on the other hand (while in Deleuze's philosophy the virtual *is* real). The "one" in *The Matrix* is located in-between molar identities and molecular multiplicities. Neo is regarded as The One, a unique subject of history in the same sense that messianic religions refer to the Savior (Neo is even "crucified" and sacrificed for the salvation of humanity at the end of *The Matrix Revolutions*). However, Neo is not really The One which signifies an exclusive unity, but he is rather an inclusive multiplicity which moves through the oppositions of real and virtual, man and machine, while uniting

these terms on a shared plane of becoming. Agent Smith (Hugo Weaving) represents the truly molar One, endlessly duplicating himself in others as a repetition of the same (*The Matrix Revolutions*). Neo's "oneness," in contrast, is in fact the "zeroness" of the BwO, the Open Whole which connects all worlds while maintaining their differences.

In the final moments of the trilogy, Neo is blinded, and only then he can see the spiritual reality of the virtual for what it is: moving lines of light, the molecular movement of duration. *The Matrix* portrays the virtual as an abstract plane, comprised solely of codes. The ability of kung fu cinema to visualize the imperceptible (pure movement) was always connected to the ability to construct an abstract plane as the whole on which the imperceptible is perceived.[65] The abstract plane is any plane-what-ever that can trace movements. Deleuze and Guatari often describe it as a plane of writing, music and philosophy. It is no accident that kung fu is often compared to these planes. In *The Twin Dragons* (*Seong lung wui*, 1992), for instance, Jackie Chan plays two roles of twin brothers — one is a classical music conductor and pianist and the other a martial arts expert; one is playing music and the other is fighting, while the jump cut editing between the scenes creates a linkage between the choreographed, ballet like kung fu movements and a plane of composition or music. Kung fu masters in *Hero* (*Ying xiong*, 2002) are also calligraphy experts, presenting kung fu as a writing plane. Yuen Woo-ping (director of *Drunken Master* and choreographer of *The Matrix, Kill Bill* and more), points to kung fu as a plane of thought in his film *Tai Chi Fist* (*Tai ji: Zhang san feng*, 1993). The film opens with a kung fu master who decides to leave the martial arts world, but is confronted by another master who is eager to know who is better. The master suggests that instead of a physical battle they will perform the duel with words, and so each one in turn announces his move instead of actualizing it, until one is declared the winner. Almost a decade before *The Matrix* depicted a world where the true battle occurs in the head, Woo-ping determined that kung fu is a virtual or abstract plain of thought.

The correlation of the moving body-image-thought appears most strongly in Tsui Hark's *Once Upon a Time in China* (*Wong Fei Hung*, 1991). The film takes place in 19th century Canton, which is under Western occupation. Wong Fei Hong (Jet Li) takes a traditional stance towards Western technology, and like Neo, he is fighting soldiers armed with guns with his bare hands. The only Western technology Fei Hong is willing to adopt is the film camera, in order to capture the movements of his kung fu maneuvers (thus creating the very first kung

fu film). The final duel scene shows Fei Hong shooting a bullet from his bare hand, piercing a hole in the head of his colonial Western foe. For director Tsui Hark, kung fu is a superior technology to guns since it is a virtual technology of the mind (a point made clear by the bullet penetrating the colonizer's head). Not accidentally the final chamber in the *36th Chamber of Shaolin*, "the most advanced field of martial arts," is dedicated to the study of philosophy.

This essay attempted to explore kung fu not just as a fighting technique but as a mode of perception and thought, an image of film and mind. Through kung fu cinema I asked to underline a relationship between the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari and Taoism, established by a link between the concept of the BwO, which Deleuze and Guattari describe as the zero degree of intensity, and Tao's concept of emptiness. Many kung fu masters use masochism in order to dismantle the self, thereby constituting themselves as a BwO on a plane of consistency. This, by definition, is a process of becoming, which in many cases turns to a becoming-animal. On the far side of this process we find a becoming which is molecular, cosmic and imperceptible. Virtual kung fu cinema reached this level as a plane through which the imperceptible (duration) can be perceived. As a virtual form of combat, kung fu is the most suitable art of survival in the contemporary world which is composed of abstract codes of thought. Instead of the virtual body understood as disembodiment, kung fu cinema offers the virtual body as a fully embodied BwO.

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1. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans. Brian Massumi (New York: Continuum, 2004), 20.
2. Ibid., 174.
3. Ibid., 274.
4. Ibid., 169.
5. Ibid., 182.
6. "The BwO is not opposed to the organs; rather, the BwO and its 'true organs,' which must be composed and positioned, are opposed to the organism, the organic organization of the organs." — ibid., 176.
7. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 1.
8. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 169.
9. Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. D.C. Lau (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 18.
10. Ibid., 8.
11. Chuang Tzu, *The Essential Chuang Tzu*, trans. Sam Hamill and J. P. Seaton (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1999), 125.
12. Quoted in Chuang Tzu, *The Inner Chapters,* trans. David Hinton (New York: Counterpoint, 1998), 119.

13. Peter Payne, *Martial Arts: The Spiritual Dimension* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 9.

14. Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, 27.

15. Ibid., 31.

16. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 168.

17. Tzu, *The Inner Chapters*, 22.

18. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 174.

19. Ibid.

20. On the relation to and negation of the BwO in theology, specifically in a Christian context, see Maximilian De Gaynesford, "Bodily Organs and Organisation," in *Deleuze and Religion*, ed. Mary Bryden (London: Routledge, 2001), 87-98.

21. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 294.

22. Sun Tzu, "Art of War," in *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China*, trans. Ralph D. Sawyer (Colorado: Westview Press, 1993), 165.

23. Ibid., 158.

24. Ibid., 168.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Bruce Lee, *Tao of Jeet Kune Do* (California: Ohara Publications, 2006), 7.

28. Ibid., 18.

29. Ibid., 21.

30. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 170.

31. Ibid., 182.

32. Ibid., 174.

33. Ibid., 167.

34. Ibid., 172.

35. Ibid., 173.

36. Ibid., 287.

37. Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, 59.

38. David Chow and Richard Spangler, *Kung Fu: History, Philosophy and Technique* (California: Unique Publications, 1982), 31.

39. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 174.

40. Ibid., 179.

41. Ibid.

42. Lee, *Tao of Jeet Kune Do*, 7.

43. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 167.

44. Lee, *Tao of Jeet Kune Do*, 13.

45. This final duel scene can also be related to what Deleuze described as a "crystal image": an actual image which has a virtual image that corresponds to it like a double or a reflection. "It is as if an image in a mirror, a photo or a postcard came to life, assumed independence and passed into the actual, even if this meant that the actual image returned into the mirror and resumed its place in the postcard or photo, following a double movement of liberation and capture." Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1989), 68.

46. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 300.

47. Ibid., 262.

48. Ibid., 275.

49. Ibid., 262.

50. Ibid., 301.

51. Ibid., 302.

52. Ibid., 265.

53. Ibid., 303.

54. Ibid., 272.

55. Ibid., 274. To be precise, becoming is not a free-floating weightlessness, but a process which is determined by specific bodies, their movements and their intensities. Nonetheless, becoming is the creation of yet unseen new bodies, and as often the case with the unknown, it is often perceived as monstrous.

56. Ibid., 308.

57. Ibid., 310.

58. Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences* (London: Routledge, 2004), 3.

59. Brian Massumi, "Sensing the Virtual, Building the Insensible," *Architectural Design* 68.5/6, "Hypersurface Architecture," ed. Stephen Perrella (1998): 16-24.

60. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 310.

61. Ibid., 309.

62. Ibid., 262.

63. Ibid., 278.

64. Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 16.

65. There are two interpretations to the abstract plane in Deleuze: one is positive — the abstract machine of the plane of consistency; the second negative — the great machine of society and the organism. I am referring here to the first.

SILENCE AS THE SPACE FOR LOVE: BERGMAN'S TRILOGY AND THE ABSENCE OF GOD

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I. INTRODUCTION

Belonging to an elite club of filmmakers who shaped cinema, Ingmar Bergman brought to the screen various themes and questions that were once found only in the pages of philosophy, religion, and history, eventually transforming film as a medium for one to explore the realities of human existence. Among his films that discuss the mundane realities of the human being, the so-called "trilogy" — consisting of *Through a Glass Darkly* (*Såsom i en spegel*, 1961), *Winter Light* (*Nattvardsgästerna*, 1962) and *Silence* (*Tystnaden*, 1963) — became significant due to the seriousness of what he wants to deal with. These films tell different stories of people faced with mundane situations and crises, but what binds them together is the way they raised the question of God's existence. Looking at these stories as a whole, Bergman illustrates seemingly dark yet striking experiences, moments that point to the absence of a God whom believers would be comfortable and secure with. And through these experiences, Bergman raises the question that has since challenged religion and faith when confronted with the absence of God: *Quo vadis?* If the God that one believes in has become absent, withdrawing Himself from the grasp of human beings, how should the human being proceed with living?

One possible answer to this question is that God's absence, His own withdrawal from humanity, provides a space not only for the human being to rethink about the identity of this God, but also for him to experience and recognize God in a more genuine way, which stands as Bergman's invitation throughout. The experience of this withdrawal would then be discussed, pointing out that such withdrawal does not immediately amount to mere absence and therefore nonexistence; instead, it is a form of God's own revelation and self-giving, indicating that God goes beyond and surpasses Being, as elaborated by the philosopher Jean-Luc Marion. And granted that God is such, this work proceeds toward "finding" this hidden God, pointing out that He, as Love, reveals Himself in the love that exists between human

beings, which is the central theme that Bergman develops in the trilogy. Ultimately, this points out how Bergman not only raises questions concerning the existence of God, but above and beyond it, challenges the human being to think otherwise.

II. THE SILENCE OF GOD IN THE "TRILOGY"

Bergman's trilogy raised perhaps the most serious and thought-provoking question in the history of cinema, a question brought by the clash within him between his own religious upbringing and his experience.[1] The trilogy puts to question the existence of God in an array of significant human experiences which lead the human being to ask the meaning and purpose of existence when nothing is left but the freedom to decide how one should live in a world where God, identified as the meaning and purpose of human existence, seems to not exist at all. In fact, Bergman's subtitles to these films hint at the way he wants to show God's silence and, more importantly, break apart the images of God that religion knows and is used to, namely:

> *Through a Glass Darkly* — certainty achieved;
> *Winter Light* — certainty unmasked;
> *Silence* — God's silence: the negative impression.[2]

These subtitles are nothing but Bergman's way of saying that, based on the data of human experience, people cannot just believe in God anymore, for these experiences "throw human beings back to themselves,"[3] destroying all images of God that religion, specifically Christianity, has been used to. It seems that Bergman desires to establish a certainty that runs contrary to the certainty of faith, one that points to the complete absence of God. And he proceeds to show this not only through the varying plotlines that run in each of these three films, but also in the symbols he used in all of them.

Through a Glass Darkly tells the story of a vacation that changed the lives of a family of four: David, the father of Minus and the schizophrenic Karin, accompanied by her husband Martin. At first, it seems that they are a tightly bound family gathering together to celebrate each other's stories. However, as the film progresses, we see Bergman subtly bringing out the

tensions that exist between each of them, gradually making them more serious and explicit to the point that these tensions bear upon their own individual lives. And among these tensions, there stood two significant ones that have driven not just the film's plot, but more importantly Bergman's point: David's apathetic attitude toward his children and Karin's schizophrenia that brought her visions and illusions.

David's inability to be a father to his children is already evident from the beginning, as early as Minus' way of expressing it through the "morality play, intended only for poets and authors."[4] It becomes more explicit when David and Martin went fishing, as the former told the latter about his failed suicide attempt which made him realize his desire to live in order to love his children.[5] But then, this is only a foreshadowing of what is to come near the end of the film, in which David and Minus had a moment of reflection on the absent God, saying that he is "every sort of love."[6]

This brief dialogue serves as a provisional answer for Bergman, expressing that the God who vanished has "reappeared" as love, a basic element of faith proclaimed by Christianity but seems to have lost its meaning. However, even though it appears to be the final word, Bergman seems to break it apart again by the Minus' immediate dismissal of these words, saying that they are "terribly unreal,"[7] as his family is torn apart with its members appearing alien to each other. Such negation of what seemed to be a profound affirmation is in view of what is to come in *Winter Light*, which raises the question of God's nature as love.

The second film of the trilogy tells the story of a Lutheran pastor, Tomas, who, ironically, is indifferent toward God and, more importantly, toward love. The problem with Tomas which Bergman makes explicit is that he has lost his "antenna for love," being indifferent to the people around him, not just to those who belong to the chapel congregation, but also and more importantly to Marta, the school teacher who is in love with him.[8] This is evident in his dialogue with Marta, in which he, instead of appreciating Marta's concern, was "tired" of it, and he needs to get rid of "all this rubbish, this junkheap of idiotic circumstances."[9] He then explained the reason for this, saying that after his wife died, he himself died as well, and this leads him to a "complete indifference" toward anything about his life, including that of the people who come close to him.[10]

Such indifference, however, is rooted in something even deeper and more profound, namely his loss of faith in God because He ceased to appear as one who "guaranteed him

every imaginable security."[11] He was aware that in the absence of such God, there is nothing left but human beings alone, living their lives as "poverty-stricken, joyless, and full of fear."[12] The irony of being a faithful servant of God who performs nothing but empty rituals and shuts out the door to intimacy, radically isolating himself from God and others, became the driving force of the film. This attitude kept Tomas at a distance from a world that reflects his own indifference and self-centeredness, which can also be seen in Marta, who sought to love him for her selfish intentions, wanting to keep him for herself,[13] and in Jonas Parsson, who is preoccupied more with his own fantasies and thoughts which closed him from his wife and children.[14] Thus, in *Winter Light*, we see not only the loss of faith in a God who provides security, but also its dire consequences in the life of a human being. In the case of Tomas, Marta, and Jonas, we see a radical loss of the sense of meaning and direction in one's life, with no other way except remaining lost within their own selves and their preoccupations, blinding them from the reality of living which inevitably includes the nurturance of human relationships.

The film proceeds and ends quite beautifully, when it seems that Tomas' disposition toward life changed when Jonas committed suicide. The final moments of the film bring us to the point where Tomas somehow accepts his role as a minister, presiding over Jonas' funeral, with the faithful reciting the *Sanctus*: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty. All the earth is full of his glory."[15] However, it is more of ironic than celebratory when seen from the point of view of the whole film and of Tomas' view of God. The scene is in itself the greatest contradiction in the whole film, for (a) such praise celebrates a God known as almighty and present, one whom Tomas searches for and takes refuge in but to no avail, but (b) such praise does not refer or point to anything because for Tomas, there is no God that exists to begin with.

This scene serves as the culmination of all the religious symbolisms and imagery that Bergman has wonderfully crafted in the film. It was filled with so much liturgical symbols that it brought out more openly the contradictions through which Bergman questions God and religious faith, revealing the meaninglessness of religious ritual to people who have accepted the absence of God with much despair.[16] From the figure of Christ hovering around scenes to the communion rite, everything that points to God and His love for humanity (which Christianity has identified as *kenosis*, a full giving of the self for the sake of all human beings) has been rendered useless and empty. Thus, Bergman puts his claim more strongly,

that the God we experience as the highest Being and therefore the most profound love, is no more, or has not been present after all.

The imagery that *Winter Light* provides leaves its audience with another area of human existence to explore, encouraging it to move from the love of and communication with a transcendent God to maintaining relationships with fellow human beings. The film invites its audience to observe how the most human of relationships affect people more profoundly than thinking about the existence of a transcendent God. The tension between Tomas' desire to love God which he has found absent, as well as Marta's desire to love in a highly exclusive relationship brings out this shift of focus, not to mention another quite unseen conflict between Jonas and his family. In a way, *Winter Light* is an explicit message that encourages the audience to accept God's withdrawal and move toward an "affirmation of humanism," wherein what matters after the refutation of God and the acceptance of his withdrawal is the reality of human relationships.[17]

However, Bergman remains unforgiving in his discussion on the absence of God when he tackles human communication and relationships in the last film of the trilogy, *Silence*. This time, Bergman puts emphasis not on the presence of a divine entity, which he already has rendered silent and absence, but on that which replaces God, namely the relationships that exist between people which are sustained by communication.[18] This is foreshadowed in *Through a Glass Darkly*, specifically in the renewed sense of fatherhood that David had, and in *Winter Light*, in the tension that exists between Tomas and Marta. However, this is pushed to the brink in *Silence*, subjecting human relationships to reflection by presenting it as a challenge to be dealt with and overcome, given the difficulty to connect with people in a profound and intimate level. The last film in the series tells the story of two estranged sisters, Ester and Anna, together with Anna's child Johan, on a homebound journey which was interrupted when they stop in a war-torn town called Timoka. In that place, a series of events reveal the tension that exists between the sisters in terms of their relationships alongside each other's personal issues and struggles. On one hand, Ester struggles both with her disease as well as her connection with Anna and her son. On the other hand, Anna is herself in search of intimacy, which she compensates through various sexual encounters with different men. In the course of such struggles, issues between the siblings surfaced, which Ester viewed as a way of tormenting each other.[19] Caught in the middle of this struggle is the

young Johan, who feels uncomfortable with Ester and yet ironically able to see through her difficulties, not just with his mother but also with her incurable disease.

This tension between siblings became the focus of the film, to the point that such tension was left unresolved even at the end, when a dramatic conversation between the siblings occurred. The last scene features Anna and Johan continuing their journey while the sickly Ester is left alone to deal with her disease. However, it seems to leave a trace of resolution when Ester gave Johan a letter, albeit written in "incomprehensible foreign words."[20]

It is fairly obvious from the films conflict that Bergman wanted to shift his attention to a different kind of silence more immanent and familiar to us: that which exists between human beings, a silence which marks the "breakdown of language."[21] On one hand, we see in Anna a common struggle of the human being to replace and fill the loss of deep, nurturing relationships with more superficial ones. On the other hand, we see in Ester the struggles that are symptomatic of problems that disturb her existence, especially her fear of death. Finally, we see the young Johan caught in the middle, and yet he does not stand as a heroic and mediatory figure as an innocent child. Instead, he remains indifferent and inattentive to everything that happens, leading him to not only find spaces to communicate with other people, like his encounter with old little men who amused and entertained him, but also become preoccupied with a world of his own characterized by "guns, books, and giant steps."[22] This makes the ending of the film all the more fitting, leaving all of them, like Ester's letter, incomprehensible, and as such, left to their own selves.

As a whole, the trilogy stands as a radical portrayal of the absence of God in situations where He is needed by the characters to intervene. However, in each of these films, Bergman drastically takes the stories to different directions, ending them without any hint of consolation that restores confidence neither in God nor in the human being. And leaving it at that, Bergman points the question of God's absence and withdrawal as a fact of life, yet encourages further rethinking in the level of the audience's own individual lives. In bringing together and weaving these stories bound not by answers but more questions that the audience is challenged to confront and ask, we are brought to one important question that brings everything together: *What is there for one who believes and hopes in a God who has hidden Himself?*

III. THE GOD BEYOND BEING: JEAN-LUC MARION AND THE SILENCE OF GOD

With the trilogy bringing out these particular experiences of God's withdrawal in the life of human beings and their possible consequences and implications, the question remains: *What now?* Two possible responses emerge, which could be seen as paths for the human being to take after experiencing God's withdrawal. On one hand, the human being can submit to God's absence, that is, as one who does not exist after all, and go on with life with whatever left for him, namely the freedom to do what he pleases. On the other hand, one can continue to believe in God, but such belief bears the burden of rethinking or reconsidering how God exists and how He makes His presence (or what seems to be the lack of it) felt within the realm of human experience. Whether to take one path or another would be a matter of personal decision and commitment; however, it would be worth discussing the possible implications and consequences of each choice.

One can take the first road and admit that there is no God, and what only happens in the experience of the supposed "withdrawal" of God is the collapse of idols and figures that the human being recognizes as God. In interpreting Bergman's trilogy in this manner, one can say that the whole trilogy is a radical proclamation that the God in whom the human being believes has never been there from the beginning, and what Bergman did is to bring humanity to the harsh reality that there is nothing left "out there" except itself and what is "in here." The whole trilogy is therefore a rejection of the "religious — as defined by any kind of 'leap of faith' or move to the 'transcendental' in some form," only to be replaced by the focus on the ethical aspect of human existence.[23] And in making the shift from the transcendental God towards an affirmation of humanism,[24] the challenge left for the human being is to focus on the relationships that are immediate, exercising care and concern for others.

But for the believer who is well aware that faith is not about adhering to seemingly convincing proofs but committing even to that which cannot be proven,[25] such is not the case. For him, there is a more pressing question that one has to grapple with: How does precisely one "see" or "experience" a God who, at such point, does not manifest Himself in the realm of human experience as presence? If God is nowhere to be found, then how does one think and experience Him?

This is one of the pressing questions that Jean-Luc Marion discusses and attempts to answer at length when he raises the question regarding the nature of God and how He is experienced by the believing subject. And regarding this inquiry, an important question about the silent God can be found in his work *God Without Being*, as he grapples with the question of speaking about God who is definitely greater than the limited human being, thus escaping speech, thought, and representation. In discussing the experience of falling silent before and about God, he asks:

> Afforded by the concrete daily attitude and what it most rightly imposes is what one might call the theological attitude, which only bears what Origen names the "dogmas to be kept in silence," [*ta siapomena dogmata*]. But what is this silence mean? To what silence are we summoned today? [26]

Marion asks this question in the light of his assertion that the God who revealed Himself in Christian faith would always be greater than any metaphysical proof or explanation of His existence or any set of theological dogmas and doctrines. Given such, one can therefore be only silent because there would be no exact and definite means of speaking about Him. However, in the case of the trilogy, the question regarding God's silence is posed on a more radical level, because one falls silent before that which has silenced himself first. Thus, one cannot say anything about God because this God has withdrawn Himself and made Himself silent. Therefore, He cannot be pointed out or referred to as a "someone" or a "something" in the strictest sense.

This makes the inquiry even more complicated, as it asks how it is possible to even speak of God in His own silence and withdrawal from presence. Regarding the latter, Marion provided an answer, pointing to God's withdrawal and absence as indicative of his distance from the human being, a concept which, for Marion bears much significance in speaking about God.

Marion talks about distance in its various meanings and senses, claiming that such meanings can be taken simultaneously. He primarily refers to distance as "the absolute difference between God and humanity," which implies the "non-coincidence of God with any concept of God." [27] But because such understanding "does not always work to its best effect," for it suggests that God and the human being lie at both ends of a lateral continuum,[28] he

supplemented it with another way of understanding it, namely as an "interruption of thought."[29] What he means is that God will always escape any form of conceptual representation of the human being, even though such representation is derived from His revelation. However, such understanding of distance should not lead us back to the idols which distance rejects, for such return is nothing but an "'impure' and unworthy idolatry."[30] It is such because in this instance, the human being decides according to his own standards what counts as "divine or non-divine, as if we could on our own ensure the suitability of any particular attribution with regard to unthinkable transcendence."[31] Nor should we resort to mere agnosticism or ignorance about God, which is a form of negation that inverts affirmation and is therefore a mere negative categorization of God, an *apophasis* that is a reversal of *kataphasis* but does not leave the realm of predication.[32] In the end, both are nothing but forms of idolatry which misses the God who reveals Himself.

This can be even more understood when we see the background of such assertion when he problematized the notion of God developed by philosophy. In both of his works, Marion delivers a criticism of the images of God that has been constructed by philosophy, particularly in metaphysics. Coming from Friedrich Nietzsche's twilight of the idols and Martin Heidegger's critique of metaphysics as onto-theo-logy, he claims that the God of philosophy is nothing more than mere idols that replace the God of Divine Revelation,[33] for philosophy uses images and symbols used to speak of God as if they express everything about God. He claims that philosophy reduces God within the human being's horizon of understanding, which is what Heidegger did when he limited God within the scope of the understanding of *Dasein*, in which God is subjected and reduced by the human gaze.[34] To understand God by resorting to a concept that belongs either to metaphysics or merely within the experience of the *Dasein* would throw the believer back to idolatry, whether cataphatic or apophatic, and should therefore be avoided. Both of these methods, then, would not help in thinking of God and should be avoided, for these disregard God's radical distance from thought which no human effort or attempt can ever cross.

This understanding of God beyond the confines of Being and thus the limits of human thought poses a serious challenge for the believer. In some way, it is a source of consolation because this frees the discussion on the absence of God from the hasty conclusion that He does not exist and is thus irrelevant in the human being's life; however, it is a challenge because one has to change one's way of thinking about God, something that can be considered

as a "better" path because it accepts and considers the "unthinkability" of God which brings us to silence.

This is Marion's point in his whole philosophical project as he provides an answer to this problem. For him, Being is not the ultimate grounds in which God reveals Himself, claiming it as an "un-theological" word,[35] despite the fact that the experience of God and his revelation "flashes in the dimension of Being."[36] This prompts Marion to think outside Being, beyond the idols erected within and under it, to the different possibilities offered by divine Revelation, as the one which "determines the manner of manifestness."[37] This is an important point to stress because when God is "placed" outside Being or the opposition between being/nonbeing, it allows one to think of God not having "to be," that is, to be present as a "someone" or a "something," a substance that differs itself from all the rest, or a definition in which all metaphysical proofs of God rest upon. And as we will see, such turning point in Marion's thought allows us to think differently of the silence that Bergman speaks about.

Marion proceeds to the possibility of thinking God while considering the infinite and incommensurable distance that stands between Him and humanity. He first considered an alternative way of naming God that is more primary than *ens* or being, namely God as Goodness or *Bonum*. This name, which is explicit in Bonaventure and the mystical tradition, is more appropriate because it "does not offer any 'most proper name' and abolishes every conceptual idol of God."[38] This way of naming God ought to be explored precisely because it allows us to think of God outside and beyond Being. He then showed how this is so by pointing out three instances in the Scriptures where God is seen to reveal Himself as beyond Being, thus as Goodness Himself.

The first, which can be found in the letter to the Romans,[39] indicates God's indifference toward the difference between beings and nonbeings, pointing to Him as calling both beings and nonbeings to him "as if they were beings."[40] The second indication similar to the first is found in St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians,[41] where it is pointed out that God does not choose according to the categories of being, and, indifferent to it, he chooses nonbeings "to annul and abrogate beings."[42] This can therefore be understood as God's own way of distracting Being and freeing beings from Being itself, as they are saved not by their own works or assertions of existence, but by God's call upon them.[43] The third, perhaps the most significant, is Marion's recalling of the Parable of the Prodigal Son,[44] where we see through the image of the loving father, God's indifference to *ousia*, substance or being, which comes only

secondary to the act of giving everything to those who remain in Him and His love.[45] From these texts, we see that (a) God is not confined to Being and even has command over it, and (b) what stands over and above Being and the ontological difference is the *gift*, understood not only as what God gives to the believer, but more importantly His selfless act of totally giving Himself.

This *gift* (*donation* in French) must be understood not merely as a simple act of giving or handing over, but in such act of giving, the giver gives his very self to the given to. Thus, God does not just give to humanity. Simultaneously, He gives Himself to humanity. Moreover, such giving is so radical that God preserves the distance between him and the believer, withdrawing at once in such giving. He gives Himself as the "gap which separates definitively only inasmuch as it unifies."[46] This gap does not only indicate God's irreducibility to thought or presence, but also and more importantly grants the human being the freedom to be open to God's Revelation, for in such giving, the human being is given himself and the freedom to give what is given to him.[47]

And pushing this further, we see that the gap is a way for God to reveal Himself and be seen by the human being. In withdrawing, God allows the human being to think of Him beyond the categories of being, beyond positive and negative theology. The "spacing that 'is' God"[48] which He has established in His withdrawal allows and leads the believer to a radical openness, granting the human being access to Him not through predication but through "praise" which recognizes and requests God to traverse the distance but at the same time maintain it.[49] However, we shall see for Marion that such distance is an aspect of and paves way for a "more appropriate" name of God, in which He shows Himself as He is, outside the realm of idolatry and simplistic silence. This name stands to be the most relevant of all, allowing us to rethink Bergman's way of emphasizing God's silence in the trilogy, for it is a name that can be spoken of despite the absence of the God who stands above Being.

Agreeing with the Scriptures, Marion claims that ultimately, God reveals Himself as He is, precisely as Love or Charity. This is God's "first name"[50] which is not a result of understanding or explanation, but only accepted through faith. Such Revelation and giving as Love is fully seen and experienced in and through the mystery of the Incarnation, in the "*agape* properly revealed in and as Christ,"[51] who, through His Death and Resurrection which reveals both His Divinity and Humanity,[52] reveals God's great love for humanity.

From this, we can see that distance and gift radically lead to God's Revelation as Charity. As such, God gives himself totally to humanity, to the point that as the very gift giving Himself, he not only distracts and precedes Being/being, but also serves as one who grants and decides Being/being.[53] Moreover, in such giving, he also withdraws and maintains his distance from the human being. This distance is an infinite gap which separates Him from everything else, the unthinkability of which "constitutes the mark and seal of love."[54]

How is this possible? Marion shows the possibility of thinking distance this way in his reflection on the poet Friedrich Holderlin, whose poem speaks of the withdrawal of the Father to pave way for the son to be as such.[55] This is the space that God leaves for the human being to believe and love Him freely, and this is the distance which is characteristic of relationships that live in love,[56] allowing the beloved to freely realize and recognize himself as loved. With such distance established, the son, the human being, is invited to "keep God pure"[57] by avoiding idolatry and respecting how God reveals Himself, that is, to "dance with God — at a good distance and in the right rhythm"[58] which He alone dictates and calls man to follow. Thus, God as charity is the gift that he gives and withdraws at the same time, His own way of maintaining a distance, a gap which presents and opens up the human being toward fully and freely knowing and loving Him.

Marion adds that because God reveals Himself as Charity, there is no other means for the human being to encounter Him except through his own exercise of charity.[59] In this regard, two important things must be pointed out.

First, charity is not a matter of knowing, understanding or comprehending, but of willing. It is a "movement of the heart, or will"[60] which aims not to comprehend the object of one's love, but to draw closer to such object without running the risk of objectifying it. This movement is the only means through which one fully receives the love of God which is first and foremost a gift, for as such, it can truly be received when it is given in the same way that God grants it.[61] In receiving the gift, one is called to be its faithful interpreter by "performing it anew,"[62] and this is possible only by heeding the call to "let charity pass through the body in order to transmit it,"[63] thus exercising it in an incarnate and corporeal way. This way of understanding charity prevents us from reducing the commandment to love as God loves us to an ethical command arising from rational argumentation; instead, it is a call to love the One who loved first by giving His love in the same way that He gives it.

Connected to this is the second important point, that love is also a way of understanding and seeing God and reality differently, as an epistemic condition that stands over and above reason.[64] As Marion sees it, charity is governed by a certain logic which separates it from mere understanding and comprehension, as it sees and thinks the object of love precisely as an irreducible other, a mystery to which one is drawn and attracted, which one can only gaze upon as an icon instead of an idol.[65] It is only through this path that charity takes where one fully understands God as an infinite self-giving (*kenosis*), understood as both a full disclosure and a radical withdrawal. Such disclosure and withdrawal is experienced not within the realm of presence, but only in the love that is given to others that is rooted in the God's love. This love then becomes a "sacrament" which one can fully receive by continuously giving it.[66] However, one should take note that charity, as a movement of the will, does not rest on any conditions of possibility or meaning that precedes action; rather, it starts with one's wager to love, a "complete investment in meaning" where one has to love first in order to see what it desires to see, or to be more precise, to see God in and through it.[67] Thus, the fundamental call for the believer is to not see and know in order to love, but actually its radical reversal: "to love in order to know."[68]

From these two points, it is clear now that the site for one to find the God who has withdrawn Himself is the exercise of charity, or to put it more plainly, in *love* alone. It is in love where one sees the God who is beyond being and nonbeing, beyond Being and beings, beyond mere presence and absence. Such love, as the giving of the gift which preserves and maintains distance and at the same time draws the lover and the beloved to one another, is the site where God "is," that is, experienced most fully by the human being.

Such understanding of God now leads to a different reading of the trilogy, making the films even more significant. We can see the whole story of *Through a Glass Darkly*, which culminates not just in David's words but in Karin's vision of the spider-God, as a challenge for us to keep love alive; however, in the same way that this God has become disturbing for Karin despite its gentle ways, the challenge to live a life of love would continually disturb us, pushing us to go outside of ourselves. In *Winter Light*, the appearance and disappearance of the figure of Christ as well as the disruption caused by Johan's suicide present themselves as a challenge to Tomas, numb of mind and heart, to once again find praise and consolation in God not in empty rituals, but in the call to open himself to love once again; however, such love is then given not just to Marta but also to other people entrusted to him. The challenge

to love in order to see God reaches its peak in *Silence*, which points to the significance of human communication that leads to ultimate concern for the Other, the kind which cannot remain superficial but should penetrate one's own being and that of the other. Moreover, *Silence* points to the challenge to love the Other in the midst of his or her own silence, which also reminds one of the irreducibility of the otherness of the other. Such silence beckons the human being not just to ethical responsibility, but more importantly, to love. In the moment of silence, one is then called to encounter the Other in and through love, which in turn goes beyond signification through words and concepts addressed to and about the Other.[69] In looking at the whole trilogy this way, we see that everything is all about love, because it is only through it that one can see God purely and truly, without the need for us to erect any form of idols that merely close us upon ourselves.

Simply put, the withdrawal of God in Bergman's trilogy can be understood as a demand to love others, in which one can find God. However, Bergman shows as well that it is a more difficult task than merely believing in a "God" which brings out a false sense of hope and consolation for the human being. Indeed, the only way the human being can find God in a world where He seems to have been absent is in His love which can only be properly received and experienced in the human being's own love, which serves as a response to Him who loved and gave first.

IV. CONCLUSION:
THE LOVE THAT IS GOD

Ingmar Bergman raised a problem relevant to the believer, as he presents a world where God is radically absent, a world which is perhaps all too familiar, where our daily human experience belongs. The trilogy somehow prompted us to rethink our understanding of God, opening up a possibility of genuinely experiencing Him otherwise, that is, beyond our common understanding of the Divine. Marion shows that God can be experienced beyond merely presence or being, and such experience is possible only in love, through and in which one can hear His voice which speaks loudly in His silence and feel His nearness in His very distance. Indeed, it is in the human being's love for one another through which one can see and experience Him as He is.

Through this understanding of God as love and how it is evident in the Trilogy, Bergman comes to a full circle, answering the question that he posed and eventually challenging the human being to be silent before the silent God, primarily because the only way to find Him is not through understanding or grasping a concept of Him, but through opening one's will to Him. This allows Him to reveal Himself in His own terms, in His mystery and greatness which surpasses all human capabilities. Bergman challenges us to see God in his films as Love pure and simple, drawing the human being to respond to this love by loving as well. In the end, we see how we are ultimately pushed to think God otherwise, which is only possible by taking upon ourselves the challenge and the responsibility to love in the same way that He loves us.

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1. Jesse Kalin, *The Films of Ingmar Bergman* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 193.
2. Laura Hubner, *The Films of Ingmar Bergman: Illusions of Light and Darkness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 53.
3. Kalin, *The Films of Ingmar Bergman*, 193.
4. Ingmar Bergman, *Three Films*, trans. Paul Britten Austin (New York: Grove Press, 1970), 25.
5. Ibid., 47.
6. Ibid., 60.
7. Ibid., 61.
8. Martien E. Brinkman, "Transcendence in Bergman's *Winter Light* (1962): A Theological Analysis," *Currents of Encounter* 42 (2011): 309.
9. Bergman, *Three Films*, 94.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., 85.
12. Ibid., 86.
13. Brinkman, , "Transcendence in Bergman's *Winter Light*," 311.
14. Ibid., 310.
15. Bergman, *Three Films*, 104.
16. Hubner, *Illusions of Light and Darkness*, 55-56.
17. Ibid., 56.
18. Ibid., 59.
19. Bergman, *Three Films*, 129.
20. Ibid., 143.
21. Hubner, *Illusions of Light and Darkness*, 59.
22. William Alexander, "Devils in the Cathedral: Bergman's Trilogy," *Cinema Journal* 13.2 (1974): 31.
23. Kalin, *The Films of Ingmar Bergman*, 194.
24. Hubner, *Illusions of Light and Darkness*, 55.
25. One of the many philosophers that discusses the radical distance and independence of faith from reason and argumentation is Blaise Pascal, who said that faith is not brought about by an accumulation of proofs and evidence, but a movement of the will toward something that the heart desires. It is important to note that Marion draws much inspiration from Pascal especially in his discussion regarding charity. See Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A.J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin, 1966), §308/793.
26. Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 54.

27. Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005), 51.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 145.

31. Ibid., 146.

32. Ibid., 147-48.

33. Marion, *God Without Being*, 56. In here he speaks of the "idolatry of substitution" committed by metaphysics, in which philosophy "presupposes a concept exhausting the name of God."

34. Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 91.

35. Marion, *God Without Being*, 64. Marion uses this word to refer that Being is not the most proper way of speaking about God.

36. Ibid., 63.

37. Ibid., 64.

38. Ibid., 76.

39. Cf. *Rom* 4:17.

40. Marion, *God Without Being*, 86-87.

41. Cf. *1Cor* 1:18-24.

42. Marion, *God Without Being*, 89.

43. Ibid., 91

44. Cf. *Lk* 15:12-32.

45. Marion, *God Without Being*, 99-101.

46. Ibid., 104.

47. Ibid., 100.

48. Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 59.

49. Ibid., 64.

50. Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 66.

51. Ibid., 90.

52. Marion, *God Without Being*, 105.

53. Ibid., 101.

54. Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 67.

55. Marion, *The Idol and the Distance*, 129.

56. Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 59.

57. Marion, *The Idol and the Distance,* 136.

58. Ibid., 130.

59. Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 68.

60. Ibid., 67.

61. Marion, *The Idol and the Distance*, 166.

62. Ibid., 167.

63. Ibid., 168.

64. Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 67-68.

65. Ibid., 68.

66. Marion, *The Idol and the Distance,* 168.

67. Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 101.

68. See Blaise Pascal, *Great Shorter Works of Pascal*, trans. Emile Cailliet and John C. Blankenagel (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974), 202–11.

69. Marion characterizes love as a "crossing of gazes" between the self and the Other, one which does not depend on one's concept of the Other. Therefore, the call to love remains even in the midst of the silence of the Other who gazes. See Marion, "The Intentionality of Love," in *Prolegomena to Charity*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).

A LINGUAGEM E OS RITOS SACRIFICIAIS NO CINEMA DE JOÃO CÉSAR MONTEIRO

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No princípio já existia o Verbo, e o Verbo estava com Deus, e o Verbo era Deus. Ele estava no princípio com Deus. Tudo começou a existir por meio d'Ele e sem Ele nada foi criado. E n'Ele estava a Vida e a Vida era a luz dos homens.

— *Jo* 1,1-4

O Evangelho de São João é um dos mais belos e enigmáticos textos da tradição cristã. No Prólogo encontramos a expressão viva da Palavra de Deus enquanto fundamento de toda a realidade — foi através do Verbo que "tudo começou a existir" (*Jo* 1, 3). Esta ideia tem uma ressonância que se estende muito para lá da teologia e ajuda a pôr em evidência o carácter performativo[1] e revelador da linguagem. Porém, a linguagem nem sempre ilumina, ou revela. A sua luz também esconde, tem lugares de sombra. A ideia de uma linguagem que reproduz fielmente a realidade como ela *é*, não passa de um mito, tão ou mais antigo que a torre de Babel, ou a desobediência de Adão e Eva.

Talvez tenha existido um tempo em que as palavras não podiam dizer outra coisa senão aquilo que queriam dizer: *Um cão é um cão. Uma árvore é uma árvore.* Mas o que é o bem e o mal? No Paraíso, a serpente falava já outra língua, a língua que nós, os descendentes de Eva, falamos também. Dito de outra maneira, "A linguagem não nos foi dada independentemente do jogo das proibições e da transgressão."[2]

Para o escritor e filósofo francês George Bataille, a linguagem goza desse duplo potencial: tanto é capaz de oprimir como de libertar aquele que a fala. O limite deste jogo de tensões contrárias é testado por Bataille em soluções disruptivas, capazes de, através da violência e do sacrifício, abrir novos caminhos de comunicação entre os homens. Nesta análise, estará em foco a noção peculiar de *comunicação*, como é proposta por Bataille, e desenvolvida nas suas diferentes expressões através do encontro com a obra cinematográfica do realizador português João César Monteiro.

As experiências do riso, do erotismo ou da poesia — últimos redutos do sagrado nas sociedades modernas, em que a violência do sacrifício de sangue se transfere em toda a sua intensidade para o campo da linguagem —, são as manifestações que servirão de fio condutor desta análise em torno do modo como os filmes de Monteiro tentam servir a experiência da continuidade, pondo-nos em comunicação com o sagrado, com a esfera do não-saber.

O SAGRADO E O PROFANO

Em *O Erotismo*, Bataille define claramente uma clivagem fundamental entre duas esferas, entre dois mundos: o mundo profano (a esfera das proibições) e o mundo sagrado (a esfera das transgressões).[3] Ao primeiro corresponde a vida regular, ocupada pelos trabalhos quotidianos, sossegada e sujeita a um sistema de interditos; a este, opõe-se a efervescência da festa, do jogo, da arte e do erotismo: o mundo da transgressão. É, pois, dentro desta dialéctica original que todo o pensamento de Bataille se organiza e pode ser percebido. A comunicação de que o autor nos dá conta resulta, pois, da violação da fronteira que nos fecha dentro dos limites do profano. A comunicação é a experiência da continuidade.

Levantar o véu sobre esta história leva-nos muito atrás, ao momento em que o homem primitivo se separa do animal. Esta dolorosa separação, que nos afasta da natureza e nos condena ao isolamento, está, em primeiro lugar, relacionada com o enterro dos mortos (a consciência de que somos seres finitos e descontínuos), a criação de *tabus* ou de restrições sexuais (como o incesto), e, mais decisivo ainda, com a invenção de ferramentas e a progressiva instauração do trabalho enquanto âmbito privilegiado da acção do homem, cuja vida passa a estar subordinada à produtividade e à acumulação de bens.

O desenho rápido e, necessariamente, sucinto deste arco que define a tendência seguida pelo homem ao longo da construção da sua história (mil vezes acelerada nos últimos dois/três séculos), mostra como ele se torna progressivamente mais ponderado, mais calculista. O domínio da razão torna-o capaz de controlar os seus desejos e de limitar, através de um sistema de restrições (um código moral), os seus impulsos mais básicos, direccionando a sua energia para a concretização de objectivos práticos, voltando-o para a eficácia produtiva enquanto valor absoluto. Foi sobre esta espantosa capacidade de raciocínio e de cálculo que o homem erigiu a ideia de humanidade.

E, no entanto, uma agitação interior continua a perturbá-lo. "Somos seres descontínuos, indivíduos que isoladamente morrem numa aventura ininteligível, mas que têm a nostalgia da continuidade perdida."[4] Essa nostalgia animal persegue os homens obrigados a existir sob a ordem fragmentada do útil, que eles mesmos instauraram. É deste sentimento de perda, de desejo de continuidade com o mundo e do estupor perante a morte que nasce o impulso religioso, determinado simultaneamente pelo fascínio e pela angústia que provoca.

A ambiguidade que caracteriza o sentimento religioso resulta da tensão entre os dois lados do humano: o profano e o sagrado. O mundo sagrado é sempre vertiginoso e perigoso porque se situa fora da esfera confortável do saber. É, por definição, aquilo que não se sabe. Ele ameaça a estabilidade e a ordem do trabalho com a promessa da "embriaguez da continuidade," da comunicação com uma realidade mais profunda, que se encontra para lá do imediato, do útil.

Como observa Bataille,[5] apesar de o trabalho ser a base em que assenta a vida humana, ele não nos absorve inteiramente e a nossa obediência à sua lógica nunca é ilimitada; subsiste sempre no homem "um fundo de violência". É preciso que o homem civilizado, razoável, culto, seja também ele capaz de reconhecer a violência que tem parte em nós. Não é sem um pesado sentimento de desilusão que Freud[6] constata, nas suas "Reflexões para os Tempos de Guerra e Morte", que apesar de todos os progressos da ciência e da técnica, da instauração de complexos sistemas morais e de punição, continuamos irremediavelmente unidos ao mesmo impulso assassino dos nossos antepassados primitivos. É a ênfase colocada no próprio mandamento "Não matarás" (*Ex* 20,13) que torna manifesto o nosso inato e feroz instinto homicida.

Durante milénios, os rituais sacrificiais floresceram em culturas que, sem qualquer contacto entre si, inventaram diferentes formas de sacrifício com o objectivo de tentar responder a esta sede de sangue, à insaciável fome de continuidade, de fusão com o divino. Actualmente, a própria palavra "sacrifício" foi engolida e processada pelo contexto social e político, mas há muito tempo que a sua prática, enquanto ritual sagrado, caiu em desuso por ferir a sensibilidade do homem civilizado, que a passou a considerar irracional e bárbara. O horror sagrado, que sempre esteve associado a estes rituais primitivos, foi perdendo aos olhos das sociedades modernas a sua capacidade para continuar a mediar a nossa relação com o desconhecido.

O último grande sacrifício de que temos memória foi o de um deus filho do homem.[7] O impacto que teve o sacrifício de Cristo na cruz foi de tal forma violento e disruptivo que ainda hoje, e através dos séculos, o sentimos reverberar. O sacrifício de Jesus, que se ofereceu na morte como mediador de uma Nova Aliança (*Heb* 9,15), é visto, assim, como um acto comunicativo por excelência, capaz de superar a descontinuidade que caracteriza o ser humano, restaurando a sua comunhão perdida com o divino:

> a morte na cruz, ou seja, um sacrifício, o sacrifício de que o próprio Deus foi vítima. [...] embora [ele] nos resgate, embora a Igreja se refira ao pecado, que foi causa dele, chamando-o paradoxalmente *Felix culpa!* — culpa feliz — o que nos resgata é, ao mesmo tempo, aquilo que não se deveria ter passado. Para o cristianismo, a proibição está absolutamente afirmada, e a transgressão, seja ela qual for, é definitivamente condenável. No entanto, a condenação foi levantada devido ao próprio crime mais condenável, à transgressão mais profunda que homem algum podia ter cometido.[8]

Como nos mostra Bataille, a relação entre a transgressão e a graça, o pecado e a salvação pode ser mais complexa do que parece a um primeiro olhar. A cruz, lugar da morte de Cristo, rapidamente se tornou a imagem central do cristianismo:[9] símbolo da expiação dos nossos pecados, prova do amor infinito de Deus pelo homem. Bataille, recuperando uma expressão de Nietzsche, chamou ao Cristo crucificado "o mais sublime dos símbolos," "o maior pecado e o maior bem."[10] Na leitura paradoxal que faz da crucificação, Bataille centra-se na violência por trás deste acto como um aspecto primordial do sentimento religioso que o cristianismo se terá esforçado por abafar. Mas, na opinião do autor, só a transgressão, só a extrema violência do crime abre espaço nos corações dos homens (carrascos e espectadores) para a relação com o sagrado.

Apesar do progressivo afastamento do homem em relação à natureza e a Deus, que contribuiu para o seu fechamento na esfera do profano (que é da ordem "das coisas"), o sacrifício, que teve ao longo da evolução da história humana um papel tão inegável quanto determinante na construção e manutenção do equilíbrio daquilo que somos, continua ainda hoje a ser a mais importante pista a seguir se quisermos responder ao enigma da violência e ao abismo da descontinuidade que caracteriza a presença dos seres humanos no mundo.

A celebração da Eucaristia é um exemplo paradigmático da extraordinária capacidade de resistência e de adaptação dos ritos sacrificiais perante diferentes contextos sociais, diferentes sensibilidades, novas alianças. Para os cristãos, o sacrifício de Cristo na cruz não só é o maior como o único sacrifício capaz de garantir a remissão dos nossos pecados. "Sem efusão de sangue não há remissão" (*Heb* 9,18), mas o sangue de Cristo, ao contrário do dos bezerros e cordeiros, é puro, e só através dele podemos alcançar a redenção eterna. Por ser excepcional, o sacrifício de Jesus substitui e supera, na sua infinita eficácia, a necessidade de repetidas oferendas e outros sacrifícios sangrentos que, de resto, nunca terão agradado a Deus (*Heb* 10,1-18). No entanto, a sagrada comunhão, celebrada diariamente na missa em memória do Salvador, não pretende ser apenas uma representação simbólica desse sacrifício único, mas uma verdadeira actualização do mesmo.[11]

A Eucaristia reflete, assim, uma transformação extraordinariamente importante que é a da transferência que se dá da acção para a linguagem. Durante a celebração do sacrifício da missa, o sacerdote, investido de poder divino, torna presente o Cristo crucificado através da palavra, do Verbo. O corpo e sangue de Cristo fazem-se presentes de facto, ou sob forma simbólica, nas espécies do pão e do vinho, e são partilhados como alimento entre a assembleia de crentes que assim participam em comunhão no amor de Cristo.

A complexidade e o mistério presentes no sacramento da comunhão não devem ser menosprezados ou simplificados, mas também não é possível ignorar a extrema violência literal, textual e imagética patente no rito eucarístico. A inversão de valores, que está na raiz da interpretação da paixão de Cristo (o sangue é salvífico; a tortura oferece a redenção; a morte é a maior prova de amor, etc.[12]), não nos alheia da sua crueldade. Em vez disso, intensifica, através da sua aparente contradição, a força e o furor do abismo antropofágico que subsiste nas palavras de Jesus, repetidas pelo sacerdote: "Tomai todos e comei: Isto é o meu corpo, que será entregue por vós."

Apesar de serem compreensíveis os equívocos, é evidente que Bataille não está a defender novas imolações e holocaustos. O crime e a violência infligida à vítima sacrificial (objecto, planta, animal ou humana) de que o autor fala, é, de facto, na sua visão, condição essencial para que ela seja arrancada à ordem do profano, e possa servir, por momentos, de elemento de fusão entre os membros de uma comunidade reunida à sua volta. No entanto, como vimos com o exemplo da cruz e da Eucaristia, a violência e o excesso podem tomar formas

diversas. A evolução para o campo simbólico da linguagem é sintomática do impulso plástico dos ritos sacrificiais e da força performativa das palavras.

É neste movimento, em que a violência se transfere em toda a sua intensidade para o campo da linguagem e as palavras se mostram capazes de abrir feridas na realidade, que as artes, e, no caso particular em análise, os filmes de João César Monteiro, podem servir essa experiência da continuidade, de que fala Bataille, pondo-nos em comunicação com o sagrado.

EXPERIÊNCIAS SOBERANAS E RITOS SACRIFICIAIS (NO CINEMA DE JOÃO CÉSAR MONTEIRO)

Um dos aspectos mais celebrados da obra cinematográfica de João César Monteiro é a qualidade, a vertigem e o brilho violento da sua escrita. Dela pode dizer-se que ilumina o mistério da noite, o abismo em nós. O realizador, que, além de actor, é também quase sempre o argumentista ou co-argumentista dos seus próprios filmes, trabalha a língua portuguesa com uma paixão e mestria inigualáveis. Os diferentes registos, a mistura única do erudito com o mais baixo calão, a decência e o deboche, a união do inesperado com a rigorosa planificação são exemplos da inteligência e do ecletismo que revela a escrita de João César Monteiro.

São conhecidos os relatos de amigos que na juventude pediam a Monteiro que escrevesse, em vez de fazer filmes, porque para escrever ele "tinha imenso jeito." Victor Silva Tavares conta, com graça, que entre os profissionais do cinema se dizia: "o César escreve muito bem, só é pena que seja ele a realizar os filmes."[13] Ao que parece, isto deixava Monteiro furioso.[14] Jorge Silva Melo tem uma hipótese interessante sobre os motivos que terão levado o talentoso escritor em César Monteiro a preterir a literatura ao cinema.

No texto "Sem Saber," que compõe o catálogo da Cinemateca dedicado ao realizador, Silva Melo diz que o cinema de Monteiro nasce "de uma recusa, a daquilo que sabe que sabe. [...] É para isso que o João César quer o cinema: para saltar do que sabe para o que não sabe, para não-saber."[15] Esta hipótese confirma, no fundo, aquilo que já suspeitávamos, que o cinema de Monteiro foi sempre feito sem rede, feito de risco.

Esta é talvez a primeira grande afinidade que podemos encontrar entre a obra de Monteiro e o pensamento de Bataille: a consciência de que é preciso correr riscos, e, simultanea-

mente, de que é no campo da linguagem do não-saber que a violência e o sacrifício terão lugar a partir de agora. Sobre isto Dominique Paini dirá:

> A *mise-en-scène* de João César inspira-se numa tradição ritual muito rica de ostentação das metáforas do sacrifício. É o próprio realizador que celebra os rituais nos quais as jovens raparigas se submetem em altares. O cineasta revela o que ainda permanece de sacrifício na sociedade moderna, e designa precisamente esse sacrifício como um comportamento e um pensamento já desaparecidos.[16]

As experiências do riso, do erotismo ou da poesia continuam a ser os redutos do sagrado nas sociedades modernas. Também designadas por Bataille como experiências *soberanas* (ou seja, independentes da lógica racional e instrumental da linguagem que rege o nosso dia-a-dia), são manifestações que Monteiro explora na sua obra enquanto discursos do não-saber. São por isso experiências de continuidade que só conhecemos através da participação no excesso que as caracteriza e que as coloca fora da esfera do profano.

O cinema de Monteiro coloca-se, assim, à margem dos discursos do saber e do poder (ciência, política, direito), ou da linguagem da comunicação na sua acepção vulgar (ideologia, senso comum). Quando entra contrariado nesse campo profano é só para melhor o poder destruir por dentro, o fazer implodir. Os exemplos são vários. Em *A Comédia de Deus* (1995) a personagem de João de Deus (interpretada por César Monteiro) trabalha como geladeiro no "Paraíso do Gelado," onde desempenha também as funções de encarregado e de inventor da especialidade da casa, o famoso gelado "Paraíso." Cabe-lhe por isso, enquanto encarregado, supervisionar as jovens empregadas e certificar-se de que tudo está dentro da ordem. Um dos aspectos que ele não se cansa de sublinhar é o respeito pelas regras de higiene e segurança no local de trabalho:

> JOÃO DE DEUS: Mostra-me as mãos. Estão lavadinhas. Assim é que deve ser. E queres saber porquê? A razão é simples e não me canso de a repetir. Uma parte muito substancial dos nossos clientes são crianças. Ora, assim sendo, quem quer que seja que trabalhe sobre as minhas ordens é obrigado a lavar as mãos, seja após a extracção de mucos nasais, vulgo macacos, por exemplo, sob pena de despedimento imediato e sem prejuízo de ulterior procedimento criminal. O que está em jogo é a

> saúde pública. Entendido? Ao servires um gelado nunca te esqueças: um dia serás mãe.

Perante o silêncio absoluto e o olhar paciente e resignado da empregada, ele inspeciona-lhe cuidadosamente as mãos, cheira-as. Não bastando isso, no seu excesso de zelo, João de Deus sente necessidade de lhe explicar, como fará com todas, talvez pela vigésima vez (mas sempre com o mesmo grau de detalhe!), porque é que é da maior importância seguir as regras sanitárias e respeitar as ordens superiores. Ele próprio cumpre escrupulosamente nenhuma, e chega ao cúmulo de fabricar gelados a partir do leite onde se banha e urina a sua mais recente conquista — Joaninha (Cláudia Teixeira), uma adolescente que mora no bairro. O local de trabalho, onde antes afirmara, por exemplo, ser sacrilégio andar em roupa interior, é justamente onde ele escolhe sodomizar Rosarinho (Raquel Ascensão), a nova empregada. Mas não se fica por aqui, até o seu ditado predilecto, que nunca se cansa de repetir, "Nunca te esqueças: um dia serás mãe," ele faz questão de negar ao eleger a sodomia como o acto sexual por excelência.

As regras existem para que possa haver transgressão. O uso que João de Deus faz de uma linguagem técnica e absolutamente rigorosa (onde só a custo a expressão vulgar "macacos" é admitida) é em si mesma condição necessária para que a subversão desse discurso regulador possa ser ainda maior. Com isto Monteiro está a mostrar-nos como a linguagem pode ser enganosa e ao mesmo tempo subversiva. Por trás de um discurso claro e irrepreensível é sempre possível que se esconda uma mentira.

O homem soberano é aquele que se revolta contra a arrogância das certezas, que se recusa a servir o útil como o servem as ferramentas que ele próprio inventou, e com as quais a maior parte do tempo já se confunde. A poesia, porque é inútil dentro dessa lógica dominante da produtividade e da utilidade, é a linguagem da revolta do homem livre. No texto que acompanha a edição original em DVD da *Integral João César Monteiro*, Vitor Silva Tavares atesta isso mesmo quando diz que nos filmes de Monteiro os planos têm uma essência "radicalmente poética e, como tal, radicalmente política." O cinema de Monteiro não é, evidentemente, um cinema de género (drama social ou político) é antes pela poesia (refletida no tipo de enquadramento, o uso de luz natural, a duração dos planos), que é a arte que mais se aproxima da exaltação da vida, que Monteiro tenta tocar ao de leve a realidade em todo o seu esplendor e decadência. Segundo Bataille,

> A poesia leva-nos ao mesmo ponto a que nos conduz cada uma das formas de erotismo: a indistinção, a confusão dos objectos distintos. Conduz-nos à eternidade, conduz-nos à morte, e, pela morte, à continuidade: a poesia é *l'éternité. C'est la mer allée avec le soleil.*[17]

Tal como a poesia, o erotismo enquanto experiência soberana tem um lugar muito especial na obra de Monteiro. Por fazer parte da esfera do sagrado, ele põe-nos em comunicação com aquilo que é mais secreto e perigoso em nós. Nos filmes de Monteiro o erótico esconde-se normalmente dos olhares devassos e só se deixa revelar entre as frechas das portas e os buracos de fechaduras, através do som, de reflexos em espelhos, ou de sombras projectadas nas paredes. Multiplicam-se também os casos em que o erotismo se mostra através de substitutos ou de objectos fetiche, de que os pêlos púbicos coleccionados pela personagem de João de Deus será, talvez, o exemplo mais excêntrico. César nunca filma, por exemplo, o acto sexual, ou o que ele chama "uma cena de cama," por o considerar praticamente impossível.[18] A única vez que o fez, em *As Bodas de Deus* (1999), torna-se também por isso particularmente interessante de analisar.

João de Deus ganha num jogo de póquer a mulher do seu adversário, Elena (Joana Azevedo). Na noite de núpcias, aguarda-a na cama enquanto ela se banha, dizendo preparar-se para ele. Ele, no entanto, que parece desanimado com o aspecto frouxo do seu órgão genital, responde-lhe humildemente que "Quem dá o que tem a mais não é obrigado." É provável que esta sua ingénua e franca honestidade tenha quebrado neste momento toda e qualquer expectativa de excitação que pudesse ainda restar no espectador. Numa última tentativa de se animar ou reconfortar, cita para si a última estrofe do poema "Ribeirada" de Manuel du Bocage:

> Agora vós, fodões encarniçados,
> Que julgais agradar às moças belas
> Por terdes uns marsapos, que estirados
> Vão pregar com os focinhos nas canelas:
>
> Conhecereis aqui desenganados
> Que não são tais porrões do gosto delas;
> Que lhes não pode, enfim, causar recreio
> Aquele que passar de palmo e meio.

Elena sai finalmente do banho e entrega-se a João de Deus dizendo: "Tomai e comei. Este é o meu corpo." Estas palavras sacrílegas dão início a uma cena difícil de descrever. Elena oferece-se em todo o seu esplendor carnal no altar nupcial e entrega o seu corpo esbelto à volúpia desorganizada de um velho com corpo esquelético, mesmo decrépito, que parece não saber bem o que fazer com ela. Ao descrever esta cena, Monteiro diz que foi feita "a três":

> a actriz, eu e a sociedade, ou seja, a câmara. [...] [O] que cria um certo mal-estar é a confrontação de um corpo belo com o de uma velha carcaça. Acho que a cena é bastante chocante. Por causa do meu corpo. É a única razão. Se tivesse escolhido uma beldade como, por exemplo, o Tom Cruise para fazer a "lambidela," a cena tornar-se-ia muito confortável para o espectador.[19]

A provocação do desconforto é, naturalmente, propositada. Recusa-se ao espectador aquilo que ele está habituado a ver numa cena de sexo. O erotismo para Monteiro, como para Bataille, não serve o conforto, o sono, a sua essência é fundamentalmente transgressiva, acorda-nos para a consciência do interdito, da morte.

Os exemplos seguintes centram-se num outro tipo de experiência soberana de que tenho vindo a falar — o riso —, e têm lugar em duas catedrais, dois tronos de fé: um do passado, uma igreja; outro do presente, um tribunal, novo lugar de fé. Começo pelo exemplo mais simples: o do tribunal. Já para o final do filme *As Bodas de Deus*, e passadas muitas peripécias, João de Deus é apresentado a tribunal na sequência de várias acusações, qual delas a mais grave, que vão desde a promoção de actos terroristas com vista ao derrube do governo, à apropriação indevida de um título nobiliárquico (a dada altura ele autonomeia-se Barão de Deus). Por razões que imediatamente se tornarão claras, a cena é muito curta.

João de Deus está sentado no lugar do réu. Ao seu lado, como ditam as normas, está provavelmente o seu advogado de defesa, mas ele não terá qualquer papel neste teatro. João de Deus está sozinho, como de costume. Atrás dele uma audiência numerosa assiste ao julgamento. Um breve instante de silêncio mantém suspensa a expectativa sobre o que se irá passar. Tudo se passa num único plano de conjunto alargado, fixo e frontal, não teremos direito a aproximações dramáticas ou sequer ao contra-campo. A expectativa é então quebrada não pela imagem (pelo corte ou movimento), mas pelo som. O juiz, que está sempre fora de

campo, limita-se a ser uma voz que comanda: "Levante-se o réu". Ao que João de Deus responde clara e pausadamente: "Levanta-te tu, meu filho da puta."

A confusão está instalada: a audiência no tribunal desata a rir, como ri também o espectador do filme. O juiz bem se esforça por manter a ordem batendo energicamente com o seu martelo e disparando com a ameaça de "mandar evacuar na sala", um infeliz lapso de linguagem, com certeza... Mas de nada lhe serve a sua desesperada tentativa de afirmação de força, pelo contrário, isso só contribui para aumentar o ridículo e confirmar aos olhos de todos a artificialidade e a fragilidade da sua autoridade — autoridade é aquilo que não se vê, uma realidade que depende do consentimento do outro para existir. Antes que dois polícias se aproximem de João de Deus para o levar para fora da sala, ele ainda tem tempo de se pôr de cócoras em cima da cadeira e oferecer os dois dedos médios ao juiz (fig. 1).

Fig. 1: *As Bodas de Deus*.

Esta cena mostra-nos como para a eficaz desconstrução da situação são tão ou mais importantes que as palavras ofensivas e os gestos obscenos de João de Deus a expectativa e o respeito pela rigidez dos procedimentos que definem o funcionamento da instituição do tribunal. Como explica Judith Butler, tomando como exemplo o *Processo* de Kafka:

> There the one who waits for the law, sits before the door of the law, attributes a certain force to the law for which one waits. The anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning is the means by which that authority is attributed and installed: the anticipation conjures its object.[20]

Quando João de Deus se recusa a levantar ele não está só a recusar obedecer àquela ordem específica, ele está desobedecer ao ritual, e é por isso que é tão perigoso. O riso que o seu desafio provoca espalha-se como uma infecção que ameaça destruir a estabilidade daquilo que parecia sólido, inabalável. Abre uma crise que põe em causa aquilo que era esperado, e por isso cómodo.

O exemplo seguinte é de *Veredas* (1977), um dos primeiros filmes de Monteiro, onde o humor mordaz que caracteriza o realizador já estava claramente apurado. A cena que destaco passa-se numa pequena igreja, talvez a capela privada da Quinta do Senhor das Terras (João Guedes), onde parte da acção de *Veredas* tem lugar. Depois de terminar a leitura do que se supõe serem textos apócrifos, o padre (Luís de Sousa Costa) dirige-se à assembleia do Senhor dizendo:

> PADRE: Irmãos e irmãs... amigos, cunhados e outros, o maná que caiu do céu não era um, eram três. Era a fé, a esperança, a caridade. A esperança não é nada sem a fé; a fé não é nada sem as obras. As obras são a caridade, a caridade são as esmolas. É preciso haver quem dê esmolas, é preciso haver quem as receba. Porque muitos serão chamados, e poucos os escolhidos. É necessário que haja, pois, muitos a receberem as esmolas, poucos aqueles que as dão, porque esses são os que se salvam. "Creio num só Deus..."

Mais uma vez, o contexto e a antecipação, aquilo que pensamos que sabemos que se vai passar, são aspectos essenciais para o desejado efeito de ruptura. Estamos numa igreja, a arquitectura e a disposição das pessoas é a correcta. O padre, com a sua típica pronúncia das Beiras, dirige a partir do altar a assembleia de crentes. Mas, de repente, apesar de quase poder passar despercebido, não é o esperado que é dito mas o seu reverso. De resto, desatamos imediatamente a rir quando ele diz "Irmãos e irmãs... amigos, cunhados e outros." Não há nada de intrinsecamente errado nesta frase, aquilo que nos faz rir é também a passagem abrupta e inesperada daquilo que conhecemos, de uma cerimónia que segue uma certa ordem, daquilo que sabemos que se segue a cada interjeição (como se prova no final quando as pessoas respondem à deixa "Creio num só Deus..." e completam mecanicamente a oração do Credo), porém, as nossas certezas são abaladas. Escutamos incrédulos o discurso perturbador do padre. Como explica Bataille,

> Knowledge demands a certain stability of things known. In any case, the domain of the known is, in one sense at least, a stable domain, where one recognizes oneself, where one recovers oneself, whereas in the unknown there isn't necessarily any movement, things can even be quite immobile, but there is no guarantee of stability. Stability can exist, but there is not even any guarantee as to the limits of the movements that can occur. The unknown is obviously always unforeseeable.[21]

Aquilo que não se sabe é sempre assustador. Ao saber cabe o papel de acomodar, de oferecer segurança. O riso provoca a desordem, suspende o sentido. O que nos mostra Monteiro é que não há nenhum saber absolutamente seguro capaz de se furtar à força imprevisível do riso. A linguagem é, dentro dos planos fixos de Monteiro, o elemento desestabilizador. Não sabemos nunca o que vai surgir a seguir, a surpresa é, como se viu, um importante elemento provocador do riso. Bataille dá por diversas vezes[22] o exemplo de quando, inesperadamente, encontramos na rua alguém conhecido que não víamos há algum tempo, e rimos. Outro exemplo é de quando vemos alguém escorregar e cair, ou as cócegas, em que nos deixamos tomar completa e convulsivamente pelo riso. Estas situações, absolutamente triviais, são para Bataille exemplos de como o riso resulta daquilo que não sabemos, da surpresa, do inesperado.

Torna-se, pois, necessário saber reconhecer, enquanto dimensões endógenas da linguagem, a sua permeabilidade e a forte cumplicidade que mantém com as relações de poder, redes de sentido concretas: crenças, ideologias, preconceitos. Assim, a linguagem veicula sempre uma representação que não pode ser nem imediata nem transparente, porque existe num contexto histórico, simbólico e político que determina, em parte, os sentidos que gera. É dentro do campo da linguagem que diferentes estratégias, de controlo e de subversão, jogam o jogo dos sentidos.

O debate político é, evidentemente, o palco mais extremado em que as questões de estratégia e de retórica se colocam de forma aguda devido à necessidade de legitimação de que a política precisa para existir. Esgrimem-se argumentos ideológicos, tantas vezes mascarados de verdades objectivas e (temporariamente) irrefutáveis,[23] operam-se graves inversões de valor e adoçam-se expressões para ocultar o seu significado real e os resultados devastadores do seu peso social — "o desemprego é uma oportunidade," "as privatizações dinamizam a economia," a extinção de serviços e de postos de trabalho é chamada "mobilidade especial," etc.

João César Monteiro apropria-se dos lugares, dos símbolos e da linguagem da autoridade para os destruir por dentro. Um dos casos mais violentos disto podemos encontra-lo numa cena de *Vai e Vem* (2003). João Vuvu (César Monteiro) encontra Fausta (Manuela de Freitas), uma velha amiga, que presta serviços sexuais no Parlamento. Ele acompanha-a ao local de trabalho, e, na escadaria da Assembleia da República, dá-lhe uma longa e detalhada explicação sobre como proceder à prática do "brochim," ou *fellatio* chinês, tal como ela o deverá executar. Segue-se a sua proposta de lei:

> JOÃO VUVU: Que após acesa discussão, dura batalha no hemiciclo, legislem: "O broche chinês, também designado por brochim, devido à sua remota origem asiática, é especialmente recomendado para senhoras ou meninas que se sentem cativadas pela arte de bem o fazer, ressalvando que os incentivos que, no âmbito comunitário, lhe serão facultados, devem inserir-se numa rigorosa política de desenvolvimento das indústrias de recreio e lazer, pelo o que o seu exercício será obrigatoriamente orientado por profissionais altamente qualificadas e com sobejas provas dadas em tão laboriosa e intrincada tecnologia de ponta." A velha puta pode, enfim, sorrir.

A proposta apresentada por Vuvu segue uma linha de raciocínio claríssima onde ele usa a mesma semântica habitualmente usada pelos políticos ("incentivos no âmbito comunitário" ou "rigorosa política de desenvolvimento," entre outros). A sua argumentação segue uma corrente lógica e coerente de modo a revelar como a linguagem é capaz de nomear e de defender o indefensável. É através do carácter cómico, risível, que Monteiro excede e ultrapassa o saber racional, instrumental das palavras, tornando claro aquilo que a linguagem política tantas vezes esconde debaixo do seu tom monótono de seriedade e de rigor absolutos.

Monteiro faz uso de uma linguagem consciente de si, que só se produz com base numa razão interior, reconhecendo-se a si mesma enquanto dispositivo atuante em nome das forças soberanas. A crença no poder da linguagem que, segundo Bataille caracteriza a verdadeira literatura e a dispõe como força, como forma de violência e de resistência contra os poderes institucionais, é aqui provada eficaz.

A habitual hierarquia do discurso racional, científico, pragmático é completamente subvertida no discurso de Vuvu, obviamente, pelo objecto da legislação. Monteiro desafia-nos a examinar a ligação complexa entre linguagem e significado. Toda a linguagem

é ambígua. A ambiguidade e a contradição são aspectos centrais do discurso político, como nos sugere Monteiro nesta e muitas outras cenas.

Em contraste com o constante bombardeamento de notícias, de novas medidas e conferências de imprensa diárias, à margem deste formigueiro mediático, persistem, inalterados, os mesmos problemas de sempre (a corrupção, a má distribuição de recursos, a pobreza extrema) aos quais o discurso racional, mas vazio, dos políticos não responde, nem parece querer responder. Para que serve a palavra quando esvaziada do seu poder criativo, do seu valor de revelação, de desafio? Todos os dias assistimos ao esvaziamento do sentido, e isto acontece não só por serem colossais os volumes de dados anódinos transacionados como informação, mas porque concorremos resolutamente para o empobrecimento das sociedades através da progressiva uniformização das respostas que os indivíduos são capazes de imaginar. O problema não é novo, mas agudiza-se e multiplica-se a cada minuto de mais um comentário político ou um *reality show* (quando se conseguem distinguir) que passa nas televisões e, em seguida em *loop*, em todas as outras plataformas digitais.

Embrulhadas nas apertadas teias da utilidade e da objectividade, as palavras vão perdendo plasticidade, tornando-se monótonas, como nós. A suposição de que somos nós que definimos a linguagem que usamos só é verdadeira se percebermos que somos, na mesma medida, definidos por ela. Mais de meio século após a publicação de *1984*, continuam a parecer-nos assustadoramente próximos o realismo e a atracão do modelo de sociedade imaginado por George Orwell. O sistema de vigilância, a distração constante, é claro. Mas especialmente a ideia da linguagem como uma prisão, um lugar a partir do qual não conseguimos mais compreender e expressar o nosso lugar no mundo.[24]

Na sua obstinada procura de comunicação, João César Monteiro vai extremando posições. Num outro exemplo de *Vai e Vem*, Monteiro torna literal a expressão vulgar "fomos enrabados", confrontando a sua personagem, Vuvu, com um estranho ritual em que está tudo de pernas para o ar (é uma mulher quem usa o pénis; o ritual faz-se ao som de ritmos africanos, mas o verdadeiro violador é americano, etc.), mas para entender esta sequência é importante relacioná-la com a cena imediatamente anterior. Neste caso em particular, o sentido disruptivo do discurso nasce também do choque provocado pela montagem.

Vuvu viaja mais uma vez no seu autocarro n.º 100, onde ao longo do filme vai encontrando várias personagens (a menina Custódia, que foi Miss Piscina e que sonha um dia vir a ser famosa; um racista convicto, etc.). Desta vez, Monteiro viaja à noite e tem como único

companheiro um menino de rua, pedinte, que toca acordeão e canta músicas populares. Não há praticamente diálogo, e a câmara limita-se, como de costume, a registar a acção de longe. Quando o menino termina a música, vai aos encontrões (o autocarro vai, é claro, em andamento) até junto de Vuvu que lhe dá a ele e ao seu pequeno cão uma esmola, fazendo cair uma a uma as moedas. Quando saem ambos do autocarro, Vuvu pergunta ao menino:

JOÃO VUVU: Sabes o rei dos Álamos?
MENINO: Essa não sei.
JOÃO VUVU: Quando tinha a tua idade o Schubert também não sabia. Que idade tens?
MENINO: Vou fazer 11 anos.
JOÃO VUVU: Talvez faças, talvez não. Por mim fazias.

Num primeiro momento, a pergunta de Vuvu parece simplesmente idiota, disparatada. E por isso rimos. Pensando bem, é uma pergunta que pode passar por arrogante, senão mesmo cruel. É evidente que aquele menino de rua não pode conhecer o poema de Gothe[25] ou o *lied* de Schubert. Mas existem muitas dimensões diferentes neste curto diálogo que, porém, se concentram todas naquela que julgo ser a primeira reacção instintiva do espectador comum: o riso.

Nesta cena, a *mise-en-scène* de Monteiro está mais uma vez a acordar o espectador, não o deixa ter pena, não o embala docemente na trágica fragilidade da criança, na extrema vulnerabilidade da sua condição. Vuvu é frio quando, momentos antes, depois de lhe dar uma esmola lhe diz simplesmente "Tu aqui não te governas." É uma afirmação factual. No plano seguinte, a graça que faz não é para o menino, é para ele próprio, Vuvu, e para nós, espectadores. Uma graça com um forte sentido trágico porque, sabemos nós, o Rei dos Álamos é uma figura terrível, que persegue noite a dentro um outro menino que viaja a cavalo no colo do seu pai, e que, primeiro com promessas de jogos e brincadeiras, depois com violência, lhe arrancará a vida.

Tal como observava Bazin a propósito da criança em *Alemanha Ano Zero* (*Germania anno zero*, 1948), de Rossellini, "Não é o ator que nos emociona, nem o acontecimento, mas o sentido que somos obrigados a extrair deles."[26] O que nos toca é talvez a inocência, a falta de jeito ou a ingenuidade que vemos no menino e que percebemos que perdemos para sempre. Ele não sabe quem é o Rei dos Álamos, está perdido, estamos perdidos, e é por isso que ri-

mos. No fundo, enquanto rimos, é também por nós que choramos. O riso não mascara o seu excesso. "Terror. Pânico. Tudo o que quiserem [...] está lá e é lá, na tal extremidade de onde temos o pressentimento do Único que se ganha o direito sagrado de filmar."[27]

E de repente temos um corte. Uma mudança abrupta. Vuvu chega a casa e é surpreendido por um estranho ritual em que uma figura andrógina, detentora de um falo gigante, dança freneticamente para si. Vuvu esconde-se debaixo dos lençóis mas é evidente que este gesto infantil não o poderá salvar. Um novo corte leva-nos directamente para a sala de operações onde vemos a ameaça confirmada: durante o ritual o enorme falo foi introduzido e deixado no ânus de Vuvu. Exibido como troféu, o pénis com que João Vuvu foi violentamente sodomizado é colocado em cima de uma bandeira dos EUA, que serve de napperon, com a fotografia do George W. Bush pendurada por cima, na parede do quarto do hospital onde Vuvu recupera do trauma (fig. 2).

Fig. 2: *Vai e Vem*.

O riso é inseparável da violência e do drama. Mas quando somos capazes de nos rir de nós próprios ficamos um pouco mais perto de nos libertarmos daquilo que nos faz chorar. Daquilo que é insuportável. De algum modo esta sucessão inesperada de planos pode significar essa tentativa. O riso liberta uma energia incendiária que encontra nos filmes de Monteiro combustível suficiente para incendiar o mundo.

O plano de pormenor do seu olho azul, o último plano de *Vai e Vem* (que é simultaneamente o último plano da obra de Monteiro[28]), representa, de outra maneira, aquilo que o choque provocado pela montagem procura. Ou seja, mostrar que há coisas que pedem silêncio. É interessante pensar nisto deste ponto de vista: o confronto entre a tagarelice de Vuvu e os momentos de silêncio.

CONCLUSÃO

> [N]ão sou um cineasta da abjecção. Sou um cineasta da abominação. Há coisas que são abomináveis, e isso eu mostro. Eu faço filmes para mostrar isso. Mas este [*O Último Mergulho* (1992)] não é o meu primeiro filme. Andamos aqui há anos, os filmes seguem-se uns aos outros e há uma lógica nisto tudo: é passar da abominação ao sagrado.[29]

César Monteiro partilha com George Bataille muitas ideias, talvez se possa mesmo dizer que partilham uma certa mundividência em que a violência não nos abandonou, continua a fazer parte do nosso ADN. Somos seres ferozes, seres feridos em busca da continuidade perdida. Sem violência não é possível comunicar com aquilo que está fora do imediato, do útil, fora da esfera do saber. A abominação de que fala Monteiro comunga, de certo modo, da mesma identidade com aquilo que Bataille designa como o "impossível," aquilo que não se pode agarrar através do discurso racional porque faz parte da experiência. Tal como acontece com o erotismo, ou a morte, não existem palavras no vocabulário limitado dos discursos do saber e do poder capazes de conter aquilo que é abominável.

E, no entanto, o realizador afirma não só querer mostrar o abominável como deseja a passagem da abominação ao sagrado. É, pois, essa busca incauta pela comunicação de opostos que Monteiro leva a cabo numa obra desafiante em que a potência e os limites da linguagem são testados e levados ao extremo.

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1. A noção de *performatividade* assume-se como característica central dentro do ramo da pragmática. Dentro dessa concepção, a linguagem não se limita a descrever ou a informar, é ela mesma uma forma de acção. Continua a merecer destaque o trabalho pioneiro de John Austin e a sua teoria dos "actos de fala" — em especial a obra *How to do Things With Words* (1955) —, que teve desenvolvimentos no trabalho de Derrida e, mais recentemente, com Judith Butler a chamar a atenção para a importância do corpo e do contexto na construção de identidades através do discurso.

2. Georges Bataille, *O Erotismo*, trad. João Bénard da Costa, 3.ª ed. (Lisboa: Antígona, 1988), 243.

3. Também chamada "soberana," "heterogénea," "parte maldita," esfera do "não-saber," da "continuidade," etc. Bataille desenvolveu ao longo da sua carreira um complexo sistema terminológico que não se esgota nas várias denominações já apresentadas e que é sintomático da incessante procura de Bataille por uma linguagem dinâmica, capaz de comunicar a exuberância da vida para lá da denotação. Ver Bataille, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, ed. Stuart Kendall, trad. Michelle Kendall e Stuart Kendall (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), xxiv.

4. Bataille, *O Erotismo*, 14.

5. Ibid., 35.

6. Sigmund Freud, *Reflections on War and Death*, trad. A. A. Brill e Alfred B. Kuttner (Nova Iorque: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1918).

7. René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trad. Stephen Bann e Michael Metteer (Nova Iorque: Continuum, 2003). Apesar de René Girard concordar com o ponto essencial, ou seja, que a morte de Cristo na cruz foi o último grande sacrifício na história da humanidade, ele avança com uma hipótese diferente e bastante interessante quanto às razões de excepcionalidade desse acto. Ele defende que a morte de Cristo expõe e subverte o esquema sacrificial fixo do "bode expiatório" ao mostrar como a vítima é inocente e as comunidades culpadas, enfraquecendo, ou mesmo anulando o sentido da continuação deste rito milenar. Ver ibid., 141-263.

8. Bataille, *O Erotismo*, 231.

9. Para uma detalhada análise histórica e teológica acerca do papel da cruz na religião cristã dos séculos I ao XIII ver Elizabeth Dreyer, ed., *The Cross in Christian Tradition: From Paul to Bonaventure* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000).

10. Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, trad. Bruce Boone (London: Continuum, 2008), 17.

11. Cf. *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Sacrifice of the Mass," acedido 1 Jul. 2013, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10006a.htm.

12. Um exemplo extremo é o das *arma Christi*, os instrumentos usados na tortura e morte de Cristo, veneradas durante séculos não como símbolos de sofrimento, mas antes como prova do seu triunfo e da sua autoridade sobre o mal. Ver Bynum, "Violent Imagery in Late Medieval Piety", 15.ª palestra anual do GHI, 8 Nov. 2001, acedido 1 Jun. 2011, http://www.ghi-dc.org/ publications/ghipubs/bu/030/3.pdf. Ver Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

13. João Nicolau, org., *João César Monteiro* (Lisboa: Cinemateca Portuguesa - Museu do Cinema, 2005), 63.

14. É o próprio quem o confessa: "nessa altura [depois de 1974], quase toda a gente me dizia que os filmes que eu fazia eram uma merda, que não tinha talento nenhum e sobretudo (e isso é que eu não suportava) que o que eu devia fazer era escrever porque para escrever tinha imenso jeito." Ibid., 25.

15. Ibid., 245.

16. Ibid., 584.

17. Bataille, *O Erotismo*, 22.

18. Nicolau, *João César Monteiro,* 441.

19. Ibid.

20. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Nova Iorque: Routledge, 1999), xiv.

21. Bataille, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, 133.

22. Bataille, "On Nietzsche: The Will to Chance, Preface," trad. Annette Michelson, *October* 36, "Georges Bataille: Writings on Laughter, Sacrifice, Nietzsche, Un-Knowing" (1986): 69-70. Bataille, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, 135.

23. Veja-se o recente exemplo do estudo publicado em 2010 por Carmen Reinhart e Kenneth Rogoff, que serviu de base de apoio às políticas de austeridade que têm vindo a ser implementadas na Europa, em especial nos países do sul. Apesar de ter ficado provado que as conclusões a que o estudo chegava sobre os efeitos negativos da relação entre endividamento e crescimento económico estarem erradas, o assunto foi rapidamente esquecido e não foram retiradas quaisquer consequências políticas do caso.

24. No clássico distópico *1984*, a invenção da *novilíngua* (*newspeak*) vem responder às necessidades de controlo do sistema político totalitário do Grande Irmão. Continuamente revista e melhorada pelos intelectuais do Partido, o objetivo da *Novilíngua* era tornar-se, através da brutal redução do número de vocábulos, uma língua extremamente objetiva, ortodoxa, que não permitisse, pela ausência de certos vocábulos, a articulação de determinados pensamentos potencialmente subversivos.

25. A versão portuguesa de "O Rei dos Álamos," feita por Eugénio de Castro e publicada em 1932 por ocasião do centenário da morte de Goethe, pode ser lida em http://www.musica.gulbenkian.pt/cgi-bin/wnp_db_dynamic_record.pl?dn=db_notas_soltas_articles&sn=pontos_de_vista&rn=45&pv=yes, acedido 1 Jul. 2013.

26. André Bazin, *O Cinema: Ensaios*, trad. Eloisa de Araújo Ribeiro (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1991), 190.

27. Citado em Nicolau, *João César Monteiro,* 25.

28. João César Monteiro morreu em 2003, meses antes da estreia de *Vai e Vem*.

29. Nicolau, *João César Monteiro,* 358.

APPROCHES D'UN STYLE SPIRITUEL AU CINÉMA : *DANS LA BRUME* DE SERGEI LOZNITSA

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> Insistons, non pas : comment rendre visible l'invisible au moyen du visible, mais : comment rendre accessible l'invisible au moyen du visible ; ce n'est pas là une affaire de détail, c'est dans cette différence, précisément, que réside l'énigme de l'essence des images.[1]
>
> — JEAN-PAUL CURNIER, *Montrer l'invisible*

Lorsque l'on parle de la relation entre film et religion, on pense souvent aux films à thèmes, ou bien à ceux qui auront inscrit dans leur histoire quelques moments de représentation du religieux, à travers un objet symbolique (le crucifix par exemple), un rituel (une prière) ou un dialogue (l'évocation de Dieu ou de l'institution religieuse). Mais qu'en est-il des films implicitement religieux, c'est-à-dire des films qui n'ont pas directement à voir avec le religieux mais qui malgré tout évoquent une profondeur sacrée qui transcende le spectateur ? Nous suggérons deux catégories : la première correspond aux films au sujet religieux. Ces films peuvent avoir un style spirituel ou pas. Dans la seconde catégorie nous incluons les films qui ne sont pas directement religieux mais qui peuvent aussi aborder le sacré, concept qui s'est transformé au fur et à mesure du temps et s'est prolongé à l'humanisme. Ces films peuvent aussi avoir un style spirituel.

Comment représenter ce en quoi l'homme croit et qui le dépasse ? Qu'entend-on par spirituel en cette ère contemporaine ? Existe t-il un style spirituel au cinéma ?

Dans un premier temps, nous proposons de définir ce que nous entendons par style spirituel au cinéma. Ensuite, nous analyserons la pensée d'un théologien (Amédée Ayfre), d'une théoricienne (Susan Sontag) et d'un réalisateur–scénariste (Paul Schrader) qui ont contribué à définir la possibilité d'un style spirituel au cinéma[2]. Nous verrons qu'il n'existe pas de style spirituel comme genre cinématographique à proprement dit, mais ce qui apparait c'est un langage implicite à l'intérieur du langage filmique qui peut avoir une tonalité spirituelle. A ce style spirituel peut s'associer une esthétique cinématographique du sacré[3], c'est-à-dire que

certains réalisateurs vont eux-mêmes élaborer un style qui leur permettra d'exprimer ce qu'ils ne veulent ou ne peuvent figurer directement. Pour terminer, nous rapprocherons le style spirituel proposé par les auteurs antérieurs avec celui qui se rencontre dans le film que Sergei Loznitsa a réalisé en 2012 : *Dans la brume* (*V tumane*, 2012). C'est une œuvre qui réunit de nombreux éléments qui permettent de le caractériser comme cinéma proposant une réflexion philosophique et théologique contemporaine en se retournant sur la tragédie de la grande Histoire. Il nous a semblé pertinent d'introduire la pensée d'Emmanuel Lévinas dans cette étude, car il propose une éthique fondée sur la relation à l'autre qui conduit à une ouverture vers la transcendance. Au cinéma, cette éthique peut se retrouver non seulement à travers le récit mais aussi par la forme qui est appliquée. Nous analyserons pourquoi et comment cette éthique de l'autre est si présente dans *Dans la brume*, en particulier à travers le style que Loznitsa a choisi pour son film.

STYLE SPIRITUEL

Si le cinéma permet l'identification d'un style spirituel, c'est parce qu'il est un *medium* qui reproduit de la réalité, dans la continuité de son mouvement. En partant du principe que le monde est la source même où l'homme peut rencontrer le sacré et peut en faire une expérience spirituelle -—même s'il se manifeste sous une forme abstraite, le cinéma offre des possibilités esthétiques qui rendent sensible la représentation et l'expression d'un style dit « spirituel ». Cependant il ne constitue pas un genre, c'est-à-dire qu'il ne propose pas de système particulier : au cinéma le style spirituel procède d'une rencontre narrative et esthétique qui se prolonge jusqu'au spectateur.[4]

Par exemple, Robert Bresson est un réalisateur qui propose un style spirituel :

> En restant uniquement dans la relation aux faits et gestes de son personnage, Robert Bresson invoque l'idée d'une présence plus grande que l'homme, la présence possible d'un esprit simultanément source de foi et destinataire de cette foi.[5]

Au cinéma, l'expression du sacré peut conduire à un style spirituel. Que signifie *sacré* aujourd'hui ? Le sacré est un concept qui évolue et qui ne se limite plus à un sens religieux

originel. L'idée d'un sacré humaniste est aussi répandue que le sacré religieux. Nous entendrons « sacré » comme le symbolique qui serait à la frontière entre l'immanent et le transcendant, religieux ou humaniste. Le sacré est directement lié au mystère, à ce qui ne peut pas être expliqué de manière rationnelle, et c'est pour cette raison que sa représentation au cinéma doit respecter ce mystère et ne pas être illustratif, au risque de tomber dans le stéréotype. Mais *sacré* a une connotation d' « intouchable » et d' « inviolable » qui peut ou non être spirituel. C'est une propriété qui qualifie quelque chose à l'extérieur, alors que le spirituel est profondément intérieur. Le sacré est spirituel quand il remet celui qui en fait l'expérience (du sacré) à une croyance du transcendant. Notre tâche est d'analyser quand et comment les concepts de sacré et spirituel se rejoignent pour s'exprimer dans l'image filmique. Par exemple, ils sont toujours liés au temps, que cela soit à travers le déroulement d'une temporalité linéaire et quantitative (qui pourrait être le *Kronos*) ou à partir d'un temps abstrait (qui serait qualitatif et sans continuité, le *Kairos* ou *Aion*). Mais ce qui est le plus important, c'est l'impression de temps que l'image filmique procure au spectateur. Le spirituel est intrinsèquement lié à un temps qui s'*épanouit*, c'est-à-dire que son expérience se fera effectivement au fur et à mesure du temps, à partir de sa *transformation différée* (et non immédiate). Même s'il existe une impression de relation instantanée avec le sacré (dans la prière par exemple), ce n'est que plus tard que la révélation, qui pourra être une des conséquences de l'expérience, se fera *présence*.[6] Sans cette *épanouissement* du temps, le spirituel ne pourra s'imprimer dans la mémoire du spectateur et ne laissera aucune trace. On peut alors se demander si le sacré doit laisser une empreinte pour être sacré ; par exemple, c'est souvent à partir de la durée d'un plan que se crée un *hors-temps*, lorsque la temporalité filmique permet au spectateur de se détacher de la sensation de temps en tant que passage d'une action, et le transporte vers la sensation d'exister devant *une présence*, qui peut être soit celle de l'image, soit celle de ce qui à lieu dans l'image et qui se révèle pendant le déroulement du plan. Par exemple, les plans de *Dans la brume* de Sergei Loznitsa obligent le spectateur à dilater ses attentes spectatorielles en créant une tension particulièrement forte entre l'image filmique et lui-même[7].

C'est la temporalité de l'image qui déclenche chez le spectateur l'expérience de l'intériorité spirituelle : le sacré et le spirituel ne peuvent se manifester qu'à travers le temps. C'est donc un des facteurs essentiels et universels du style spirituel cinématographique[8].

LE SPIRITUEL COMME FORME CINÉMATOGRAPHIQUE

Amédée Ayfre, prêtre français catholique disparu trop tôt lors d'un accident de voiture en 1964 (à l'âge de quarante-deux ans) est l'un des premiers critiques à analyser le cinéma du point de vue de la théologie, sans pour autant l'associer directement au religieux. Il va plutôt l'explorer à partir d'un *humanisme spirituel*. Ayfre loue le cinéma qui n'impose pas de message et qui permet au spectateur d'interpréter à sa façon ce qu'il voit. Pour lui, il n'y a pas de cinéma « religieux » au sens propre mais il existe des films qui « ont une approche concrète du mystère ontologique. »[9] Amédée Ayfre prend comme exemple le film de Rosselini *Allemagne Année Zéro* qui oblige le spectateur à prendre conscience de l'action dramatique au lieu de l'observer passivement. La déambulation du jeune garçon dans les rues de Berlin détruites par les bombardements jusqu'à sa chute mortelle de la fin ne peut pas laisser indifférent le spectateur. Il est obligé de questionner l'*image-fait*[10] qui lui est proposé et qui ne représente aucune réponse, ni aucune certitude du monde dans lequel il se déroule. En ce sens, l'événement existe tout simplement, tel quel, sans effet de causalité, sans déterminisme. L'*image-fait* n'a pas de sens préétablit. Ce qu'elle montre *est*, dans sa forme pure. C'est en créant une distanciation que le film révèle une ouverture métaphysique dans ce « réalisme humain » comme l'avait définit Amédée Ayfre.[11] Le cinéma, et en particulier le cinéma néo-réaliste, permet au spectateur de prendre conscience de la réalité de l'autre, et de la saisir en dehors de la salle de cinéma. Amédée Ayfre parle de « monde fraternel de présences »[12] car l'image cinématographique peut créer un lien direct entre le film et la réalité. Il écrit :

> C'est seulement dans la rue que ce vieux retraité que je croisais sans le voir pourra devenir pour moi, si je veux, par la médiation du film de Vittorio de Sica, *Umberto D.* [1952], mon prochain. J'aurai ainsi bouclé le circuit et retrouvé moi-même, grâce à la médiation de son image, la réalité d'où un autre était parti.[13]

C'est bien là une des propriétés spirituelles du cinéma : projeter un fait figuré dans un fait réel et être conscient de cette translation. Et si le néo-réalisme cinématographique engage un effet de distanciation, il rapproche aussi l'individu de son prochain dans la vie réelle. Comme l'a dit Amédée Ayfre, il a compris la misère humaine à travers l'image filmique et a

pu l'appréhender en toute empathie dans la réalité. Elle ne lui est plus étrangère. Il s'est produit une véritable « conversion aux images ».[14]

Dans une perspective phénoménologique, Philippe Rocher définit le réalisme spirituel d'Amédée Ayfre :

> Dans un film, il s'agit de voir comment un réalisateur donne à voir « l'existence » et non « l'essence », comment, loin du « jeu » et du « spectacle », il aide le spectateur à appréhender la réalité de l'existence humaine. Les « bonnes » images, le « bon » film, doivent laisser percevoir dans l'action d'humains « concrets » une humanité concrète dans laquelle est « co-présent le mystère entier de l'univers. »[15]

Ayfre défend que l'esthétique des films explicitement religieux ne révèle pas la transcendance car c'est dans la réalité pure qu'elle se trouve. C'est dans l'ambiguïté de l'image réaliste que se manifeste le mystère de la transcendance, même si, à la différence d'André Bazin, le théologien ne conçoit pas l'écran comme un espace où toutes les choses du monde seraient présentées de façon indifférenciées. Pour lui, le cinéma permet de montrer et de questionner la nature de l'être, dans toute sa complexité, mais prenant l'homme comme référence et point de départ de la spiritualité. C'est aussi ici que réside le principe de distanciation car sans lui, le spectateur se laissera prendre au jeu de l'image. Amédée Ayfre voit la force du cinéma dans sa possibilité d'exprimer ce qui est invisible mais présent dans la réalité, et de proposer au spectateur la possibilité d'une transcendance résidant au cœur de l'existence humaine.

Dans son essai *Spiritual Style in the films of Robert Bresson*, Susan Sontag montre que le spectateur a un réel plaisir à se distancier de son espace affectif pour interpréter intellectuellement ce qu'il voit.[16] Elle explique que l'utilisation formelle du contrepoint (ou *doubling-duplicating*) permet au spectateur de contrôler ses émotions au moment où il va les réveiller. Dans l'œuvre de Robert Bresson, l'objectif du contrepoint est à la fois d'arrêter le cours cinématographique de l'émotion pour mieux l'intensifier. Alors que dans le cinéma classique les émotions bouleversent le spectateur (c´est-à-dire qu'il perd ses capacités interprétatives et se laisse manipuler par ce qu'il voit), l'esthétique utilisée par Bresson lui donne la possibilité de suivre tranquillement l'intrigue de l'histoire. C'est ce que Susan Sontag appelle « un état d'équilibre spirituel » qui serait lui-même le sujet du film.[17] Il est indéniable que l'identification facile épuise la nature émotionnelle qui perd toute sa force et son originalité expressives.

Le cinéma qui met en valeur son espace formel permet au spectateur un ajournement de l'émotion, qui retrouve ainsi une densité originale. Le spirituel refuse l'immédiateté : l'atemporalité de sa transcendance engage la patience. Le spirituel a besoin de silence et s'il se développe dans le temps, c'est dans la suspension qu'il se manifeste. Cette suspension peut être spatiale, temporelle, narrative ou sonore. Le spirituel a aussi besoin d'espace créatif pour se déployer. Des réalisateurs comme Bresson ou Tarkovski utilisent la rupture (narrative ou esthétique) pour stimuler les capacités imaginatives du spectateur.[18] Ces ruptures filmiques peuvent se manifester sous différentes formes mais toutes auront pour conséquence de suspendre la participation affective du spectateur dans l'action.

Par exemple, l'ellipse, l'intervalle ou le contrepoint (que nous avons vu dans l'œuvre de Robert Bresson) provoquent une discontinuité narrative qui rompt avec la permanence de l'espace-temps de la réalité. Cette fracture amène le spectateur à se projeter dans un domaine qui ne lui est plus familier et qui lui permettra, s'il est disponible, de se projeter au delà d'une simple reproduction/construction réaliste. Si d'après Sontag c'est à travers la stylisation de la réalité que Bresson rend possible l'expression du spirituel, il n'en reste pas moins que rien n'est imposé au spectateur : c'est lui qui continue d'interpréter ce qu'il voit comme il le veut. Il ne s'intéresse pas à la psychologie de l'âme ; c'est l'action spirituelle qui est en jeu et non les motivations de l'être humain qui sont trop complexes pour en être réduites à des interprétations légères. Le rôle des acteurs est essentiel pour la construction d'un style spirituel au cinéma. Robert Bresson refuse de nommer « acteurs » ses interprètes car pour lui les « modèles », comme il les appelle, ne doivent pas interpréter le personnage mais si présenter le personnage. Susan Sontag rapproche la direction d'acteur de Bresson à une énonciation Brechtienne : « L'acteur [...] doit demeurer un démonstrateur ; il doit présenter le personnage comme étant un étranger, il ne doit pas supprimer " il a fait ci, il a fait ça " qui fait partie de son interprétation ».[19]

On retrouve encore le procédé de distanciation (le *Verfremdungseffekt* de Berthold Brecht) qui empêche que le spectateur s'identifie. Cet effet, appelé encore *effet d'aliénation*, construit un regard critique qui lui permet d'interpréter l'action ou le style du film. C'est aussi grâce à ce procédé que le personnage *bressonien* révèle sa beauté au fur et à mesure du temps. En choisissant des interprètes qui sont des non-professionnels au physique *plat*, c'est-à-dire qu'ils ne sont ni beaux ni laids, mais plutôt *passe-partout*, sans éclat particulier, les personnages ont la possibilité de devenir *transparents* aux yeux du spectateur. Petit à pe-

tit, les personnages deviennent attachants car ils dévoilent leur espace intérieur. Ils perdent leur opacité première et laissent la temporalité filmique traverser l'épaisseur de leur corps : leur âme est dense et fascinante. Susan Sontag souligne la différence entre un personnage dont la beauté ou la personnalité se révèle progressivement tout au long du déroulement de l'histoire et celle qui fait partie de l'action dramatique : alors que par exemple le style spirituel des protagonistes de Jean Cocteau converge aboutit au narcissisme, celui des personnages de Robert Bresson ne s'intéresse pas à leur personnalité idiosyncratique qui ferait partie de la psychologie. C'est l'être et sa relation à l'existence qui le préoccupe ; il ne cherche pas à comprendre ou à justifier ses actions ou ses pensées qui sont aléatoires, instables et variables.[20]

C'est pourquoi il refuse l'expressivité du visage et même du corps. Dans *Notes sur le cinématogaphe* il déclare : « Acteur. " Le va-et-vient du personnage devant sa nature " oblige le public à chercher le talent sur son visage, au lieu de l'énigme particulière à tout être vivant ».[21] La psychologie détourne le spectateur de l'essence des personnages et ne lui permet pas de se questionner sur ce qu'il voit. Tout lui est donné sur le visage de l'acteur. L'espace psychique ne détient plus de mystères. Il n'y a plus de place pour une empreinte spirituelle.

Dans son essai sur le style transcendantal au cinéma, Paul Schrader propose une *esthétique de la rarescence* (*sparseness*) qui est identifiable au cinéma et qui permet la représentation d'une transcendance qui n'est pas forcément religieuse mais qui est transcendante.[22] Sa proposition est clairement formaliste, et revendique un style spirituel universel. Son approche est pertinente pour comprendre comment un film peut être un *objet* spirituel ; l'esthétique, c'est-à-dire le style formel du film, se présente comme le moteur de cette possibilité expressive. Pour Schrader, le cinéma est capable de hiérophanie ; il a la possibilité d'exprimer le sacré. Par conséquent, le spectateur peut aussi faire son expérience à partir de l'esthétique de la rarescence qui correspond à la représentation de la banalité du quotidien et à l'expérience de sa temporalité ; à partir d'une épuration esthétique et narrative peut surgir celle d'une abondance capable de provoquer une *expérience de disparité* chez le spectateur, c'est-à-dire qu'il pourra ressentir une intensité émotionnelle qui le transcendera.

Par exemple, Robert Bresson utilise parfois le son comme divergence de l'image : ainsi, la musique ne sera jamais utilisée à des fins dramatiques. Au contraire, elle pourra retirer une sentimentalité naissante chez le spectateur. Cependant, certains bruits pourront être par-

ticulièrement expressifs, comme le son du feuillage dans le vent qui excède celui d'un dialogue pour diminuer la force des mots et renforcer l'émotion entre les personnages (c'est *un contrepoint*). Le spectateur ne peut pas s'identifier, mais son esprit créatif va être inspiré par ce qu'il voit et ce qu'il entend ; cet espace créatif ne correspondant pas à l'espace réel avec lequel il est familiarisé, il lui sera possible d'en découvrir un autre, comme celui de la spiritualité. Le détachement de l'un permet la rencontre de l'autre.

Schrader prend comme exemple l'oeuvre du cinéaste japonais Yasujiro Ozu, et montre que son style vient de l'esthétique Zen et en particulier du concept *mu*, qui signifie « sans », c'est-à-dire qui représente la négation en soi[23]. Le réalisateur utilise le plan fixe et laisse l'action se dérouler naturellement, suivant une temporalité tangible. C'est le refus d'une expressivité visuelle et sonore qui permet à Ozu de ne pas dramatiser l'intrigue, et d'obtenir l'esthétique de la rarescence.[24] Si, tout d'un coup, alors que l'histoire se déroule le plus *platement* possible (par platement on entend sans prétention de construction psychologique) l'un des personnages exprime une forte intensité émotionnelle, c'est l'inclusion de l'esthétique de l'abondance qui provoque la disparité non seulement narrative comme spectatorielle. Il existe une rupture qui rend possible l'expérience de la transcendance. Dans les films d'Ozu, comme dans ceux de Bresson et de Dreyer, Schrader souligne que l'action ne peut envahir l'espace filmique car il doit exister une distance entre le spectateur et ce qu'il voit. C'est cette distance qui lui permet de faire l'expérience de ce style cinématographique transcendantal évoquant des « petites perceptions »[25] ou des forces, qui échappent à l'entendement immédiat et concret de l'être. Paul Schrader utilise le terme *stasis* pour désigner le moment de disparité entre l'esthétique de la rarescence et celle de l'abondance qui permet le retour à l'esthétique de la rarescence comme manifestation de la transcendance (par opposition à la résolution de cette discordance, les forces contraires vont créer une tension qui projette la transcendance à travers la dépuration esthétique et narrative).

Alors que Bazin se sert du réalisme pur pour évoquer la transcendance, Paul Schrader réclame la nécessité d'une stylisation. Pour lui, la réalité est en soi un parcours banal, qui n'est que ponctué partiellement de moments expressifs. Pour exprimer cette banalité du quotidien, il faut retirer l'excès de détails qui existe dans le monde pour montrer l'essentiel et ne pas distraire ou « perdre » le spectateur. L'esthétique de la rarescence doit préférer le silence au son ; l'action doit être réduite à un minimum de dramatisation. Il affirme :

> Le quotidien [...] refuse toute interprétation faussée de la réalité, même s'il existe des techniques « réalistes » conventionnelles comme la caractérisation, le multiple point de vue de la caméra, et sons d'ambiance. Dans le quotidien rien n'est expressif, tout est froid.[26]

DANS LA BRUME DE SERGEI LOZNITSA

Dans la brume, réalisé par Sergei Loznitsa en 2012, est un film qui propose un style spirituel original que l'on peut rapprocher en partie de celui de Robert Bresson par son austérité, en particulier en ce qui concerne la retenue émotionnelle de ses acteurs. Loznitsa continue en quelque sorte une tradition de cinéastes russes dont l'œuvre révèle un style spirituel comme celui de Tarkovski ou de Sokurov.[27]

Dans la brume est un récit historique qui se passe en Biélorussie en 1942, pendant l'occupation allemande du territoire. Inspiré du roman de Vasil Bykov publié en 1987, il raconte l'histoire d'un homme, Sushenya qui est accusé injustement d'avoir collaboré avec les allemands et trahit ses compagnons. Deux résistants sont chargés de l'exécuter mais les rôles se transforment lorsque l'un d'eux, après avoir été blessé mortellement, se retrouve à la charge de Sushenya qui, pour essayer de le sauver, le transporte sur son dos à travers la forêt. Mais au fur et à mesure que le temps passe, Sushenya se retrouve le seul survivant. N'ayant aucune chance de prouver la vérité, il est prisonnier de sa propre innocence : plutôt que de continuer à vivre dans une atmosphère de doute il décide de se tuer, aux côtés des deux partisans.

Sergei Loznitsa définit ses personnages de la façon suivante :

> Sushenya est une figure *sainte*, très conscient et responsable de ses actions ; Burov est celui qui doute. Il est conditionné par son idéologie mais peut s'ouvrir aussi à l'autre pour essayer de le comprendre ; Voitik est le vilain de l'histoire. Sans scrupule, il est prêt à trahir ses compagnons pour sauver sa peau. Pour lui, le monde ne représente qu'un moyen ou un obstacle pour atteindre ses objectifs personnels.[28]

Le réalisateur va traduire cette caractérisation à travers, non seulement l'action, mais aussi par l'utilisation du gros plan qui met en valeur les traits du visage. On peut rapprocher l'image que Loznitsa utilise du visage et de son envers — le dos — de la théorie philosophique d'Emmanuel Levinas fondée sur ce qui est *l'étique de la responsabilité de l'autre*.[29] Sa pensée s'associe parfaitement à une analyse entre théologie et cinéma ou à l'étude d'un certain cinéma spirituel, car il soutient que c'est la rencontre avec l'autre qui peut nous ouvrir à la transcendance. Pour Lévinas, c'est l'autre qui nous révèle l'infini du mystère de l'humanité ; cette idée s'apparente à la façon dont Amédée Ayfre fit l'expérience avec le pauvre personnage de *Umberto D*.

Refusant l'idée de morale associée à l'éthique, Lévinas intègre la transcendance dans l'immanence et accepte l'idée d'une découverte de l'infini dans le monde réel. L'*absolument autre* est vers ce quoi tend le désir métaphysique.[30] Lévinas parle d' « épiphanie du visage » pour définir la révélation qui s'opère à l'intérieur de l'autre — à travers le regard.[31] Lorsque le spectateur rencontre un visage en gros plan, il se passe d'abord *quelque chose* entre eux de l'ordre de l'éthique et qui est infini mais qui devient par la suite significatif. Du premier contact visuel qui touche la transcendance nait la proximité de l'autre.

Quand, par exemple, Sushenya sort du bureau nazi, il est filmé de dos et marche, courbé vers l'avant, comme s'il portait un fardeau sur ses épaules. Nous ne voyons pas son visage mais nous devinons ce qui se passe à l'intérieur de lui, à travers son pas trainant et son visage affaissé vers le sol. Lorsqu'il se retourne et regarde derrière lui, on peut dire qu'entre l'image et le spectateur s'ouvre la frontière de la transcendance : à travers l'épiphanie du visage se révèle alors le destin de Sushenya.

Sushenya se retourne et regarde le nazi qui l'a implicitement condamné à mort : *Dans la brume.*

Sushenya reprend son chemin, portant déjà sur son dos sa croix, immatérielle, qui devient corporelle, plus tard : *Dans la brume.*

Le gros plan du visage expressif au cinéma provoque souvent une identification avec le spectateur, ce que Bresson, par exemple, refusait. Pour lui, l'ambiguïté des choses du monde doit être respectée lorsqu'elles sont montrées à l'écran.

Quand Lévinas déclare qu'il existe dans l'expression originelle du visage un appel à l'interdiction du meurtre, il se réfère à une appréhension de l'autre à partir de sa genèse, antérieure à toute signification :

> Le néant de la mort n'est-il pas nudité même du visage du prochain ? « Tu ne commettras pas de meurtre » est la nudité du visage. La proximité du prochain n'est-elle pas dans ma responsabilité pour sa mort ? Alors ma relation à l'Infini s'invertit en cette responsabilité. La mort dans le visage de l'autre homme est la modalité selon laquelle l'altérité par laquelle le Même est affecté, fait éclater son identité de Même en guise de question qui se lève en lui. […] La relation avec l'Infini est la responsabilité d'un mortel pour un mortel.[32]

Cette pensée de Lévinas qui propose une relation envers l'Infini à partir de la révélation de la mort dans le visage de l'autre s'applique à la scène de meurtre que Burov devait commettre sur Sushenya. Lévinas sous-entend un regard de l'un sur l'autre, sans parler d'un tiers. Sergei Loznitsa va lui aussi refuser d'engager le spectateur dans une relation dramatique avec les personnages à partir du classique champ-contrechamp. Au contraire, il utilise le hors-champ visuel, ce qui renforce l'expression de l'invisible dont les forces sont projetées vers un espace intangible. Lorsque Burov pointe son arme directement sur le visage de Sushenya,

nous ne voyons que celui de Burov. Sushenya nous tourne le dos, seul le son de sa respiration tendue se fait entendre. Accompagnant l'image du visage de Burov dont le fusil s'oppose au souffle de Sushenya, le temps semble à la fois suspendu et infini ; la durée de cet instant – Burov ne tire pas tout de suite à bout portant – révèle une hésitation de sa part. À ce moment là, il prend peut-être conscience de la responsabilité qu'il a envers l'autre.

La respiration de Sushenya comme introspection latente : il se retrouve abandonné à son destin. Le miracle qui le sauve lui révèle qu'il est intrinsèquement condamné : *Dans la brume.*

On retrouve cette idée du temps chez Lévinas quand il déclare :

> Que le temps dure comme une modalité psychique sans *doxa*, comme une durée qui n'est à aucun titre connaissance, qui dure sans égard pour la conscience qu'on peut prendre de la durée, conscience qui elle-même dure (la conscience de la durée est la durée de la conscience), et que cette durée ait néanmoins un sens, et même un sens religieux, le sens d'une déférence à l'Infini […]. Le temps par-delà la conscience n'est-elle pas la modalité du psychisme où se défait l'événement ontologique ?[33]

Le réalisateur refuse le sentimentalisme et préfère garder hors-champ l'expression terrifiée du visage condamné. On retrouve l'idée que Robert Bresson propose dans *Notes sur le cinématographe* pour ne pas tomber dans le cliché : "Approche inhabituelle des corps. À l'affût des mouvements les plus insensibles, les plus intérieurs."[34]

L'intérieur est invisible et c'est son opacité qui engendre la possibilité d'une expression spirituelle. Sushenya est clairement un personnage christique qui se sacrifie en vue d'une rédemption. Il représente deux réalités ; d'abord il appartient à une culture qui a un sens de l'honneur et de la dignité très marqués. Il lui est impossible de vivre alors qu'on l'accuse de

quelque chose dont il n'est pas coupable, mais qu'il ne peut prouver. Il est donc condamné à vivre dans la honte d'une faute qu'il n'a pas commise. Pris entre un conflit intérieur et extérieur qui n'a pas de solution, il est aussi victime de la honte du survivant, comme l'a bien analysé Giorgio Agamben dans son essai sur Auschwitz.[35] Les allemands ont pendu ses camarades mais la perversité de l'ennemi lui a offert la vie sauve pour qu'il soit incriminé de collaboration par les partisans. Comment survivre avec cette double honte en lui ? Il ne faut pas montrer le visage de celui qui souffre car l'expression qui existe à la surface ne correspond jamais à ce qui est véritablement ressenti à l'intérieur.

Si *Dans la brume* accuse un style spirituel incontestable, c'est aussi grâce à la façon dont Loznitsa filme la nature et la relation de l'homme dans la nature. Dans sa *déclaration* sur le film, le réalisateur dit qu'il souhaitait représenter la forêt mystérieuse, comme dans les tableaux de Jacob van Ruisdael.[36] L'œuvre de ce peintre néerlandais du XVII siècle consiste surtout en la représentation de paysages orageux, renforçant ainsi le dramatisme de la réalité.

Jacob van Ruisdael, *Paysage forestier avec étang* (c. 1640). Musée des Beaux Arts de Houston.
Ce tableau de Ruisdael pourrait se rapprocher du mystère de la forêt de *Dans la brume*.

Loznitsa s'inspire de l'œuvre de Ruisdael pour montrer que le mystère de la nature accueille le mystère de l'homme. La spiritualité se dégage lorsque les protagonistes du film entrent en relation avec la force de la nature. La forêt est à la fois salvatrice et inquiétante à cause de tous les bruits qui l'envahissent mais *qu'on ne voit pas*, et qui créent une atmosphère angoissante pour le spectateur.[37] Au fur et à mesure que la nature se dévoile, les trois personnages vont aussi se révéler à travers les trois *flash back* qui ponctuent le récit. La traversée de la forêt

est d'autant plus difficile que Sushenya transporte le corps de Burov sur son dos. Loznitsa n'a pas peur d'assumer l'allégorie d'une figure christique qui porte sa croix et va jusqu'au bout de son destin.

Sushenya porte *sa croix* à travers la forêt pendant que Voitik fait le guet : *Dans la brume.*

La forêt finit par être le tombeau des trois protagonistes du film, la brume envahissant petit à petit la totalité de l'écran. De cette dernière image murée par le brouillard où apparemment il ne reste plus rien à voir, retentit soudain le son d'un coup de feu qui en rompt le silence. Le dernier plan est comme un long tableau qui nous révèle un au-delà inexprimable ; le réalisateur désincarne l'image et par cela même rend l'abstraction de sa surface encore plus spirituelle.

Loznitsa filme en temps réel la rédemption de Sushenya par le sacrifice. Il prépare son lit de mort en plan d'ensemble fixe pendant quatre minutes. Dans sa déclaration sur le film, le réalisateur écrit encore :

> Du point de vue métaphysique on peut dire que le film s'intéresse à l'idée de comme l'état de non-être afflige la société, en guerre, et que l'état de non-être afflige tout individu dans la société, qui exige le sacrifice de ses membres. Le sacrifice de l'un d'eux est montré dans le film comme étant une possibilité d'arrêter l'expansion du fléau de mutuelle destruction. Lorsque le protagoniste comprend son destin et trouve le courage de l'accepter, il acquiert une sagesse existentielle.[38]

Dans cette dernière séquence, on retrouve l'idée de temps qui permet à l'un un engagement vis-à-vis de l'autre. Avant de se suicider, Sushenya rend une dignité aux corps de Burov et

Voitik en les couchant décemment sur le sol. Ces dernières images font tout de suite penser à l'Évangile de Matthieu quand dans le sermon sur la montagne, Jésus Christ déclare :

> Vous avez entendu qu'on a dit : « aime ton prochain, et hais ton ennemi » .
> Eh bien moi, je vous dis : « aimez vos ennemis ; priez ceux qui vous pourchassent » .[39]

Nous sommes ici en pleine présence du sacré qui transcende la conscience égologique.

Si *Dans la brume* est un film qui allie l'esthétique du sacré au style spirituel, c'est aussi en grande partie dû à la façon dont Loznitsa fait ressortir le *souffle* de Sushenya. Les images respirent dans *Dans la brume*. Le souffle est un principe spirituel par excellence, qui relève de la vie, du sacré et qui est invisible. Il peut se faire entendre, et prendre une place fondamentale dans le récit. La première fois que la respiration de Sushenya est mise en valeur, c'est au moment où Burov l'oblige à creuser sa tombe dans la forêt et le met en joug pour l'assassiner. Debout dans la nuit, les deux hommes sont face à face ; l'un droit, retient son souffle ; l'autre, de dos dans l'image, vacille et respire profondément, en attente de sa sentence. La respiration de Sushenya entre en résonnance avec celle de la nature. Soudain, comme par miracle, un bruit distrait Burov qui se retourne. Une balle de l'ennemi l'atteint et c'est lui qui devient la victime.

Dans la brume de Sergei Loznitsa est un des exemples qui montre bien que le style spirituel continue présent dans le cinéma contemporain dont les références religieuses sont toujours allégoriques, jamais illustratives. Ne faisant pas partie d'un genre, le style spirituel a l'avantage de pouvoir se renouveler sans cesse, son esthétique ayant pour origine l'unique choix du réalisateur (en dialogue avec le reste de l'équipe).

Alain Bergala montre que la révélation du sacré et du spirituel diffère entre Rosselini et Kiarostami : le premier croit que le miracle est une manifestation du sacré, c'est-à-dire qu'en introduisant une fracture dans le quotidien pour le déstabiliser, il en fait un signe concret de sa manifestation. Pour Kiarostami, au contraire, la présence du sacré dans le monde est réservée :

> Le sacré s'y présente le plus souvent comme une épiphanie discrètement troublante par son imprévisibilité et la soudaine transformation qu'elle fait subir au monde, mais cet

> événement qui affecte le visible reste toujours assignable à un phénomène naturel, juste un peu trop raide ou accéléré, ou improbable dans les conditions de son surgissement.[40]

Le style spirituel a de multiples expressions au cinéma. Pour certains, le monde ne cache rien en soi, et c'est donc dans sa visibilité qu'il faut découvrir la grâce (de Dieu ?). Pour d'autres, le sacré se trouve dans la « brume de la réalité » et c'est à partir de l'invisibilité que se dévoile le style spirituel de l'œuvre.

Analyser le style spirituel d'un film soulève toujours de nombreuses interrogations car, n'étant pas déterminé, son expression est souvent changeante et abstraite. Cette indétermination produit une relation trinitaire entre image, sacré et spectateur. C'est peut-être grâce à cette rencontre que s'établit le *style spirituel du cinéma*.

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1. Jean-Paul Curnier, *Montrer l'invisible* (Toulouse : Actes Sud, 2009), 91.

2. Le choix de ces auteurs n'exclue en aucun cas d'autres propositions aussi pertinentes que celles proposées dans le texte. Notre sélection repose en grande partie sur la pertinence à chercher — et découvrir — un style spirituel à partir de réflexions qui sont aujourd'hui acceptées par les théoriciens du cinéma. Mais il est évident que pour approfondir cette étude, il faudrait inclure Henri Agel, André Bazin, Carl Dreyer et Paolo Pasolini entre bien d'autres encore, sans parler de tous les auteurs modernes et contemporains qui s'intéressent à la question comme Ingmar Bergman, Andrei Tarkovski, Eric Rohmer, Bruno Dumont, Jean-Pierre et Luc Dardenne, etc. Cela signifie que la question est bien présente aujourd'hui.

3. L'esthétique cinématographique du sacré peut se rapprocher de l'esthétique pictural du sacré à plusieurs points de vue : entre autres, le gros plan fixe d'un visage rappelle l'icône Chrétien orthodoxe bien comme la lumière intérieure qui se dégage des corps représentés et qui préfigurent la transfiguration. Cette esthétique du sacré est aujourd'hui dépassée, en particulier lorqu'il s'agit d'humanisme spirituel.

4. Malheureusement, certains réalisateurs retirent le caractère véritablement spirituel en faisant des clichés comme Terrence Malick dans *The Tree of Life - L'arbre de vie* (2011), par exemple. Il impose un *pseudo* style spirituel en utilisant de nombreux effets visuels abstraits et gratuits qui sous-entendent un esprit supérieur lié à la création. Le spectateur est éblouit par le beauté de ces effets spéciaux qui sont totalement vides de sens.

5. Jean-Michel Frodon, « Quel vent souffle où il veut ? A propos d'Un condamné à mort s'est échappé de Robert Bresson », in *Croyances et sacré au cinéma*, ed. Agnès Devictor et Kristian Feigelson (Condé sur Noireau: Cinémaction Charles Corlet, 2010), 179.

6. Nous faisons référence à une transformation qui s'opère à l'intérieur de celui ou celle qui fait l'expérience du sacré ou simplement qui vit une expérience spirituelle. L'impression de la rencontre a besoin d'aller en profondeur pour empreindre, si ce n'est l'âme, ce sera le corps psychique. Les conséquences de cette rencontre se manifestent *à posteriori*, à partir de prises de conscience qui se révèlent au spectateur lorsqu'il se retrouve dans le monde réel. Nous verrons plus loin l'exemple présenté par Amédée Ayfre après avoir vu *Umberto D.* (1952) de Vittorio De Sica.

7. Cependant, si le spirituel se révèle dans le temps, l'image n'est pas nécessairement contemplative.

8. C'est la preuve que lorsqu'il tombe dans le stéréotype, et que son expérience est immédiate, le style spirituel perd son authenticité et devient artificiel.

9. Amédé Ayfre, « Un réalisme humain », *Revue internationale de filmologie* 18-19 (1954) : 182.

10. L'*image-fait* est un concept proposé par André Bazin dans son essai sur « Le réalisme cinématographique et l'école italienne de la libération ». Il écrit à propos de *Païsa* : « Fragment de réalité brute (le plan), en lui-même multiple et équivoque, dont le « sens » se dégage seulement *a posteriori* grâce à d'autres « faits » entre lesquels l'esprit établit des rapports. » André Bazin, *qu'est-ce que le cinéma ?* (Paris : Les Éditions du Cerf, 1994), 281.

11. Ayfre, « Un réalisme humain », 177.

12. Ayfre, « Cinéma et présence personnelle » in *Cinéma univers de l'absence ? Le sort de la personne dans l'œuvre filmique* (Toulouse : PUF, 1960), 54-55.

13. Ayfre, « Cinéma et présence du prochain », *Esprit* 249 (1957): 639.

14. Ayfre, « Conversion aux images ? », in *un cinéma spiritualiste*, ed. René Prédal (Paris : Éditions du Cerf, 2004), 63.

15. Philippe Rocher, « La cinéphilie chrétienne: Amédée Ayfre (1922-1964), sulpicien et critique de cinéma », in *Cahiers d'Études du Religieux – Recherches interdisciplinaires. Monothéismes et cinéma* (2012), http://cerri.revues.org/1067# bodyftn31.

16. Le contrepoint utilisé par Robert Bresson c'est, par exemple, l'accompagnement sonore de l'image qui se propose de renforcer sa présence au lieu de l'aplatir (sous une musique sentimentale par exemple). Mais le contrepoint peut aussi être créé à partir du montage : par exemple, c'est le montage qui créera le mouvement et non la caméra.

17. Susan Sontag, « Spiritual Style in the Films of Robert Bresson », in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York : Picador, 2001), http://www.coldbacon.com/writing/sontag-bresson.html.

18. Ces ruptures sont souvent des *contrepoints*, comme par exemple lors d'un dialogue entre deux personnages dans une rue, c'est le son des voitures et le bruit urbain qui sont privilégiés au lieu des mots, pratiquement inaudibles.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Robert Bresson, *Notes sur le cinématographe* (Paris : Gallimard, 1988), 44.

22. Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (Massachussetts : Da Capo Press, 1972), 159-62.

23. Idem, 27.

24. Maria Consuelo Maisto, « Cinematic Communion ? *Babette's Feast*, Transcendental Style and Interdisciplinarity », in *Imag(in)ing Otherness: Filmic Visions of Living Together*, ed. S. Brent Plate and David Jasper (Atlanta : Björn Krondorfer, 1999), 90.

25. Gottfried Leibniz propose une théorie des « petites perceptions » pour différencier la perception consciente de la totalité, de la perception insconsciente des parties qui la compose. Cf. Leibniz, *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* (Paris : Flammarion, 1993).

26. Traduit par moi-même de l'original : « The everyday [...] rejects all the biased interpretations of reality, even if they are such conventionally acceptable "realistic" techniques as characterization, multiple point-of-view camerawork, telltale sound effects. In the everyday nothing is expressive, all is coldness. » Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film*, 39.

27. Il serait par exemple intéressant de voir pourquoi la figure de l'icône est récurrente dans l'œuvre des cinéastes russes.

28. Sergei Loznitsa, « Statement », http://inthefog-movie.com/thefilm.php?ln=en.

29. Cf. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totalité et infini. Essai sur l'extériorité* (Paris : Livre de Poche, 1987).

30. Ibid., 21.

31. Ibid., 218.

32. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Dieu, la mort et le temps* (Paris : Grasset, 1993), 132-33.

33. Ibid., 130-31.

34. Bresson, *Notes sur le cinématographe*, 46.

35. Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *Ce qui reste d'Auschwitz* (Paris : Rivages, 2003).

36. Loznitsa, « Statement ».

37. À ce propos, voir l'étude sur le concept d'atmosphère de l'auteur : *A Atmosfera no Cinema. O Caso de « A Sombra do Caçador » de Charles Laughton entre onirismo e realismo* (Lisbonne : Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2005).

38. Ibid.

39. *Mt* 5,43-44, in *La Bible* (Paris : Bayard, 2001), 1985.

40. Alain Bergala, « De l'épiphanie dans le cinéma de Kiarostami et de Rosselini » in *Croyances et sacré au cinéma*, ed. Agnès Devictor et Kristian Feigelson (Condé sur Noireau : Cinémaction Charles Corlet, 2010), 200.

HOW FILM CAN CARRY BEING: FILM MELODRAMA AND TERRENCE MALICK'S *THE TREE OF LIFE* AS A POST-RELIGIOUS FILM

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INTRODUCTION

What would a religious film look and feel like in a post-religious world?[1] This is the question guiding the argument of this paper. Such a film would need to offer its audience a religious experience not as the defining feature of this world, but as an "otherwise" possibility. Is such an experience possible in today's cinema? Can the cinematic "apparatus"[2] — the figurations, gestures, technical codes and modes of address whereby film announces itself *as* film — offer its audience an experience equivalent to the kind of experience offered by religion itself?

Adrian Martin has identified the need to address the sacred in film from a non-religious perspective in the following way: "the problem, or challenge, for non-believers [is] to understand and use a language of the sacred or the spiritual but without religion; to approach and celebrate mystery — especially poetic mystery […] but without the mystical."[3] In responding to Martin's challenge to approach the "poetic mystery" of film and to "understand and use a language of the sacred or the spiritual but without religion," my task will be to develop a critique of film using concepts drawn from German Idealist philosophy and more recent film philosophy and theory, setting out a way of thinking about religious experience in non-religious terms as it might apply to film.

More specifically, I will employ Friedrich Schleiermacher's concept of religious experience as a feeling of the infinite released from systems of belief. In Schleiermacher's terms, religious experience is an excess over belief, opening into a "beyond" without measure.[4] My paper will examine how this "beyond," as an excess over belief, has been captured and framed within the apparatus of Hollywood film melodrama as an ameliorative experience, moving from injustice towards justice, guided by divine providence. Through a reading of Mervyn LeRoy's *Blossoms in the Dust* (1941), I will show how the task of melodrama is to unblock the protagonist's blocked situation, releasing her for the moral good. Hollywood

film melodrama subjectifies audience's belief in the moral good within the mythic presentation of a world defined by ideals of historical progress linked to the power of industrialised capitalism. In such a world, elected individuals (protagonists) are provided with the means of effecting their own salvation through the auspices of a divinely decreed nation-state promising individual freedom. Their salvation becomes the salvation of all, embodied in those audiences subject to the apparatus of cinematic melodrama and its capacity to deliver an experience of the moral good through the pleasure of film. I will then show how Terrence Malick's film *The Tree of Life* (2011) counters melodramatic amelioration and the subjectification of its audience to the cinematic apparatus by breaching its own framework, opening to a beyond carried by the film itself in its own material becoming. My aim is to show that *The Tree of Life* restores faith in film to carry Being — the measureless-infinite of finite life. *The Tree of Life* breaks with the closure of melodrama and opens to the poetic mystery of film itself.

I. RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND FILM

SCHLEIERMACHER AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

In his essays entitled *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultural Despisers*, the nineteenth century German theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher provides a critique of religion that rejects the reduction of religious feeling to autonomous subjective states as defined by the Kantian system of reason.[5] Schleiermacher's essays, written early in his career under the influence of the *Frühromantik* philosophers, were well regarded in their day, and, along with other writings of the *Frühromantik* movement, call for a shift in emphasis away from inner aesthetic states and towards an experience of openness as an excess of feeling inhabiting rational systems of thought and meaning production.[6] Schleiermacher's aim is no less than a complete reformation of religion, away from dogmatic rationalism and toward singular feelings of openness to the Absolute[7] which he understands as "a sense and taste for the Infinite."[8] This sense of the infinite is "the unity of intuition and feeling which is immediate";[9] a sense of the infinite felt in the contingency of finite life.[10]

Schleiermacher's critique of religion is important for today's post-religious world because it characterises religion as an experience defined in non-religious terms. It does this by

drawing from critical philosophy responding to Kant's critique of reason. Critical responses to Kant by Schleiermacher and other post-Kantian thinkers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries should not be seen as outdated historical arguments; rather, they begin the project of critical modernism that still claims our thinking today, posing fundamental questions about subjectivity and the transcendence of reason — questions we have yet to surpass. The guiding thread of this paper is as follows: how might Schleiermacher's concept of religious experience as an excess of feeling inhabiting systems of reason be applied to post-religious film; that is, how might this concept of excess — an excess that threatens to destroy systems of belief — be applied to film with a religious "structure of feeling"[11] offered to its audience in a post-religious world.

Raymond Williams defines a structure of feeling as "elements of impulse, restraint and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity."[12] A structure of feeling "cannot without loss be reduced to belief-systems, institutions, or explicit general relationships, though it may include all these as lived and experienced."[13] Rather, a structure of feeling exceeds belief-systems in the "generative immediacy"[14] of finite situations, opening into absolute possibility, or possibility without measure.[15] Evidence of a structure of feeling can be found in "semantic figures — which in art and literature, are often the very first indication that such a new structure is forming".[16] In their generative immediacy, film texts are capable of offering a newly forming structure of feeling irreducible to the audience's subjectified belief in the systems of meaning that allow them to make sense of their already formed world. By the term "structure of feeling," Williams does not mean the feeling already instituted and normalised by the apparatuses of subjectification, but the feeling experienced in art and literature as the prefiguring of otherness; as the possibility of being beyond current modes of subjectification.

I will be concerned with the structure of feeling produced as an excess in the system of Hollywood film, which I will define in terms of melodrama: a systematic formalisation of feeling in which "fallen" human being is restored to the wholeness of feeling and meaning through an ameliorative process of retributive justice.[17] Melodrama captures the excess of feeling that inhabits the systems of meaning of everyday life and guides it back into the cinematic apparatus as that which needs to be overcome and transformed in the amelioration of human existence. My aim is to show how a post-religious film, in particular Terrence Ma-

lick's *The Tree of Life*, refuses the ameliorative solution to the reparation of fallen human existence offered by film melodrama, thereby opening up an "otherwise" possibility — a possibility that equates with Schleiermacher's idea of religious experience as openness to the Absolute — in the "event" of the film itself.

In the first and second speeches of *On Religion*, Schleiermacher sets out the conditions under which religious experience can be postulated in critique. He defines religion as an *activity*; as something that happens in a primary sense of forces cancelling each other out: "religion, then, is a mixture of elements that oppose and neutralise each other."[18] Religious experience is, like the experience of art, a stasis of contradictory forces — the cosmic forces of expansion and contraction — held together in the fact that singular things simply *are*. The critical issue for Schleiermacher is how singular things *can be* while still being part of the forces of expansion and contraction at the same time, as "the two original tendencies of spiritual nature."[19] Like Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*[20] published around the same time, Schleiermacher's critique of religion attempts to think its object (religious experience) from primary activity, as the grounding and ungrounding of the forces of nature.

The activity that Schleiermacher ascribes to religious experience can be understood as pre-subjective and concerned with Being — the *possibility* that something can be. Possibility implies "being possible" irreducible to what the thing is. If things were nothing more than the being they already are, then they could not be otherwise, and hence all would be the same. To account for diverse modes of being, there must be Being irreducible to the being that things are. Being defines the being of things in their possibility as such. In his "Letter on 'Humanism,'" Martin Heidegger defines this kind of possibility as enabling possibility, to distinguish it from the possibility of calculative rationality.[21] Otherness does not transcend beings, but is enabled in the "event of Being" itself. I will argue that film *enables* possibility in its poetic-technical turning-unfolding – as a carrying of the event of Being. From this critical, post-religious perspective, the otherness inhabiting film poses questions of onto-theology: Being as equivalent to God. Otherness is not located in a transcendent or divine order, but in the enabling-being of the film itself; in its "generative immediacy"[22] as a meaningful event. Film opens itself to Being in the otherness that it makes possible as a finite event experienced by the viewer herself. A religious experience in this post-religious sense is an experience of Being as otherness felt in the event of film — in its poetic unfolding *as film*.

For Schleiermacher, religious experience is the feeling of openness to the Absolute as an experience of the Whole of what is. This sense of wholeness is not something that is simply there for anyone to experience; rather, it must be gained from contradictory "impulses" in humans, to become either self-enclosed in subjective states or given over to pious feelings of the Infinite.[23] Schleiermacher suggests that this experience of wholeness can only come to those able to hold onto the opposing impulses, as a contradictory sense of the infinite in the finite "work[ing] in them as a creative power."[24] This contradictory sense of the whole as infinite/finite impulse opens the experience to "the eternal and Holy Being that lives beyond the world."[25] This "beyond" is not a transcendent or divine order in another world removed from the contingency of human existence, but a virtual space of otherness immanent to the historical time and place of singular human existence in *this* world. Someone inhabiting such an experience of the beyond feels a sense of all possibilities held for a moment in the opening event, where "all combinations [of being] are actually present in humanity."[26] In a move that prefigures Heidegger's concept of *Ereignis*,[27] Schleiermacher's proposal of religious feeling as an activity inhabiting systems of reason opens critique to the possibility of an otherwise movement affirming itself within the closure of the subject in technical formats and aesthetic states. This otherwise movement in the post-religious film is the experience of openness into absolute possibility *enacted by the film itself*. The film turns *against itself* in opening otherwise. My aim in what follows is to pursue this line of thought in terms of the poetic-technical event of film.

BAZIN AND CINEMATIC BELIEF

Recently, film theorists have turned to the writings of André Bazin to address the issue of belief in cinema, in both a theological and ontological sense.[28] Bazin's arguments are especially interesting in this regard because they promise a revelatory cinema — a cinema that reveals the beyond of absolute possibility — carried by the technology of film itself. Rather than identifying religious experience in terms of the content of film (its stories and characters), Bazin proposes an "ontology" of the film image — its mode of being — based on an underlying photographic realism:

> The photographic image is the object itself, freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discoloured, no matter how lacking in

> documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is a reproduction; it *is* the model.[29]

The photographic image is not a degraded form of reality, but an event of being-with its object. The technology of photographic reproduction ("the very process of its becoming") means that the image produced shares the same being as that of its object ("it *is* the model"). From this ontological realist position, Bazin argues that the photographic image becomes an automaton independent of human intervention:

> Originality in photography as distinct from originality in painting lies in the essentially objective character of photography. […] For the first time, between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent. For the first time an image of the world is formed automatically.[30]

Because of its status as an automaton (an "automatic" production), the photographic-cinematic image reveals the world "objectively," as a revelation of the mystery of Being.

We can see how Bazin employs ontological realism as a revelation of the mystery of Being by turning to one of his film reviews. In his review of Augusto Geninas's *Heaven Over the Marshes* (*Cielo sulla palude*, 1949),[31] Bazin writes that the film presents a "truly religious experience," not as hagiography or special effects, but through the realism of the images themselves: their fidelity to life. In the presentation of its subject matter — the rape and murder of a peasant girl later canonised for her forgiveness of the crime — the film suggests the presence of divine grace "through some ambiguous signs that can all be explained in quite natural terms." The film presents "an ambiguous manifestation of a spiritual reality that is impossible to prove," achieved through "the dictates of realism." Through its realist images, the film expresses divine grace; that is, the film *becomes* the divine reality made apparent in realist images appearing on the screen.

This type of argument has been subject to much criticism for its assumption of an unmediated relation between the photographic-cinematic image and the object represented by it (the objectivist fallacy). It is for this reason that Bazin's work has fallen out of favour over the past few decades. However, in seeking a transcendent-realist theory of film, scholars have recently turned to Bazin but with a new inflection. For instance, Robert Sinnerbrink

proposes that we understand Bazin's ontological realism in terms of "cinematic belief" or "the conviction that [the film image] bears the trace of a former presence."[32] Sinnerbrink suggests that there is a certain psychological dimension to Bazin's argument, in effect shifting ground from an ontology of the photographic-cinematic image to an aesthetics of belief in the reality of "unique cinematic worlds."[33] These worlds are "liberated from the flow of time,"[34] enabling us to overcome our "fear of death"[35] and "reveal reality anew."[36] Cinematic belief revives "that sensuous love of the world, a belief in its reality, that we have forgotten or lost."[37]

But has belief in the reality of unique cinematic worlds really been lost? Is such belief not simply the way audiences already relate to the cinema? Through its phantasmic-plastic power to present fictional worlds steeped in realist myths, cinema has always presented unique cinematic worlds soliciting audience belief. Film, especially Hollywood feature film, already reproduces "reality anew" in scenarios that invite the audience to overcome the fear of death through stories of struggle against adversity. Film already renews a quasi-religious "sensuous love of the world" in the mythic enactment of human life as meaningfully idealised. Thus, audiences have already come to believe in a cinematic realism that presents a world "liberated from the flow of time," as a way of being intimately connected with their lives. Cinematic belief in the reality of this world has not been "forgotten or lost," as Sinnerbrink suggests, but is constantly renewed in the mythic enactment of the triumph of the human spirit over adversity, self-doubt, and the forces of otherness presented through the ameliorative film melodrama ruling popular cinema and culture over the last century.[38]

A specifically renewed belief in the world through an experience of absolute openness in film cannot be a belief in the reality of unique cinema worlds, as these worlds are already subject to quasi-religious belief in cinematic realism expressed in the structure of feeling enclosed by melodrama. So what would such a belief be? Recalling Schleiermacher's sense of an immanent beyond in the contingency of finite life, I argue that such a belief would need to be a belief in the "beyond" of cinema worlds currently produced. This is not a belief in a cinematic beyond (a world constituted by yet more cinema), but a belief in the possibility of a "beyond cinema" — a beyond in the possibility of a *non-cinema* real. Such a belief would first require *faith* that another world could be; faith in the "nothing" of the cinematic world itself.

FAITH IN NOTHING

In his book *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology*, Simon Critchley discusses Pauline theology in terms of faith in "nothing." He writes:

> Paul is preaching a *meontology*, an account of things that are not. Furthermore, his is a double meontology: on the one hand, the form of this world is passing away or falling away and becoming nothing. This is the nihilism of world politics. But, on the other hand, what will take the place of the "god of this world" is at present nothing. It is simply the anguished vigilance of the Messianic standpoint defined by its relation to the futurity of *parousia* [the imminent Second Coming as presence of God]. […] Paul is announcing something that […] breaks with the order of being in the name of an event which is *not*. The event is something indiscernible in the situation.[39]

Faith is faith in the possibility of otherness as the "not" of this current world that "breaks with the order of being." Faith in nothing is a refusal to accept belief in the current system of being in order to prepare the way for the being to come. From this Pauline perspective, a revelatory cinema would not propose an alternative world of faith in new cinematic worlds where faith might be fully expressed, as proposed by the recent turn to Bazinian ontological realism, but faith in the nothing that lies beyond the cinematic world as it currently is. To do this, film must dismantle current belief in the cinematic world by standing against it. Film must stand *against itself* and open otherwise. Faith is faith in the nothing opening in this capacity of film to stand against itself, enabling a not-yet-discernable world to begin to appear. To demonstrate this point and counter the recent turn to Bazin's photographic ontological realism, I will draw on Roland Barthes's discussion of photographs in *Camera Lucida*, as well as Jacques Derrida's analysis of the aporetic logic of the event of bearing witness in *Sovereignties in Question*.

In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes postulates that the photographic image testifies to the fact that "*the thing has been there.*"[40] The viewer's belief in the reality of the event depicted in the photograph is based not on any inherent capacity of the technology to make the event real, as is the case in Bazin's ontological realism, but on an ontological gap between the present and the past in which the viewer experiences the impossibility of their reparation. The experience of viewing photographs is one of disjunctive-chiasmic time in which the presence of the past is

felt as something irretrievably lost, yet *there* nevertheless. In looking at the photograph, I bear witness to the event in the "aoristic" sense of reliving the past as if for the first time.[41] For instance, Barthes discusses his viewing of a particular photograph of a street scene in Nicaragua during the revolution in the late 1970s which shows a dead body covered in a blood splattered sheet:

> here on a torn-up pavement, a child's corpse under a white sheet; parents and friends standing around it, desolate: a banal enough scene, unfortunately, but I noted certain interferences: the corpse's one bare foot, the sheet carried by the weeping mother (why this sheet?), a woman in the background, probably a friend, holding a handkerchief to her nose.[42]

Barthes notes "certain interferences" that interrupt the generic conventions of street scenes, including an oddly placed boot poking out under the sheet covering the child's body. These singular photographic gestures are not part of the symbolic register of the image — its capacity to convey the "ideal" of the revolution or the brutality of the regime — but the irruption of chance in the expectations of my viewing of the photograph. My viewing is interrupted by a *punctum* effect that stops me from reading the image in terms of generic conventions (the *studium*), sending it otherwise.[43] These interruptive gestures *resist* generic convention in affirming that this actually happened. They affirm that "this life was" by plunging me into a meaningless abyss, where I relive the feeling of death in all its singularity through the mark of the gesture itself — its specific resistance to generic convention.

Barthes's reading of the *punctum* effect can be understood as a *bearing witness* to the death after the event, as if the viewer were reliving the event for the first time. In Derrida's terms, this "as if" is a carrying of the "truth" of the event: its singular happening as a truth that has to be believed.[44] If life is to go on, then one simply has to believe, despite the impossibility of the restoration of the event to full presence. Derrida calls this "having to believe" a "performative-pragmatic, [which] is as determining as 'I believe'."[45] In following this line of thinking, cinematic belief must be grounded in an experience of nothingness as "having to believe." This having-to-believe is based on a pragmatic imperative felt in the chiasm between past and present lives, as a *fall* into otherness triggered by the event of the film itself. From this fallen state, the viewer cannot speculate about the possibility of a "beyond" (she

cannot size it up, propose alternatives, come to believe in it) since there is insufficient stability of ground from which it could be projected. Rather the viewer simply has to believe, if life is to go on. Derrida calls this pragmatic imperative "an appeal to an act of faith."[46] Faith comes before belief as its condition of possibility. As Critchley argues in relation to religious belief, "What is true, then, is an experience of faith, and this is true for agnostics and atheists as it is for theists. Those who cannot believe still require religious truth and the framework of ritual in which they can believe."[47] In a post-religious world, we can do without belief, but we cannot do without faith without falling into the nothing of nihilistic meaninglessness.

Following this line of thinking, the task of a revelatory cinema is not to confirm belief, but to appeal to an act of faith from its audiences. This act of faith is faith in the "otherness" catalysed through a collapse (fall) in the continuum of the cinematic world; a collapse into the nothingness of absolute possibility as the mystery of Being. The onto-theological experience of otherness, as indicated in Schleiermacher's essays in *On Religion*, is not to be found in belief in the capacity of film to carry the ultimate meaning of the world, but in a crisis of belief in this world through the shattering "interference" (*punctum*) of a chance event in the generic order of things, triggering a momentary openness into absolute otherness. This openness is the "nothingness" or the non-being at the heart of being; the absolute possibility of being otherwise experienced in the finitude of life as it confronts its limit in death. A cinematic faith in nothingness thus requires that film resist its own drive towards the cinematic fulfilment of a meaningful world. It must refuse belief in this world in order to open itself otherwise, thereby restoring faith in otherness as the very condition of life as freely opened possibility.

II. FATE AND MELODRAMA

In the second part of this paper, I will advance the proposition that Terrence Malick's film *The Tree of Life* is a post-religious film that opens itself to absolute otherness through a collapse in its own formal structure. This collapse, brought on by specific techniques and cinematic gestures, carries the audience into an abyssal beyond which is also the film's very unfolding as film. The film's own "being" — its mode of technical presence — is a "standing against" conventional film structure, which I will define in terms of melodrama. By standing

against conventional melodrama, the film challenges the audience's belief in the possibility of an ameliorative solution to the fall of human being into injustice and distance from God (idealised Being), posing onto-theological questions that call us forth and challenge us "to be" through the event of the film itself.

In order to demonstrate this otherwise mode of being enacted by *The Tree of Life*, I will compare it with Mervyn LeRoy's 1941 film *Blossoms in the Dust*. Despite differences in theme, period, style and narrative structure, there are compelling reasons to compare the two films. Both films are set in provincial Texas towns, and feature a fall of family fortune where the main male characters, both entrepreneurial inventors and believers in the American Way, lose their standing in the community, ceding power and authority to female principles and ideals. Most importantly, both films feature the accidental death of a son, triggering a cathartic "death event" felt through the entirety of each film. Indeed it is difficult not to conclude that Malick drew from LeRoy's film in composing his own epic version of life in provincial mid-twentieth century Texas. My aim is to show how the presenting of human being as fated for meaningful life in film melodrama, as exemplified in *Blossoms in the Dust*, is resisted by Malick's film — a resistance that carries its audience into a non-cinematic beyond equivalent Schleiermacher's definition of religious experience.

THE BLOCKED SITUATION

Melodrama underlies most Hollywood films. It offers a mode of experience to its audiences in which human being is fated for a meaningful place in a universe from which God has withdrawn. Melodrama attempts to make sense of this universe by substituting its own version of fate as a kind of divine providence acting in all things, leading humans towards salvation from their fallen condition in the contingency of life beset by chance and the will to power that governs both nature and the social order. Melodrama reshapes these indifferent and hostile forces so that they appear to make sense to the audience as an amelioration of human being, moving from injustice to justice in a world where a just moral order is gradually discerned. As Ben Singer argues: "melodrama expressed the anxiety of moral disarray and then ameliorated it through utopian moral clarity."[48] Melodrama offers its audience an amelioration of human existence thrown into indifference, into a higher moral good as a substitute for belief in religious solutions to human injustice. Melodrama is thus deeply concerned with the fate of human existence withdrawn from God and subject to the law of

chance: "melodrama has persisted as a dramatic mode because, in a fundamental sense, it succeeds in expressing 'the truth of life,' capturing a crucial existential truth, an aspect of life that affects everyone — namely that, ultimately, we are all governed by random forces of happenstance. We are all flotsam and jetsam adrift in the 'tides of chance.'"[49] If there is a divine providence at work in melodrama, it is one put there by the mechanics of plot and filmic technique to account for and overcome the rule of chance in human existence.

In the nineteenth century stage melodrama from which Hollywood film melodrama takes its cue, the fate of human being is presented in quasi-religious terms. Jeffrey Mason writes:

> the absolute imperative of melodrama is the restoration of the moral, social, and domestic order — and consequently, the reassurance of the audience — by subjecting characters to a high degree of risk and uncertainty and then lifting them out of danger. [...] [T]he melodramatic imperative, operating under the guiding hand of divine providence and moving the action toward reconciliation, offers a guarantee that reduces the hero's achievement. By its very nature and method, melodrama must satisfy its audience's expectations rather than present a confrontation between belief and value.[50]

Stage melodrama restores the audience's belief in a moral order threatened by nihilism and indifference by presenting the "guiding hand of divine providence" as part of the machinery of plot. The audience is offered a "reconciliation" of the opposing forces of good and evil, where victims of injustice are restored to a just world. In a similar vein, Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs argue that stage melodrama is "motivated by a notion of divine order."[51] Here Brewster and Jacobs are referring to the unlikely plot coincidences of stage melodrama in which individuals are either blighted by misfortune or blessed with luck. Lacking a complex middle ground, stage melodrama swings between good and evil potentials, enacting a presentation of fate through the transformation of chance into eschatology where the human is restored to justice and the moral good. The nihilistic meaninglessness of the world and the subjectification of human being to the indifference of nature is ameliorated through the manifestation of what Peter Brooks has termed the "moral occult," or "the domain of operative spiritual values which is both indicated within and masked by the surface reality [...] as the repository of the fragmentary and desacralized remnants of sacred myth."[52] Melodrama

transforms chance into a quasi-religious belief system based on what remains of the sacred still operating at an underground level in the post-religious world of western human existence.

How are these remnants of the sacred carried into film melodrama? Brewster and Jacobs note that "what survives from popular nineteenth century theatre in the 1910s feature [film] is "a set of staging practices linked with situational dramaturgy."[53] The "situation" in stage melodrama is the presentation of "an unstable constellation of forces precariously held in check but nonetheless liable to break out into action."[54] This "static state of affairs"[55] or tableau configuration compressed and made manifest the contradictions and tensions requiring resolution and action so that "the linear progress of the narrative is arrested or blocked."[56] The configuration of gestures presented in the tableau situation interrupted narrative flow and pointed to what was to come. They "anticipate or sum up a series of cause and effect relationships"[57] waiting to be released. The blocking action of the tableau brings the plot into a temporary stasis, prefiguring the release of the blocked forces into a resolution in the restoration of justice at the end of the play. For the audience familiar with the conventions of stage melodrama, the blockage indicates an injustice demanding to be put right. The logic of melodrama is that the righting of injustice does not come from heroic action, but from the machinations of the melodramatic plot. As Mason argues, melodrama "reduces the hero's achievement."[58] Although present in melodrama, heroic action is not an expression of individual free will, but of divine providence enacted in the resolution of contradictory forces in the blocked situation. Thus to understand how the sacred is carried into film melodrama, we need to look at how the blocked situation of stage melodrama is transformed into film, from a unity of action and gesture presented on the stage to an audiovisual becoming spread throughout the film.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE IN *BLOSSOMS IN THE DUST*

In this section I will show how classical Hollywood cinema engages its audience through the unblocking of a blocked situation. My aim here is to describe the ameliorative movement of melodrama as one based on the elision of time that secures the revelations of plot in a transcendent moral order. By showing how this works in Mervyn LeRoy's *Blossoms in the Dust* (1941), I also describe the limits of melodrama and what it does not allow to be presented.

Mervyn LeRoy's melodrama *Blossoms in the Dust* is set in a provincial town in Texas in the early twentieth century. It concerns the campaign by Edna Gladney, a real historical person (played by Greer Garson), to have Texas state legislation changed so that children without parents will no longer be designated as illegitimate. The film depicts Edna's early life as a young woman from a wealthy Wisconsin farming family swept off her feet by a handsome Texan man, Sam Gladney (Walter Pidgeon), who takes her back to Texas where they marry and begin life together, raising a young son and furthering the family's fortune in the flour milling business.

Blossoms in the Dust begins with two deaths, both of which prefigure the rest of the film. The first death occurs with the suicide of Edna's step sister Charlotte (Edna's double), whose plans to marry into a wealthy family are foiled when her fiancé's mother refuses to accept her because she is discovered to be illegitimate when signing marriage documents. Stricken with shame Charlotte locks herself in her room and shoots herself dead. The second death occurs a little further into the film. Edna and Sam are happily married with their five year old son, Sammy, living in a luxurious mansion in Sherman, Texas. On Christmas eve, Edna sends Sammy out to play much against his wishes, but soon after, a servant returns with the news that the boy has drowned, presumably in a nearby lake where he had been playing. Each death is sudden and dramatic, cutting short young lives and suggesting a malevolent force working to undermine the family's good fortune. But instead of dwelling on the deaths and their consequences, the film rushes straight past them as if they had hardly happened. For instance, immediately after the scene in which Edna cradles Sammy's lifeless body in her arms, the film shifts abruptly to a sumptuous party where we see Edna, clothed in a fine dress and jewels, attending to her role as hostess to the wealthy citizens of Sherman. Although we are told that some years have passed, Edna is presented as if she lacks appropriate concern over her son's death, suggesting that she has not grieved properly and is in serious denial.

Through this elision of time, the film provides no opportunity for the audience to see how Edna might have dealt with her grief.[59] It is as if Edna had blocked her grief by immediately plunging into a life of excess and self-indulgence. In this way, the film presents us with a blocked situation requiring Edna to be released so that she can follow the path set for her, which, as we soon find out, is to establish day-care homes for the children of working mothers and eventually to campaign for change in state legislation to take away the stigma of ille-

gitimacy on abandoned children. The release occurs just as precipitously as Charlotte's and Sammy's deaths, when Edna is confronted with her denial by the family doctor also attending the party, and she collapses into her husband's arms. This scene dissolves into the next scene where we now see Sam and Edna no longer living in the luxurious mansion we saw previously, but happily inhabiting a neat suburban house full of children. Edna's self-indulgent, childless life has been magically transformed into a life of sober industry founded on the care for children. These major reversals in Edna's life happen within the space of a few scenes and, in the instance just described, in a single dissolve. The film rushes through events, eliding story world elements that would otherwise provide the audience with a sufficient explanation of them. What are we to make of this?

The task of the melodrama here is not to provide immediate answers to the calamities that have befallen the family, but to make the audience bear witness to them. By bearing witness to them, the audience carries the truth of their injustice as part of the restitution of a just moral order. The truth of these calamities cannot be found in causal explanations at the level of individual lives, but in the way they contribute to what the film is pointing towards in a more general sense — the moral good of the world. Although Charlotte's and Sammy's deaths appear to be blighted events — the consequence of malevolent forces and indifferent chance — they nevertheless prepare the way for a bringing-forth of the Good. This Good will gradually become apparent as the action progresses and Edna is released from her blocked state in order to follow the destiny that the film is preparing for her.[60]

The film is asking its audience to accept that the deaths are not what they first seem (a misfortune blighting the family), but part of a divine providence ordering the world according to the principles of justice in which everyone will eventually receive their fair share (exemplified by the legislative righting of the wrong of categorising abandoned children in law as illegitimate "foundlings"). The deaths are thus sacrifices in the name of a providential order fated in the melodrama itself. The audience's belief in a just world is affirmed through faith in the machinery of melodrama — its ellipses, compressions and coincidences of plot — to deliver such a world in the amelioration of human existence from injustice to justice revealed in the unfolding of the film. After further sacrifice by Edna (she gives up her adopted son to a worthy couple), the film ends on an elevated note with patriotic music playing over the end titles, leaving the audience in no doubt about who the guarantor of this just world really is.

The audience is *called* into the "structure of feeling" of melodrama through an interpellation whereby they recognise their own fate as that of the characters in the film. The elision of time and the coincidences of plot keep the audience focused on the release of the protagonist from the blockage of forces that prevent her from attaining her assigned goal. Her release is also the release of the audience, who no longer feel themselves trapped in a world ruled by chance and indifference, but freed for the coming of the Good. They bear witness to the fate of the protagonist, carrying its liberating truth with them. However, the melodramatic structure also has its own form of blockage. By calling the audience into its structure, melodrama blocks the possibility that the events might lead otherwise. This is not an otherwise that is already known, but the "not" that makes this film possible in its very self-affirmation. This "not" is what the film excludes in its faithful rendering of the American Way as a progression towards the Good. It is not another way that the film could have been made (for instance by thinking of different plot machinations to gain different outcomes), but the other of melodrama itself — a counter-melodrama that this film can never be. The revelations of melodrama always point to a "beyond" fully anticipated by the machinations of plot and narrative drive; a beyond already prepared for at every step of the way by the reversals of ill-fortune into good fortune, and through coincidences that circle the story back onto itself. But it also reveals another beyond — the "other beginning" in the excluded possibilities not shown.[61] This beyond cannot be seen by seeing with the ameliorating movement, but by seeing it otherwise, in the other beginning foreclosed by the film's own closure in the moral Good.

Audience belief in the cinematic world with its affirmation of the American Way is locked in place through faith in the machinery of melodrama to deliver the feeling of release and liberation required to sustain such belief as a quasi-religious sense of a divine providence rescuing human being from chance and the meaninglessness of life. To counter this locked-in "structure of feeling" and take the "other beginning" prepared by, but not offered by film melodrama, film would need to call its audience in a different way. Film would need to resist the appeal to a transcendent order delivered by the machinery of plot, thereby refusing the solution to the ills and misfortunes of the world through a divinely ordered providence. What would such a film be required to do? It would need to render the fate of the audience unrecognisable in the events presented by the film, thereby defying the divine providence offered by film melodrama, and opening into the "otherness" of the film calling

against itself. To do this would be to invoke a "beyond" unbound from the structure of feeling of the cinematic real — a beyond of a non-cinema real. In the rest of this paper I will look at Terrence Malick's film *The Tree of Life* as offering its audience an experience of beyond cinema, in the opening of the film frame against itself.

BEYOND CINEMA: *THE TREE OF LIFE*

Terrence Malick's film *The Tree of Life* poses a series of questions to its audience through character voice-overs that concern the meaning of human life made meaningless by the indifferent force of nature that strikes individuals and families with calamities and death. Like *Blossoms in the Dust*, *The Tree of Life* presents human being as challenged to renew faith in something beyond when faced with calamitous events. These voice-overs speak in a language that is both spiritual and at times specifically Christian. It is tempting to read the film in the terms set by these voice-overs, as if they held the key to the ultimate meaning of the film. However, there is a danger in taking this approach, as it reduces the film to one of its elements, rather than in terms of the film as a whole. Voice-overs and their accompanying images are part of this whole, but they do not explain it. To reduce *The Tree of Life* to a film about religion based on its invocation of religious terms and images is to overlook the presentation of the film as such. It risks a reading that too readily affirms the symbolic language of the film at the expense of its self-presentation: its appearing *as* film, as distinct from what is said by the characters about the world that appears in it. In *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, Walter Benjamin proposes a way of reading literary and cultural texts in terms of how they allegorize their symbolic content. Allegorical readings show how cultural texts always run up against their own limits in the failure to deliver the promised symbolic content.[62] They invoke the destructive principle that is itself the very life of finite human existence as the deathly nothingness of possibility — of a beyond without measure. By reading *The Tree of Life* in terms of its allegorizing of symbolic content, I will show how the film both offers and withdraws its promise of transcendent meaning. In its very self-presentation, the film deconstructs its symbolic "message," opening to the beyond of the non-cinematic real.

As I have indicated at the beginning of this paper, a post-religious film is a film that employs religious content within a framework of belief in which human being is no longer grounded in a religious metaphysics. A religious film in a post-religious world accounts for religion not as the truth of this world, but as one of the ways in which human being is able to

have a world. *The Tree of Life* presents a certain vision of human being as having a world through religious belief, but places this "having" within an evolutionary scheme in which the religious elements are themselves the result of an evolved way of being. Consequently, the religious content of the film can only provide partial answers to the question of being — what does it *mean* to have being? — that the film poses to its characters and to its audience. In posing this question of being in religious terms, the film is not necessarily affirming a Christian message, but enacting its own historical finitude in order to re-affirm the mystery of Being as the unattainable "beyond."

The film opens with a quote from the Book of Job: 38:4,7: "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the Earth? When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy." The film thus begins with a question: a question concerning the whereabouts of an unnamed "you" — someone missing from the primary event of the creation of the earth filled with divine grace. In the Book of Job this "you" is Job, who is challenged by God to retain faith despite the calamities visited upon him. But the "you" is also addressed to whomever hears it — the audience of the film. The voice interpellates audience members into the film, challenging them to account for their absence from God's grace and their own fall into a meaningless world beset by calamities. As audience members, we are challenged to restore our faith in a world deprived of divine grace.

Precisely what is it that Job is asked to do? This is what Slajov Žižek has to say about Job's biblical task: "After Job is hit by calamities, his theological friends come, offering interpretations which render these calamities meaningful. The greatness of Job is not so much to protest his innocence as to insist on the meaninglessness of his calamities."[63] Job's task is not to see signs of a divine plan in the calamities that beset him, but to simply bear up to them, thereby affirming the absence of a divine order watching over him. The lesson of Job is that God resides not in a transcendent order but in the very being of things, in their possibilities as chance events. As Žižek goes on to say:

> the legacy of Job prevents us from taking refuge in the standard transcendent figure of God as a secret Master who knows the meaning of what appears to us as meaningless catastrophe, the God who sees the entire picture in which what we perceive as a stain contributes to global harmony.[64]

The "greatness" of Job is to refuse doctrinal solutions to the evils of this world, while still retaining faith in God. Faith in God is faith in the "otherness" of this world not as a transcendent order, but in the very possibility of a "beyond" through the strike of chance that brings bad fortune and calamitous death, and challenges our belief in this world as divinely ordered. In Simon Critchley's terms, faith is faith in the nothing of this world, a nothing that makes otherness possible. This faith in the nothing as faith in the something beyond lies at the heart of Malick's film *The Tree of Life*.

Within a few minutes of the film's beginning, we are presented with a death. A telegram is delivered to the front door of a neat suburban home in Waco, Texas. It is not long before we learn that the telegram contains terrible news — a family member has been killed. The woman who answers the door (Mrs. O'Brien, the mother of the dead son, played by Jessica Chastain) slowly reads the telegram, a look of despair gradually appearing on her face as the news sinks in. Suddenly she is shifted to one side through two successive jump cuts, accompanied by a twisting and foreshortening of the camera as she moves around the room in despair. She then sinks to the floor with an anguished sob and just as quickly, rises again. This "genuflection" continues the unsettling sequence of movements already enacted in the scene, as if she were being thrown around by an invisible force.[65] What are we to make of these gestures?

In their analysis of Jean-Luc Godard's *Hélas pour moi* (*Woe is Me*, 1993), Bersani and Dutoit describe a moment in the film where "a non-transitional displacement occurs entirely within the framed scene."[66] In the scene in question, a female figure is thrown slightly to one side while retaining the same position:

> she is twice thrown a few inches to the left where she has been sitting. [...] [S]he does not move from one position to another; rather, she simultaneously disappears and reoccurs to the side of herself. [...] [I]t might seem that some positional "mistake" were being corrected by an agent unconstrained by the distance between points. Being is transferred without being moved.[67]

In Godard's film, the female figure is possessed by God, who comes to her in the form of her absent husband. In this visitation, the film "carries" Being — the measureless infinite of finite life — in the disjunctive jump of the female figure so that she appears both "here" and

"there" at the same time. This carrying of Being is effected through a violent deframing gesture, exposing a crack within the framing of the film that opens "otherwise." In *The Tree of Life*, a similar displacement occurs, as the female figure is taken out of herself while remaining where she is within the film's frame.[68] Death comes to her as a crack in the structure of the film so that she seems to be possessed by a force that moves her around the room. But we also see something else. Although falling almost to her knees, the female figure immediately rises again as if she were willing herself to stand against the momentum of the force pulling her down. All this happens in the blink of an eye, but it is telling.

Just what she is resisting becomes apparent in the following scene, which shifts to her husband (Brad Pitt) speaking on the telephone at an airport terminal. As the husband hears the news of the death of his son over the telephone, he falls to the tarmac as if in prayer (he too appears to be hit by jump cuts, but this time accompanied by a doom-laden tolling bell). Later, we see him at prayer again, this time alone in the family home, with his wife looking on from an adjacent room. The respective falls of the husband and wife — both as if possessed by an invisible force — suggest different "ways of being" in relation to the death of the son. While the husband appears to have accepted the son's death as part of a divine order, the wife refuses and looks away. This glancing away, repeated elsewhere in the film, is a "looking otherwise": a way of not being with the "will" that fates human being to a divine order in death.[69] The wife is looking away from what she is already fated to be: subject to the "will to power" enacted in the nuclear family, obeying the patriarchal authority of the husband and the obligation to God defined by a Protestant work ethic, all linked to the industrial-economic-nation nexus. In looking away, the mother is resisting her own "being" as part of the American Way. What is it that she seeks?

What she seeks can be found in the way women are positioned in the film's story world. The fragmentary narrative presents the life of a nuclear family in mid-twentieth century small town America, attempting to meet the demands placed on them by the industrialised capitalist system and its underlying ethos of work, progress, and success through male entrepreneurialism, embodied in the figure of the father. We see the father disciplining his sons into the "way of being" of competitive capitalism (a *Bildung*, which will be addressed shortly), requiring individual toughness and an ability to take knocks. However, this masculine toughness fails to bring the hoped for success and the father loses his job and patent applications for his inventions are rejected.[70] His eldest son Jack eventually becomes a success-

ful architect, but has lost faith in the American Way. The film suggests that the evolution of human being through a masculine will to power has run its course, opening up the possibility of another beginning led by the feminine principle. This other beginning, blocked by the masculine will to power, now begins to open, as we see images of Jack being led through a mysterious gateway by a female muse that could be his wife or any one of a number of women whose faces we have glimpsed in the film.

It could be argued that the film is the presentation of Jack's childhood memories in flashback. However, this would be to give too much authority to Jack's version of events and to privilege the ontological status of Jack at the expense of the film as a whole. Rather, Jack's "flashbacks" are better understood as moments in the film, mixed in with other moments, all of which are orchestrated into an experience of disjunctive-chiasmic time (time that crosses over itself so that the past is experienced as the future and vice versa).[71] The film presents the life of the O'Brien family as a series of vignettes, as if the audience were looking at a family snapshot album in which the photographs mysteriously come to life. In this way, the audience bears witness to the life of the O'Brien family in fragmented image-events that carry their truth in the disjunctive opening between life and death in the manner described by Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (discussed earlier in the paper). Each image-event bears witness to the "life-death"[72] of the O'Brien family: its "having to believe" in order to go on living in the event of the calamitous death of the son. The events presented cease to be about the life of a particular family, and become universalised as the very possibility of life faced with mortality.

In this universalised "life-death," women are positioned to go along with but resist the will to power required of them in the nuclear family as an evolved way of being based on the masculine principle operating in mid-twentieth century America. The evolution of this way of being is signalled in the film through a lengthy "beginning of time" sequence, a third of the way into the film, featuring a dinosaur scene where we see one dinosaur spare the life of another as the first evidence of the will to power in nature. The dinosaurs in this scene are presented as neither male nor female, indicating that the will to power comes to evolving life without a specific gender. This will have consequences for how we read the gendering of power relations later in the film where the will to power becomes associated with the masculine principle. Male authority in the modern nuclear family derives, so the film suggests, from an evolved way of being that is not essential to the will to power as such, but to other

factors, such as the ideological practices of self-formation (e.g., when we see the father training his sons in the skills of manhood) that reproduce this way of being as part of the industrialised capitalist-state-religious nexus. The will to power is not essentially masculine but takes a masculine form at a certain evolved stage of human being. It can always be otherwise from any finite moment of historically evolved way of being.

The sparing of life by the dinosaur suggests self-consciousness and a capacity to control power over others. It places the "fall" into freedom as the awareness of possibility in life well before humans. Human being is thus placed in evolutionary time *after* the coming of freedom. The film thus suspends the traditional mythical explanations of human existence in terms of a divinely decreed world entrusted to humans as superior free beings. What we see happening in mid-twentieth century America is the acting out of an already evolving will to power, including rationalisations of life through religion, science and industrialised technology. These higher rationalisations contribute to and explain the evolved way of being embodied by the O'Brien family and their neighbours *but they do not comprehend it*.

The dinosaur scene is repeated later in the film when the eldest son (Jack) comes across his father working under the family's jacked-up car. Having previously been admonished by his father for disobedience and consequently suffering overwhelming resentment, the boy is tempted to release the jack. However, he refuses the temptation[73] and, as a consequence, suddenly grows up; he no longer reacts to the world by lashing out in frustration, anger and resentment, and begins to see his life in a more independent way, taking the first steps towards assuming responsibility for others. Like the dinosaur who discovers the will to power as the freedom to either kill or spare the life of the other, Jack discovers the will to power as freedom to "be otherwise."[74] This freedom however implies a moral responsibility to others and an awareness of the contradictory nature of human existence: he realises that he is now burdened with a sense of freedom where, in his own words "whatever I want to do I can't do; I do what I hate." In an ensuing scene, we see Jack testing one of his younger brothers in a game of trust, where he commands the brother to place his finger over a loaded air gun. As the brother goes to place his finger over the end of the barrel, the gun suddenly goes off and he runs away in fright. Later, Jack seeks out his brother and asks for his forgiveness, something he could not have done previously. Jack's coming-of-age through resisting the temptation to kill his father not only gives him power over others, but also fills him with a sense of guilt and responsibility. In a decisive way, he now becomes a moralised human being.[75]

These tests and trials of trust are part of a *Bildung*: the development of the self from a natural way of being towards consciousness of the universal order, shown here as the way in which male children learn how to become moral human beings, aware of their responsibilities to others.[76] In this case the *Bildung* is shown in terms of the coming of the will to power as an evolved state of being, initially through the dinosaur scene and then repeated in the coming of age of the O'Brien children. The film is saying that human morality is part of the broader evolution of life.

The *Bildung* presented in *The Tree of Life* takes up a significant amount of the film and involves tests and trials between the boys as well as training by their father in "how to be a man." The *Bildung* is focalised through Jack, and involves challenging his father's authority as well as asserting his authority over his younger brother in the formation of the masculine self as part of the will to power of mid-twentieth century American industrialised capitalism. This power is disciplinary power, as distinct from the control power of the post-industrialised societies of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.[77] Jack has to learn obedience to the father not only by obeying his commands but also by feeling the father's power through the grip his father has on his body (there are numerous images of the father gripping and holding the boys' bodies as he playfully teaches them how to "be a man"). He also has to learn how to become a father himself, first by breaking away from the father's controlling grip, and then by letting go of his childish love of his mother and by displacing his burgeoning sexual desire onto other mother-like female figures. In one scene he sneaks into the house of a female neighbour and steals her sheer nightgown after first laying it out on her bed. He then runs out of the house and into the woods where he hides the nightgown in a hole under a plank of discarded timber. Thinking better of it, he takes the nightgown out of the hole and throws it into the nearby river where he watches it float away. Here we see the enactment of displaced sexual desire: unable to seduce the woman as a man might do, the boy does the next best thing — he turns the garment that covers the woman's nakedness into a sexual fetish. By first burying and then disinterring the nightgown, he releases his sexual desire into the flow of the river (the river of life), preparing himself for the life to come as a fully sexualised man.

These trials of strength and rituals of desire prepare Jack for his life as an adult male. Significantly, the moment when Jack challenges his father's authority and begins to take on the moral responsibilities of an adult male, his father's own authority begins to wane and he

starts to treat Jack as a man. It is also at this point that the father recognises his own failure in life, and where he realises something else as well: he has failed to see the glory. In a moment of regret, the father confesses: "I dishonoured it all, and didn't notice the glory." In now recognising that he has failed to see the glory, he is making a tacit comment on the masculinised way of being required of him and his sons in having to live up to the demands of a discipline society in mid-twentieth century American capitalism. These demands requires a *Bildung* in which sons become fathers (i.e., bearers of self-affirming patriarchal authority) through learning the strategies of survival and success within competitive capitalism. This *Bildung* is also linked to the church and to the state which justify disciplinary authority of fathers over their wives and sons by teaching obedience and trust.

Although taking up almost half the film, the masculinised *Bildung* is presented as a failure: in adult life, Jack has rejected the capitalist will to power that affirms the masculine, and has turned to the feminine as a means of escape. Throughout the film the feminine is seen but has no voice. In further examples of the masculine will to power, the father exercises a brutal control over his family when one of the sons dares to challenge his authority at the breakfast table. Exploding with rage, he reaches over the table, gripping the offending son and marching him out of the room while the wife looks on in alarm, afraid to speak out. Later, he accuses his wife of turning his sons against him, and she fights back by striking him on the chest with her clenched fists. He then grips her in a smothering hold as one might subdue a frightened animal. This "taming" of the wife restores his authority and the masculine will to power that defines the way of being of the O'Brien household. But it also acts emblematically for the universal restoration of authority of the masculinised way of being throughout America at that time. By showing how the masculinised will to power blocks the feminine, the film sets up the possibility of an unblocking as well. Throughout the film, we see this possibility in repeated images of the force of nature opening into a glorious beyond. These images are associated with the feminine as the unblocking of the blocked spirit into a rigid masculinised way of being that leads to a dead end.

The questions posed by the characters in voice-over throughout the film in terms of Christian notions of grace and nature are attempts to give voice to the "question of being," as each character rises in his or her own way to the challenge set by God (the indifferent force of nature and the event of chance) in visiting calamities on the family that plunge them into nihilistic despair. But these responses can only provide partial answers. This is because they,

like human being itself, are subject to evolved time. Evolved time is time that reproduces a specific way of being, but in doing so, blocks other ways of being from coming about. Thus, the masculinised, patriarchal way of being presented in the O'Brien family as part of evolved nature, blocks other ways of being in its very presentation. The female way of being — the way of grace — is presented as the way of being that the film allows us to see, *but in its blocked state*. It is the "not" of the film; the "other beginning" revealed in the film's turning against itself. This is why we see the mother glance away from her kneeling husband on hearing of the death of their son: she is looking otherwise, resisting the evolved and hence *naturalised* way of being that demands obedience to the law of the father; a way of being that she must nevertheless accept as part of who she is.

The flaw or defect of the film is the *fall* of human being into otherness — in the ontological gap in time where the possibility of a reconciliation between the past and the present is both affirmed and denied. As we saw with Barthes's *punctum* effect, the presence of an irretrievable life or event is felt in its loss when viewing photographs against the grain of their generic meaning. This sense of loss is not a melancholic pining, but a "bearing witness" that carries the loss with it as a "truth of life" — an enactment of faith in life that must go on. This enactment of faith comes through the interference of the chance event that "rises out of the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me."[78] This piercing of my being when confronted by the chance event of death portrayed in the photograph, shatters my belief in the meaning of the event — its generic denotation as part of a system of belief in the capacity of technology to reproduce life as factually real — and turns me otherwise into a truth that has to be believed: the truth of the inescapable contingency of mortal life and the demand that life must go on. In terms of the "death event" in *The Tree of Life*, this shattering of belief comes through the death of the son which hits the family like a thunderbolt, shaking them to their foundations. On receiving the news of the son's death, the mother and father literally fall to their knees, while the frame of the film splits apart, plunging the scene into a spiralling motion as it follows the mother around the room and tracks the husband as he seeks solace in prayer.

This splitting and twisting of the film's frame triggers a collapse in the temporal ordering of events. The scene ends with a shot of the telegram delivery man leaving the house, but instead of appearing hatless and in the zip-up bomber jacket we saw him wearing at the start of the scene, he is now wearing a full blue uniform and peaked cap. It is as if we have been

taken back in time while staying in the present. This crossing of time is continued through the rest of the film. For instance, we learn later in the film that the death of the son occurs in his late teens, yet there is nothing in the scene to suggest this. Rather, we are encouraged to think that the son has died in the childhood just presented in the previous scene. The blending of time frames is compounded when, a few scenes further on, we see a boy drowned in the local swimming pool. The body of the dead boy, who looks much the same age as the O'Brien boy, is pulled out of the water and offered to Mr. O'Brien kneeling at the side of the pool as if it were his own son. This confused blending of time and doubling of characters and events produces a chiasm in the structure of the film, where current events appear to be affecting events that have already happened. The death event visited upon the O'Brien family is not contained within their own lives but reverberates through the community and throughout the entire film, affecting everyone and everything with a mortal sense of life and the proximity of death in all things. Narrative drive is thwarted and characters are drawn away from their fate in a higher moral order predicated on the American Way, causing them to question their existence and belief in God.

In *Blossoms in the Dust* the deaths of Charlotte and Sammy are sacrifices, enabling Edna to move along her destined path to ameliorate the condition of illegitimate children. Their lives thus have meaning. The ellipses of time and coincidences of plot harness the randomness of thrown life — life subject to chance in a world from which God has withdrawn – by smoothing it into a purposeful event. Their lives are given meaning in terms of the apparatus of melodrama in which a divine providence is seen to be working through the presented events leading to the affirmation of a higher moral order. However, in *The Tree of Life*, no such solution can be found. The death of the son is not a sacrifice, but an enigmatic event that poses unanswerable questions. The film does not elide the death in order to suture itself into a higher order in the manner of melodrama, but tarries in its reverberating effects — in the fragments of its collapsing narrative framework. In this breaching of the film frame a possibility appears in the shining of nature. The lesson of the film is the same as the one that Job has to learn: that God's presence is not to be found in a transcendent moral order that explains the occurrence of chance events and the ills of the world, but in accepting such events as part of life itself in its opening into the void of otherness, as *this* life and no other. Thus the "answer" to God's question with which the film began is not to be found in pondering on the meaning of religious doctrine or in seeking solace in prayer, but in a joyous sense of being-

open to the "beyond" offered by the film itself in its images of nature shining through all things. This beyond cannot be seen through the will to power of the masculinised way of evolved human being, predicated as it is on discipline and patriarchy. Rather, it can only be seen through the way of grace carried by the feminine principle, as the other way that the film presents but in a blocked state.

CONCLUSION

Schleiermacher defines religious experience as an "activity" felt in the stasis of human being blocked from being otherwise. This activity is an "immediate experience"[79] felt by resisting systems ("[s]eeing I have rejected systems, commentaries and apologies")[80] that smooth away the effects of calamities and chance events through pious feelings and elevated thoughts.[81] Religious experience does not seek solace in doctrine or a transcendent God, but calls for a release from the blockage of being into divine life as an immediate experience of the finite in the infinite. The possibility of divine life is always *right there* where we already are, but experienced otherwise, in the release from blocked being.

My claim in this paper is that Terrence Malick's film *The Tree of Life* enacts this releasing of blocked being into a "beyond" equivalent to Schleiermacher's religious experience as a release into the infinite-divine. The release of blocked being in *The Tree of Life* is triggered by a breaching of the cinematic framing of the events presented in the film such that they turn against the frame itself, collapsing temporality and opening the film otherwise. This turning of the film against itself counters the normalisation of belief in the cinematic experience of melodrama, where chance events are smoothed into an ameliorative movement, serving the purpose of a divine providence that reaches towards the moral Good. The collapsed framing of *The Tree of Life* breaches the cinematic real — the expectation delivered by the apparatus of melodrama that things will turn out all right, that defeats are really a prelude to victory and that death is the necessary sacrifice for the living — and opens into a non-cinematic beyond, challenging the audience's belief in the capacity of the cinematic apparatus to fulfil the promise of divine providence. The film enables its audience to bear witness to this beyond, restoring the audience's faith in the film to carry the event of Being with it. The film is itself an event of being-with the beyond of the cinematic real itself.

1. There are many different worlds, both religious and non-religious. A post-religious world is not a world without religion; rather, it is a world in which religion continues to be configured within its belief systems but in a non-determining way. I propose that those cultures defined by modernity, scientific rationalism and the principles of the Enlightenment (what we routinely term "the west") are post-religious in the sense that they continue to have religion as part of their belief systems, but not as a transcendental order of meaning that defines their mode of being.

2. Giorgio Agamben defines an apparatus as follows: "The term 'apparatus' designates that in which, and through which, one realizes a pure activity of governance devoid of any foundation in being. This is the reason why apparatuses must always imply a process of subjectification, that is to say, they must produce their subject." — Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 11. A cinematic apparatus interpellates its audience as subjects.

3. Adrian Martin, *Last Day Every Day: Figural Thinking from Auerbach and Kracauer to Agamben and Brenez* (New York: Punctum Books, 2012), 12.

4. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultural Despisers*, trans. John Oman (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 1.

5. Ibid.

6. For the relation between Schleiermacher and the *Frühromantik* philosophers see Frederick Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 46.

7. In German Idealism, the Absolute refers to the "unconditioned" of thought — the limit that thought runs up against in its thinking; a limit that is itself irreducible to this thought. See Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, trans. Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 24ff.

8. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 39.

9. Ibid., 40.

10. Schleiermacher thus engages in the restitution of the unity of intuition and feeling in *symbolic* forms. The finite is subordinated to the infinite through the symbol. The reverse of this is allegory, where the finite *presents* the infinite in finite terms. For the distinction between symbol and allegory along these lines, see Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), 163-67.

11. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132.

12. Ibid., 132.

13. Ibid., 133.

14. Ibid., 133.

15. Absolute possibility is immeasurable in the sense that it cannot be calculated in advance. It is simply an openness in being — the freedom "to be" opened in generative immediacy.

16. Ibid., 133.

17. See Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James and the Mode of Excess*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 20.

18. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 29.

19. Ibid., 4.

20. Schleiermacher was influenced by Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*. See Friedrich Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1988) and *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Keith R. Peterson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

21. Martin Heidegger, "Letter on 'Humanism,'" trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, in *Pathmarks* , ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 242.

22. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 133.

23 Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 4-5.

24. Ibid., 6.

25. Ibid., 1.

26. Ibid., 4.

27. Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 4-6.

28. See for instance the special issue on Bazin in *Angelaki* 17.4, "Belief in Cinema: Revisiting Themes from Bazin" (2012).

29. André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What is Cinema?*, vol. 1, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 14.

30. Ibid., 13.

31. Bazin's review of Augusto Geninas's *Heaven Over the Marshes*, was initially published in *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1951. My reference to it in this paper is to an English translation, published as "Cinema and Theology: The Case of *Heaven Over the Marshes*," trans. Bert Cardullo, *Journal of Religion and Film* 6.2 (2002).

32. Robert Sinnerbrink, "Cinematic Belief: Bazinian Cinephilia and Malick's *Tree of Life*," *Angelaki* 17.4 (2012): 97.

33. Ibid., 98.

34. Ibid., 99.

35. Ibid., 100.

36. Ibid., 100.

37. Ibid., 100.

38. I take melodrama to be a dramaturgical mode beginning in Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century as a specific theatrical style, and gravitating to film in the early twentieth century. Melodrama emerges as a means of simplifying the complex political and social realities of revolutionary Europe and the annihilation of the pastoral way of life by modern industrialization. See Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and its Contexts* (New York: Columbia Press, 2001). See also Elaine Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace, 1800-1885* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995). In industrializing England, melodrama emerged at a time when church attendance was on the wane. The 1851 census on church attendance in England revealed that over forty percent of the population did not attend church — see G. Kitson Clark, *The Making of Victorian England* (London: Methuen, 1962), 148-49 — a fact considered shocking by the ruling class at the time. This fact, coupled with the rise of popular culture (sports, music hall entertainment, popular drama) in the middle of the century, suggests that the moral education of the working class was shifting from the domain of the church to the domain of popular culture through a dramaturgy found in popular newspapers, pamphlets and magazines, as well as theatrical melodrama.

39. Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2013), 178.

40. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage Press, 1993), 76.

41. Ibid., 96. The aorist tense concerns an ontological relation to time and death. In his discussion of the peculiar temporality of looking at photographs of people who have since died, Barthes suggests that this ontological dimension is "an anterior future of which death is the stake."

42. Ibid., 25-26.

43. "The second element will break (or punctuate) the *studium*. This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the *studium* with my sovereign consciousness), it is the element which rises out of the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me." — Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 26. The *punctum* effect is like a little death that I suffer; a fall into the abyssal gap between the present and the past carried by the resistive *mark* of its presence in the photographic image.

44. For a discussion of the future anterior tense as a bearing witness of truth that has to be believed, see Jacques Derrida, *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, ed. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (Fordham University Press, New York, 2005), 76-77. Having to believe is not an imperative on the subject to believe (as if the subject had no choice), but the pre-subjective condition of truth-telling. Having to believe is an ontological condition of being that precedes and enables the possibility of belief.

45. Ibid., 76.

46. Ibid., 79.

47. Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless*, 3.

48. Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 46.

49. Ibid., 52.

50. Jeffrey D. Mason, *Melodrama and the Myth of America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 18.

51. Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism in Early Feature Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 26.

52. Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 5.

53. Brewster and Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema*, 29.

54. Ibid., 23. Note here the similarity to Schleiermacher's idea of the stasis of contradictory forces, held together in things as their immanent possibility.

55. Ibid., 22.

56. Ibid., 24.

57. Ibid., 22.

58. Mason, *Melodrama and the Myth of America,* 18.

59. The film does however provide an intertitle separating the two scenes: an image of blooming gladiola acting as a motif of the family's name (Gladney) as well as a symbol of life. Interestingly, in Malick's *The Tree of*

Life, we also see a series of similar intertitles: fluted flower-like images turning on their axis also separate scenes eliding vast time spans in the narrative.

60. Although Edna's actions are heroic, she is not a true hero, as her decisions are already made for her by the film's plot machinations. Her character is better described in terms of election: she is someone "elected" to undertake an arduous task to fulfil divine providence. The task is thus characterised by a Protestant sense of the fulfilment of a political-spiritual destiny bound up in the fate of human being as it exists in twentieth century American industrialised capitalism. Edna's actions and the event they enable — the repeal of legislation that stigmatises abandoned children as illegitimate – can be understood as part of an American "manifest destiny," initially proposed as a means of justifying colonial expansion to the west, but later as the "way" of America's future in all things. In this case manifest destiny becomes a quasi-religious movement towards moral amelioration of the poor, fully revealed in the final scenes of the film. For the concept of manifest destiny in American history see Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950).

61. Heidegger refers to the "other beginning" (*Ereignis*) as the turning of the event of Being out of an already enclosed way of being. See Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 4-6.

62. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 163-67.

63. Slajov Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2008), 152.

64. Ibid., 153.

65. For an analysis of this scene in terms of the actor's gestures, see Warwick Mules, "Mise-en-scène and the Figural: A Reading of Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life*," *Cine-Files*, no. 4 (2013), http://www.thecine-files.com.

66. Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Forms of Being: Cinema, Aesthetics, Subjectivity*, (London: BFI, 2004), 4.

67. Bersani and Dutoit, *Forms of Being*, 4.

68. Compare these non-transitional displacements with the transitional events in *Blossoms in the Dust*. In the latter film, there is no dwelling in the disjunctive event as is the case in *The Tree of Life*; rather major disjunctures (for instance, the deaths of Charlotte and Sammy) constitute a clean break between events, so that they appear to be marching logically from one to the other towards the fulfilment of an implicit destiny.

69. The wife's looking away is a gesture of non-willing of the will to power. Heidegger calls this non-willing "twisting free" (*Verwindung*). See Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Volumes One and Two*, trans. David Farrel Krell (New York, HarperOne, 1991), 201-2. See also Warwick Mules, *With Nature: Nature Philosophy as Poetics through Schelling, Heidegger Benjamin and Nancy* (Bristol: Intellect, 2014), 117.

70. Compare this patenting of inventions with *Blossoms in the Dust*. Sam Gladney's invention of a new strain of wheat is successfully lodged and approved. Sam embodies the spirit of entrepreneurial capitalism as does Mr. O'Brien. The difference between them is that while Sam succeeds with his invention, Mr. O'Brien does not. *Blossoms in the Dust* maintains belief in the American Way, whereas *The Tree of Life* does not. The fact that Sam dies suddenly half way through the film is due to the requirements of the melodramatic plot (and perhaps to be faithful to the real life characters on which the story is based). Sam needs to be eliminated to clear the way for Edna's success.

71. A similar chiasmic structure of remembered childhood moments mixed in with later moments of the life of an adult male narrator can be seen in Tarkovsky's *The Mirror* (*Zerkalo*, 1975).

72. In German Idealism and Romanticism, the condition of "life-death" describes the consciousness that my life is predicated on death: all living being (nature) entails mortality that both enables and limits life. See David Farrell Krell, *Contagion: Sexuality, Disease, and Death in German Idealism and Romanticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 2.

73. Like the dominant dinosaur who places a foot on the injured dinosaur three times before moving away, Jack hesitates beside the jack three times before he too moves away.

74. We are told in an earlier scene that Jack will "inherit" the legacy of the dinosaurs when he comes across a dinosaur bone in the field in which he and his brothers are playing.

75. The development from childhood to adulthood equates with a transformation from nature (mimicry) to spirit (self-consciousness). The O'Brien boys lack self-consciousness; they can only mimic the world around them and remain bound to an "animal" way of being. In one scene, the boys accompany their mother on a trip into town where they come across three men with various physical impediments (a drunken man, a man stricken with polio and a shackled criminal). The boys mimic the impeded gait of these "deformed" men without understanding their predicament. In another scene, the boys team up with other boys from the neighbourhood to roam the streets as an animal pack, vandalizing buildings and engaging in violent pranks with no thought of the consequence of their actions.

76. In the German Classical and Idealist philosophical and literary tradition, *Bildung* is the striving to transcend the natural state of the particular self towards the universal. See Friedrich Schiller, "Third Letter," in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Reginald Snell (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2004). Schleiermacher equates *Bildung* with the releasing of religious feeling for the infinite blocked in the particularised state of the self. See Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 146.

77. Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," in *Negotiations: 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 177-82.

78. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 26.

79. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 36.

80. Ibid, 33.

81. Ibid, 5: "[the powers of the infinite in the finite] are smoothed away to dull mediocrity in which no excess appears, because all fresh life is wanting."

DES FILMS CANNIBALES, OU L'HUMANISME MIS À MAL

Frédéric Marteau

Christophe Becker

I've always considered movies evil ; the day that cinema was invented was a black day for mankind.

— KENNETH ANGER

J'ai tué mon père. J'ai mangé de la chair humaine. Et je tremble de joie.

— en *Porcherie* (*Porcine*, 1969)

Le cinéma est par essence un art anthropologique. Dans ses documentaires comme dans ses fictions, il s'intéresse à l'Homme, à ses manifestations, ses mœurs, ses tendances les plus communes comme les plus étranges. Si le cinéma a pour principal objet de filmer des corps, c'est qu'il est travaillé depuis toujours par la question du Même et de l'Autre. Filmer un autre, est-ce reconnaître un semblable ? Avec des fortunes diverses, le cinéma a exploré les limites mêmes de ce rapport à l'autre comme étranger (fascination pour l'étrange, les monstres, les êtres difformes ou handicapés, les dégénérés,…), explorant les confins de cette altérité dans ce qu'elle a parfois de plus dérangeant, en l'exposant notamment à ses tabous. D'où le développement d'un cinéma « bis » proposant des objets *limites*, qui apparaissent comme des manifestations *barbares* par rapport à tout un cinéma traditionnel et officiel qui propose un spectacle *raisonnable*. Mais en tant qu'art du XXè siècle, et notamment dans sa deuxième moitié, le cinéma se fait l'écho d'un humanisme vacillant et d'une violence réellement active que les images ont parfois du mal à cacher.

Afin d'entrer dans un tel questionnement, nous nous intéresserons à un phénomène qui présente le double avantage d'être au fondement de la philosophie humaniste tout en représentant une manifestation cinématographique extrême, à savoir le cannibalisme. Souvent présenté comme le tabou des tabous — « de toutes les pratiques sauvages, [elle] est sans doute celle qui nous inspire le plus d'horreur et de dégoût »[1] —, l'anthropophagie apparaît *a priori* comme une pratique qui remet en cause l'humanité de l'Homme, puisqu'elle stigmatise une violence que l'individu s'inflige à lui-même ; en ce sens, l'anthropophagie est toujours

une autophagie ou une allélophagie (quand les membres d'un groupe se dévorent les uns les autres). Il s'agit d'un phénomène extrême, qui pointe la frontière de la nature humaine et de ses manifestations culturelles, censées déprendre l'Homme de ses pulsions malfaisantes et suicidaires. Mais les limites, on le sait, sont toujours une invitation à la transgression, au moins dans ses manifestations imaginaires (artistiques, littéraires, culturelles). Georges Bataille voit ainsi un point commun entre le cannibalisme et l'érotisme, à savoir « cette création paradoxale de la valeur d'attrait par l'interdit », même s'il reconnaît que « le désir de manger des hommes nous est profondément étranger »,[2] contrairement au désir de tuer ou au désir érotique. On verra que le cinéma, dans toute sa diversité, n'a pas manqué d'affronter ce tabou particulier qu'est le cannibalisme, qui éclaire l'homme d'une singulière façon ; ses représentations manifestent tout à la fois une répulsion (un dégoût, une horreur) et une fascination (une attirance, une curiosité). Il s'agit par conséquent d'une histoire de regard : peut-on regarder, observer un tel phénomène qui échappe non seulement à l'entendement, au discours, mais aussi à la représentation ?

Il faut cependant préciser qu'il n'y a pas un mais des cannibalismes : cannibalisme guerrier, religieux, funéraire, de vengeance, de survie, individuel ou involontaire,[3] les formes et les motivations des pratiques anthropophagiques varient au gré des continents ou des ethnies observés. Il faut ajouter à cela un fond mythique ou symbolique, qui n'a cessé de hanter les hommes par ses récits et ses figures souvent inquiétantes, et une contamination langagière qui peut faire du dit « cannibale » la métaphore de tout mangeur d'hommes, que ce soit sur un plan politique (l'homme est un loup pour l'homme) ou sexuel (dévorer l'être aimé, et non seulement du regard). C'est en un tel sens élargi que Lévi-Strauss affirmera que « nous sommes tous des cannibales »,[4] le phénomène de cannibalisation socio-culturelle dépassant la seule réalité d'un acte de manducation.

1. LA PENSÉE SACRÉE ET LA FICTION DU BON CANNIBALE

Il convient tout d'abord de rappeler les grandes lignes d'une tradition culturelle qui va nourrir, à titres divers, les représentations au XXè siècle. Elles peuvent se décliner en trois catégories : un fonds mythique, une problématique religieuse et une pensée humaniste.

Les textes des mythographes, les grecs Hésiode et Homère en tête puis Ovide ou Pindare en témoignent : l'homme qui mange la chair de son congénère est, ou sera, puni — quel que soit le temps ou la forme que doit prendre le châtiment. Ainsi Cronos précipité au Tartare après avoir dévoré ses enfants ; les Titans emprisonnés pour avoir mangé Zagreus ; Polyphème, mangeur d'hommes, aveuglé par Ulysse ; Tantale, père de Pélops, condamné au supplice éternel pour avoir assassiné son fils avant de l'offrir en bouillon aux dieux. Atrée, Lycaon, Camblès, Aura, tous ont goûté la chair humaine ou l'ont, secrètement, fait goûter à leurs convives ; ils finiront assassinés, suicidés ou bien maudits sur plusieurs générations, la bestialité de leur acte rejaillissant sur leur famille comme une marque ineffaçable. Le cannibalisme est également présent dans le Mahābhārata et le Rāmāyana qui associent la consommation de chair humaine à l'activité démoniaque — les rakshasas ou « errants de la nuit » qui prennent forme humaine à volonté et dévorent les villageois et autres aventuriers égarés. On les nomme également dandamshuka (« mordeurs »), ou nrijagdha / nricakshas (« mangeurs d'hommes ») et sont à ranger du côté des « anti-dieux ».[5] Tous ces exemples, parmi tant d'autres, condamnent absolument le cannibale, personnage bientôt diabolique.

La question du cannibalisme devient plus embarrassée avec l'émergence des Religions du Livre et, singulièrement, avec l'essor du Christianisme. La chair comme motif de réflexion et sujet d'étude est un élément essentiel de la philosophie de Maître Eckhart et, plus largement, de la mystique et de la théologie. L'observer scientifiquement, rationnellement, est un cheminement intellectuel, un premier pas vers un itinéraire céleste et l'appréhension de la divinité, de l'univers dans son entier, depuis sa mécanique et ses fonctionnements quotidiens jusqu'à ses mystères les plus inconnaissables. En d'autres termes : la chair permet d'amorcer un authentique travail gnostique.

Les Chrétiens, et parmi eux les mystiques rhénans dont Eckhart, dominicain, croient en premier lieu à la transformation du corps qui, une fois la fin des temps atteinte, sera agrégée dans la divinité. L'homme, corps et âme « pleinement transformés et changés en Dieu »,[6] le corps usé par l'âge, les os fatigués, renouvelés et gagnant une unité inespérée dans et par la divinité. Les implications de telles croyances sont évidemment vertigineuses et posent de très nombreuses questions dont une, primordiale, à savoir le statut de la chair : instrument divin, à part égale avec l'âme — Monisme —, ou bien inférieure à celle-ci, faible tandis que l'âme est forte, périssable tandis que cette dernière est hors du temps — Dualisme.

Cette dichotomie est au cœur d'un des Sacrements les plus symboliquement puissants du Christianisme : celui de l'Eucharistie par lequel le prêtre tient le pouvoir de transformer le pain en hostie, réceptacle matériel du corps du Christ. Le rite liturgique est littéral pour St Thomas d'Aquin : ingérer l'hostie équivaut à ingérer le corps christique et le pénitent est, par définition, cannibale ; il est davantage symbolique pour Jean Calvin, les Protestants préférant croire que le repas eucharistique dans son intégralité, la condition d'ingestion de la nourriture, non plus l'hostie, constitue la première église.

Le Sacrement entretient un rapport complexe avec l'idée cannibale. La fascination pour l'un va de pair avec la terreur que provoque l'autre. Le Chrétien théophage consomme et adore la divinité sans jamais parvenir à occulter la peur du cannibale, du sauvage[7]. En témoignent à la Renaissance les débats au sujet de la ''présence réelle'' du Christ dans l'hostie qui animent l'expédition brésilienne de Villegagnon. Sommé de se convertir et de pratiquer sans restriction le rite catholique, Jean de Léry préfèrera partir avec ses compagnons protestants vivre avec les Indiens anthropophages. Le catholicisme est alors dénoncé comme cannibale[8] et les débats tournent autour de la réalité et du symbole de l'hostie, en tant que corps du Christ — corps dévoré et dévorant : « Qui mange ma chair et boit mon sang demeure en moi et moi en lui. » Depuis son origine, le repas sacramentaire tient ainsi son corollaire terrible, comme le rite tient son blasphème, sa messe noire ; et le moment de communion avec le divin peut à tout instant déborder en massacre dans un geste proprement absurde et terrifiant. L'enveloppe de viande et de muscle, loin d'être monosémique, se prête à toutes les transformations, à tous les passages ou franchissements. Le cannibalisme symbolique ou littéral du Chrétien est, conséquemment, résolument double. Si ce dernier dévore Dieu contenu dans l'hostie, Dieu le dévore à son tour avant de le digérer comme un essor formidable vers la beauté et la grâce.[9]

Les débats religieux vont ainsi accompagner la découverte ethnologique des peuplades primitives ou sauvages qui pratiquent le cannibalisme. Si la figure du cannibale ne cesse de hanter l'imaginaire occidental, des discours positifs ou « humanistes » vont répondre à cette appréhension négative de l'anthropophagie, largement condamnée au XVIè siècle. Le sauvage cannibale est rejeté avant même l'étude de la fonction culturelle de son anthropophagie. Il est le dépravé, l'inhumain, ou une émanation diabolique — comme ces anges déchus devenus cannibales dans le *Livre d'Hénoch*. Il alimentera d'ailleurs tous les discours racistes, notamment au tournant du XIXè siècle.[10] Toute une pensée moderne et humaniste va ainsi s'é-

riger sur le fond de discours visant à critiquer le regard suffisant du civilisé occidental et à réévaluer d'autres formes d'organisation humaine, d'autres coutumes. Le cannibalisme est alors perçu non plus seulement comme une barbarie, mais comme une forme culturelle dont le sens et la fonction est à étudier. On sera attentif à l'avènement d'une telle pensée humaniste qui laisse toutefois de côté une part plus obscure, plus inquiétante, sous la fiction du bon cannibale.

A propos du cannibalisme, on distingue traditionnellement « les formes proprement alimentaires, c'est-à-dire celles où l'appétit pour la chair humaine s'explique par la carence d'autre nourriture animale » des « formes d'anthropophagie qu'on peut appeler positives, celles qui relèvent d'une cause mystique, magique ou religieuse : ainsi l'ingestion d'une parcelle du corps d'un ascendant [autrement nommé *endocannibalisme*] ou d'un fragment d'un cadavre ennemi [*exocannibalisme*], pour permettre l'incorporation de ses vertus ou encore la neutralisation de son pouvoir. »[11] Cette approche du cannibalisme laisse de côté son aspect sombre et inquiétant, sa forme *négative*, entre cruauté plus ou moins ritualisée et manifestation pathologique tout aussi monstrueuse. On lit par exemple chez Roland Villeneuve cette tension entre une description de pratiques compréhensibles (le cannibalisme occasionnel des famines, des naufrages ou des états de siège) ou ethnologiques (cannibalismes guerrier ou religieux) — distinction à laquelle se tient Lévi-Strauss — et une présentation d'un cannibalisme plus inexplicable ou plus barbare. Il relève d'un côté que « ce sont les peuples les plus civilisés qui s'adonnent au cannibalisme »[12] tout en soulignant d'un autre la cruauté des cannibales, passant en revue des pratiques des plus terrifiantes. Par leur monstruosité et, dirait-on, par leur apparente gratuité et leur ''sadisme'', certaines pratiques échappent à l'entendement et révèlent une cruauté que rien ne semble véritablement justifier — un cannibalisme pathologique et *irrécupérable*.

Le cannibale a cependant focalisé depuis Léry et Montaigne tout un discours humaniste dont la tradition a irrigué notre pensée. Il apparaît, par-delà ses pratiques qui restent inacceptables pour l'occidental, comme le paradigme du « bon sauvage » que les philosophes des Lumières, à travers Rousseau ou Voltaire, s'efforceront de construire en opposition aux dérives de l'homme civilisé, affirmant par là la relativité de la notion de barbarie. Tous ces discours *positifs* sur le cannibalisme n'ont en fait pour véritable objet que de condamner la violence des occidentaux par le biais de comparaisons et de parallèles. Léry aborde ainsi la question du cannibalisme tout en dénonçant les massacres des guerres de religion[13]. C'est

dans un tel esprit que Montaigne écrit « Des Cannibales », texte paru en 1580. Le cannibalisme apparaît comme une pratique culturelle, certes barbare « eu esgard aux regles de la raison, mais non pas eu esgard à nous, qui les surpassons en toute sorte de barbarie » ;[14] elle ne relève pas de cette cruauté dont les occidentaux sont capables et qu'abhorre si cruellement Montaigne.

> Je ne suis pas marry que nous remerquons l'horreur barbaresque qu'il y a en une telle action, mais ouy bien dequoy, jugeans bien de leurs fautes, nous soyons si aveuglez aux nostres. Je pense qu'il y a plus de barbarie à manger un homme vivant qu'à le manger mort, à deschirer par tourmens et par geénes un corps encore plein de sentiment, le faire rostir par le menu, le faire mordre et meurtrir aux chiens et aux pourceaux […], que de le rostir et manger après qu'il est trespassé.[15]

Montaigne fait ici une distinction essentielle entre le cuit et le cru. Le cuit relève de la culture, car le vivant est ainsi respecté ; le cru suppose la cruauté et s'apparente à un acte de torture (de « geéne »). Dans cette logique, la guerre et la torture sont plus cruelles et plus barbares que l'anthropophagie, comme le souligne Voltaire.[16]

Ce réflexe discursif se retrouve enfin chez Lévi-Strauss. Dans *Tristes Tropiques*, deux sociétés se dessinent et s'opposent quant à leur rapport à l'autre, à l'étranger.

> A les étudier du dehors, on serait tenté d'opposer deux types de sociétés : celles qui pratiquent l'anthropophagie, c'est-à-dire qui voient dans l'absorption de certains individus détenteurs de forces redoutables le seul moyen de neutraliser celles-ci, et même de les mettre à profit ; et celles qui, comme la nôtre, adoptent ce qu'on pourrait appeler l'*anthropémie* (du grec *émein*, vomir) ; placées devant le même problème, elles ont choisi la solution inverse, consistant à expulser ces êtres redoutables hors du corps social en les tenant temporairement ou définitivement isolés, sans contact avec l'humanité, dans des établissements destinés à cet usage. A la plupart des sociétés que nous appelons primitives, cette coutume inspirerait une horreur profonde ; elle nous marquerait à leurs yeux de la même barbarie que nous serions tentés de leur imputer en raison de leurs coutumes symétriques.[17]

Les pratiques cannibales apparaissent ainsi par contraste plus humaines et plus cohérentes. Il s'agit pour Lévi-Strauss de destituer le privilège de la valeur d'humanisme que le principe hégémonique et tout-puissant de civilisation veut sans cesse brandir avec morgue.

Il reste à voir comment le cinéma a intégré ou interrogé cette tradition. En tant qu'art propre au développement moderne de la technique, le cinéma fut le témoin d'un XXè siècle pour le moins problématique, où processus civilisationnel et actes de barbarie se sont mêlés à un degré rarement égalé.

2. FILMS DE CANNIBALES : ÉVOLUTION D'UN GENRE

Quand on évoque les films de cannibales, on pense immédiatement à un genre qui a émergé dans les années soixante-dix. Cet intérêt pour l'anthropophagie se développe en Italie, dans les années de plomb, et présente des œuvres plus ou moins réussies — on retient les noms d'Umberto Lenzi et surtout de Ruggero Deodato. Ce genre présente une quadruple origine. Il est d'abord le prolongement du cinéma ''Mondo'', où affleurent çà et là, depuis *Monde cane* (1962) de Jacopetti et Prosperi, et surtout avec les films des frères Castiglioni, la question du cannibalisme. Les ''Mondo Movies'' sont le plus souvent désignés comme des « films qui se veulent documentaires mais réalisés sans aucune éthique documentariste, mélange de scènes réelles prises sur le vif et de séquences bidonnées. »[18] Le genre du film cannibale hérite également du cinéma gore qui, depuis *Blood Feast* (1963) d'Hershell Gordon Lewis, fait de la cruauté et de la crudité de l'acte sanglant un spectacle à part entière. Il est aussi une variation plus réaliste que fantastique du film de zombies. Mais davantage encore, il s'inspire depuis longtemps du film de jungle, duquel il tient ses racines les plus profondes et duquel il tirera sa dimension politique.

Avant même de voir poindre les premiers films cannibales, ce sont effectivement les films de jungle qui sont à la mode en Amérique ; ces films qui mettent en scène des explorateurs blancs aux prises avec les dangers d'une Afrique encore inconnue, le tout au moment même où le continent subit de larges transformations physiques tout aussi bien que spirituelles sous l'impulsion des pays européens qui redessinent ses frontières, également de l'église de plus en plus influente par le biais de missions dites « civilisatrices ».[19]

L'Amérique du début du XX^{ème} siècle est largement conservatrice. Les acteurs noirs sont cantonnés à des rôles stéréotypés et parfaitement dégradants,[20] et les grands studios hollywoodiens aident à consolider une vision raciste de peur de voir les financiers se désinvestir de tournages de plus en plus coûteux.[21]

Dans des films comme *Tarzan of the Apes* (1918) de Scott Sidney et surtout le film éponyme daté de 1932 de W. S. Van Dyke, le cannibale n'est jamais nettement désigné comme tel, la consommation de chair humaine, graphiquement trop violente, n'est pas plus montrée. Car ici tous les noirs, tous les « sauvages », sont des cannibales en puissance, comme confirme l'amoncellement de crânes ou de marmites bouillantes. Le public de l'époque n'est pas dupe : les termes « sauvages » et « cannibales » sont interchangeables.[22]

Van Dyke filme volontiers la supériorité supposée de l'occidental, tant dans sa façon de s'habiller que dans son élégance ou sa perspicacité… Et Tarzan, de par sa qualité d'homme blanc, intelligent et athlétique, surpasse l'africain comme le cannibale. Le film de jungle ne peut dès lors exister que s'il met en scène deux mondes qui se rencontrent, s'étrillent et ne peuvent, en aucun cas, entrer en communication.

Le film de cannibales italien apparaît dans les années 1970. Le premier film cannibale est, chronologiquement, *Man from Deep River* d'Umberto Lenzi (1972), mais le plus emblématique est, sans doute, *Cannibal Holocaust* de Ruggero Deodato (1979).

Ces films se caractérisent par plusieurs éléments communs : ils laissent de côté l'exotisme africain pour se tourner du côté de l'Amérique du sud ou de l'Asie, ce qui permet aux réalisateurs une économie conséquente quant aux cachets d'acteurs. Ils sortent sur les écrans en promettant de relater des faits réels (*Natura contro*, Antonio Climati, 1988, *Cannibal Holocaust*). Ils multiplient les images violentes, voire gores, y compris des images — non simulées — d'animaux tués par et pour la caméra. Finalement, leur qualité est critiquable et critiquée. Beaucoup de ces films utilisent des images d'archives tournées dans des pays exotiques comme pouvaient le faire les films de jungle des dizaines d'années auparavant ; des images qui peuvent se retrouver d'un film à l'autre, montées dans un ordre différent, et soulignent le manque d'argent de ces productions.

La plupart des films cannibales italiens mettent en scène un certain nombre d'observateurs : le journaliste qui couvre de manière complaisante l'irruption de la violence dans un pays dominé par un climat de terreur, se délectant des crimes, des rapts (comme celui d'Aldo Moro en 1978) ; l'universitaire qui sait comment fonctionne le monde avant même

d'en faire l'expérience. La rencontre avec les cannibales souligne précisément cet écart : l'arrogance des jeunes reporters aventuriers n'aura d'égal que la brutalité et la rapidité avec laquelle les sauvages les dévoreront.

Cannibal Holocaust raconte l'enquête d'un anthropologue parti à la recherche d'un groupe de journalistes perdus en Amazonie. Il comprend que le groupe a été dévoré par les indigènes quand il trouve les rushs de leur documentaire. Ce reportage brut présenté sans montage, véritable film dans le film, est progressivement dévoilé au spectateur qui découvre toute la barbarie des occidentaux avant d'assister à leur massacre anthropophagique. Les indiens ont mangé les blancs, « moins pour le plaisir de dévorer tel ou tel que pour celui de le vomir. »[23] Comme l'explique Deodato :

> Je voulais faire un film sur le voyeurisme. […] J'ai déclaré la guerre aux médias en me servant de leurs armes. Chaque fois que j'allumais la télé, je tombais sur des émissions faisant un étalage morbide de meurtres, de viols et d'autres actes violents commis en Italie […]. J'en ai eu ras-le-bol et j'ai décidé de prendre les armes et de contre-attaquer. Je me suis promis de faire le film le plus violent qui soit et de le jeter à la figure de ce public féru d'images malsaines […].[24]

On oublie aujourd'hui le contexte dans lequel est sorti *Cannibal Holocaust*, et, surtout, le jeu de Deodato avec son public. Bon nombre de spectateurs pensent alors que le film présenté à l'intérieur du film est réel. D'autres rumeurs affirment que les acteurs sont bien morts, tous tués par Deodato en personne. Ils ont signé des contrats leur interdisant d'apparaître dans les medias afin d'accréditer la thèse de leur disparition.[25]

Le jeu entre mensonge et vérité met le spectateur dans une position délicate. Il ne sait plus ce qui relève de la fiction, ou du réel. Les animaux tués dans le film le sont véritablement, mais qu'en est-il des hommes ? Comment le spectateur peut-il *consommer* ces images sans s'interroger sur sa propre pulsion scopique ? Se rend-il compte que le film ne vise qu'à le placer face à ses contradictions ? *Cannibal Holocaust* apparaît comme un film cannibale qui finit par dévorer le spectateur lui-même.

Réalisé un an après, *Cannibal Ferox* de Lenzi reprendra l'idée d'un cannibalisme de vengeance tout en insistant sur la fascination *et* la répulsion qu'inspire l'acte anthropophagique. Gloria Davis, jeune thésarde, part en Amérique du sud prouver que le cannibalisme

comme rite social n'a jamais existé en tant que tel — c'est la thèse de l'anthropologue William Arens.[26] Le film, là encore, prouve la nécessité d'un cannibalisme — réel ou symbolique — face à l'attitude violente et scandaleuse du civilisé. Là encore, quoique de façon moins subtile que dans *Cannibal Holocaust*, le spectateur est impliqué dans le dispositif filmique, au point que son désir de se délecter d'images atroces lui est offert en spectacle.

3. CANNIBALISME ET POLITIQUE

Conjointement à l'élaboration de ce genre qu'est le film de cannibales, de nombreux films vont aborder la question du cannibalisme sans en passer par le truchement exotique d'un pays lointain. Mais un film comme *Cannibal Holocaust* visait davantage notre modernité qu'il ne développait un souci ethnographique pour des peuplades reculées ; il regardait davantage le spectateur qu'il ne présentait à celui-ci une réalité adverse coupée de la sienne. C'est en effet le civilisé — et la civilisation dans son modèle occidental — qui est souvent visé et dénoncé comme cannibale. Toute une dimension politique accompagne ainsi les films qui présentent des pratiques anthropophagiques, que ce soit sur un mode réaliste ou symbolique.

Ces films se situent « après Auschwitz », Auschwitz n'étant ici que le nom du mal absolu — dans des formes parfois ''banales'' — qui se décline de façon diverses et répétée tout au long du XXè siècle. Nous sommes entrés dans un temps où la réalité a dépassé la fiction. On sait que l'être civilisé et cultivé peut être un loup pour l'homme, c'est-à-dire un cannibale. Les discours de domination des puissants sont désormais visés : dénonciation de l'impérialisme, de la colonisation, puis bientôt de la mondialisation ; critique de la société de consommation et de la société du spectacle ; critique du capitalisme et de la bourgeoisie ; …

Autour de 1968 surgissent un peu partout des mouvements de contestation politique et culturelle, qui vont reprendre ou développer ces discours de protestation. En 1967, Jean-Luc Godard tourne *Week-end* : un film « méchant »,[27] *inconsommable*. Le film montre un couple représentatif d'une bourgeoisie hautaine, acculturée, violente et réactionnaire. Il présente le comble du progrès de la civilisation dominante, plongeant le spectateur dans le chaos d'un ordre politique où règne l'individualisme. La dérive des deux personnages monstrueux,

toujours prêts à "*bouffer*" voisins et parents, à assassiner pour leur profit, connaîtra un point d'arrêt. Ils finissent capturés par une tribu rebelle, le Front de Libération de la Seine et Oise, sortes d'Iroquois cannibales ou d'hippies révolutionnaires qui mangent leurs congénères bourgeois. Le mari sera dévoré par sa femme et le chef de la tribu affirmera : « on ne peut dépasser l'horreur de la bourgeoisie que par plus d'horreur encore ». Film désespéré sur un monde où les hommes n'ont d'autre solution que de s'entredévorer, *Week-end* semble également ouvrir la voie à toute une série de films à dominante politique qui reprendront la figure du cannibalisme pour critiquer la société moderne capitaliste ou l'impérialisme mondialisé. On constate d'ailleurs, dans cette utilisation le plus souvent métaphorique de l'anthropophagie, que la figure du cannibale est double et suscite une visée contradictoire : il s'agit de dénoncer l'oppresseur (le patron, le puissant, le bourgeois) comme un cannibale, ou bien de cannibaliser ce dernier pour lutter contre sa toute-puissance. Cannibales anti-bourgeois contre anthropophages capitalistes — violence contre brutalité.

Deux films brésiliens sont également remarquables. *Macunaíma*, de Joaquim Pedro de Andrade (1969), et *Qu'il était bon mon petit Français*, de Nelson Pereira dos Santos (1971), appartiennent au *cinema nôvo* des années soixante, qui questionne l'identité nationale brésilienne. Le *cinema nôvo* relève d'une *esthétique de la faim* où la violence est affirmée comme le signe de la dignité retrouvée d'un peuple affamé. Ces films *tropicalistes* ont souvent recours à la métaphore anthropophagique. *Macunaíma* est l'« histoire d'un Brésilien qui a été mangé par le Brésil »,[28] une histoire qui doit être « regardée dans ces temps anthropophagiques où le Brésil se met à manger de plus en plus les Brésiliens »[29] : à travers l'existence et les métamorphoses du héros Macunaíma, homme sans qualité qui ne cesse de changer de couleur de peau, on observe le destin du brésilien qui est d'être dévoré par les puissants de son propre pays, métaphore d'une aliénation et d'une censure qui réduit la population à la pauvreté et les artistes à l'impuissance. Ce sont les fondements mêmes de la société moderne brésilienne qui relève ainsi d'un cannibalisme qui a contaminé toutes les formes de rapports sociaux et de consommation.

> Toute consommation est, en dernière analyse, réductible au cannibalisme. Les relations de travail comme les relations entre personnes, les relations sociales, politiques et économiques sont encore fondamentalement anthropophagiques.[30]

Dans le film de dos Santos, il s'agit d'un français qui a échappé à Villegagnon (dit « le cannibale ») pour se retrouver prisonnier d'une tribu anthropophage qui finira par le manger.[31] Le français se mêle aux coutumes locales au point de comprendre et, en un sens, d'accepter son sort. Le film défend cette fois un principe d'intégration, en lien avec le concept positif d'*anthropophagie* développé dans les années vingt:[32]

> L'anthropophagie […] est un processus culturel par lequel le colonisé s'approprie la culture du colonisateur et la transforme, que ce soit par la distorsion, que ce soit par la juxtaposition d'éléments culturels absolument dissemblables, en faisant ainsi une source de production culturelle originale.[33]

Le cannibalisme apparaît ainsi paradoxalement comme une menace *et* comme une nécessité culturelle et identitaire.

On retrouve cette contradiction dans *Porcherie* de Pasolini. Ce film se présente comme un diptyque : d'un côté un cannibalisme primitif où le sauvage anarchiste et cannibale interprété par Pierre Clémenti incarne la désobéissance totale et l'affranchissement de la Loi — à savoir la loi du père, dans la tradition freudienne de *Totem et Tabou* ; de l'autre un cannibalisme froid et inhumain, dissimulé sous les masques d'un néo-capitalisme que Pasolini assimile à une porcherie — et qui finit par dévorer Julien (Jean-Pierre Léaud). Tout le film fonctionne par opposition de deux destinées parallèles et antinomiques, comme deux films ou deux *mystères* juxtaposés : l'épisode du désert ou *Orgia*, et celui de l'Allemagne contemporaine ou *Porcile* ; une face primitive et une face civilisée : deux formes de barbarie radicalement opposées. On retrouve la méthode comparatiste propre à la pensée humaniste où le cannibalisme tient une place centrale.

Le cannibalisme est un système sémiologique. Il faut lui restituer, ici, toute sa valeur

> allégorique : un symbole de la révolte portée à ses plus extrêmes conséquences. C'est une forme d'extrémisme, d'un extrémisme poussé à la limite du scandale, de la rébellion, de l'horreur. C'est aussi un système d'échanges, ou, si l'on préfère, de refus total, donc une forme de langage, de refus monstrueux de la communication communément acceptée par les hommes.[34]

Il s'agit pour le poète de récuser la société capitaliste ou néo-capitalisme, ce nouvel ordre établi dans la continuité de l'Allemagne nazie où l'argent est désormais le seul idéal. « Il me paraît important d'expliquer que, malgré son apparence plus civile, plus humaniste, le néo-capitalisme n'est pas ''meilleur'' que l'ancien. Mon film est une condamnation — parfois explicite, parfois implicite — de la société capitaliste. »[35] Pasolini affirmait que le véritable contenu politique de *Porcherie* était un désenchantement désespéré à l'égard de toutes les sociétés, présentes ou passées, évoquant même le concept d' « anarchie apocalyptique ». Dans ce film, toutes les sociétés se dévorent ou sont dévorées. Comme Godard, Pasolini a voulu faire un film *inconsommable*, contre la culture de masse.

Ce cinéma d'auteur touche ainsi à la question de l'horreur — comme le film de Godard, celui de Pasolini est un film de provocation qui montre des meurtres, un viol, des têtes coupées, aussi bien que du cannibalisme —, une horreur montrée dans sa crudité, sa cruauté même. C'est l'occasion d'interroger à nouveau un cinéma d'horreur souvent dénigré qui mêle pourtant cannibalisme et politique d'une façon singulière : le film « hillbilly », qui désigne un « bouseux » ou un « cul-terreux ».

Le film hillbilly est typiquement américain. Il s'ancre dans un contexte socio-politique et géographique exclusif : le sud des Etats-Unis — Texas, Virginie, le désert du Nouveau Mexique, etc. —, un sud non pas réel mais volontairement caricatural. Les films mettent en scène des familles de cannibales, créatures dégénérées, sales, malades. Le film hillbilly présente une dichotomie parfaitement simple : celle d'une poursuite de personnes belles, riches, les « beautiful people » que vantent les magazines, par des hommes et des femmes misérables — *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (1986) s'ouvre sur l'exécution sanglante de jeune gens riches et sans soucis, caricatures du "yuppie" américain qui méprise un sud qu'il estime encore à l'âge de pierre.

Les films hillbilly assument leur discours parodique, poussent encore l'exagération, accumulant les symboles les plus lourds, les situations les plus délirantes, la provocation simple et gratuite. Ces films montrent des cannibales dissimulés aux yeux du commun des mortels, cachés au fond des bois, terrés dans des tunnels labyrinthiques et répugnants. Ceux-ci gardent des trophées humains, crânes et squelettes, ils accumulent, volent ; se vengent, en somme, d'une société qui, si elle avait la moindre idée de leur existence, les exècrerait. Ces créatures tiennent à la fois de l'animal de proie et, ironiquement, de l'américain armé prêt à la violence pour assurer la protection de son foyer ou de sa propriété. C'est donc bien un

sous-texte politique que l'on trouve dans ces films qui se moquent d'une Amérique conservatrice qui n'a plus rien ou presque à entretenir. Et si ces films sont américains, sans l'ombre d'un doute, c'est qu'ils s'échinent à éreinter l'un des thèmes les plus éminents de la pensée comme de la littérature américaine : le voyage — ici interrompu à coup de masse, de bâton, de couteau, comme un rêve américain qu'on aplatit sans effort, preuve de son inconséquence et de son irréalité pour une masse silencieuse.

Cette critique passe essentiellement par une réflexion sur le temps, le passé qui emprisonne ces individus doublement : d'une part parce qu'ils sont des bêtes sauvages affaiblis par les relations consanguines et devenus, pour la plupart attardés ou enfantins — « leatherface », le personnage principal de *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* est filmé comme un enfant capricieux ; d'autre part parce que l'histoire récente de leur pays a pu exacerber chez eux leurs côtés les plus cruels — c'est le cas de Chop Top (Bill Moseley) dans *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, revenu traumatisé par son séjour au Vietnam.

C'est vers cette idée de passé toujours réactivé que revient Jonathan Liebesman dans *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre : The Beginning* (2006) qui fait tomber deux frères, l'un soldat revenu du Vietnam et prêt à y repartir, l'autre cherchant à fuir la guerre, dans les griffes de cannibales. Liebesman ramène l'horreur sur le territoire américain, en occident, donc, et rappelle que la violence, quelle que soit sa justification morale, patriotique ou même philosophique, est une imposture — le titre cruellement franc *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* pour *Massacre à la Tronçonneuse* sonne aussi bien comme le titre d'un texte programmatique que comme un refus d'édulcorer tout ce que l'époque a à proposer à sa jeunesse.

Ces films mettent tous en lumière des familles, symboles de sociétés alternatives et, surtout, allégorie bien pratique d'une Amérique elle-même féroce. Un réalisateur fait toutefois ici figure d'exception : Herschell Gordon Lewis, cinéaste radical, coutumier des productions fauchées et pionnier du Gore au cinéma avec *Blood Feast* (1963). Herschell Gordon Lewis est un habitué du film hillbilly avec, par exemple, *Two Thousand Maniacs !* (1964). *Blood Feast* tourné un an plus tôt est plus singulier puisqu'il met en scène, pour la première fois, un cannibale seul, meurtrier solitaire. Fuad Ramses, traiteur exotique, tue ses victimes pour satisfaire la divinité Ishtar, et les donne à manger à ses clients. Le réalisateur insiste sur l'aspect étranger de l'assassin, seul au milieu d'une petite ville américaine conservatrice et religieuse, et se moque de façon outrancière de la tolérance américaine.

A mesure que l'on sort de ces années ''politiques'', le cinéma va transformer la figure collective du cannibale en une figure individualisée. Il semble ainsi qu'avec le recul du politique, ce soit désormais le corps individuel qui prenne en charge tout un pouvoir de transgression ou de subversion. Deux types de cannibales se dessinent alors : le meurtrier et l'amant, parfois indissociables. L'individu se retrouve face à un désir cannibale qui fait de son propre corps un corps extrême et hors-la-loi, transgressant les interdits mais parvenant par là même à une nouvelle connaissance — aussi inédite que scandaleuse, aussi fascinante que répugnante — de l'autre.

4. PULSIONS CANNIBALES

Si les meurtriers cannibales comme Sawney Bean, Issei Sagawa ont inspiré bon nombre de films (Bean : *Death Line*, 1972 ; *Hillside Cannibals*, 2006 ; Sagawa : *Adoration ou la Transsubstantiation*, 1986), le spectateur retient surtout le personnage d'Hannibal Lecter.

La série de films entamée par Jonathan Demme avec *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) joue pleinement sur l'idée de saveur, de fumet, sur une atmosphère de charme et de décontraction : la recherche du plaisir, en somme. Hannibal Lecter, tueur en série et personnage monstrueux, est un homme du monde et un fin gourmet. Il peut donner à manger de la chair humaine à ses invités à leur insu, augmentant ainsi son plaisir ; c'est une dégustation horrifique qui prend la place du rituel païen (*Red Dragon*, 2002). Le cannibale n'est plus le « sauvage », créature ni plus cruelle qu'une bête tuant afin de se nourrir, mais l'homme de culture qui brise volontairement l'un des interdits les plus irréfragables de notre société. Sa culture est classique : il aime l'art, la littérature ou l'opéra, comme on peut le voir dans *Hannibal* (2001), film en partie tourné à Florence.

Il faut également souligner le cas du cannibale allemand Armin Meiwes dont la vie est rapidement passée à l'écran. *Grimm Love* (2006) montre deux individus ordinaires, jamais effrayants. L'un va dévorer l'autre avec son accord, sans meurtre ou pression d'aucune sorte. Le tueur n'a rien à voir avec le résultat d'une lignée consanguine, il n'est pas idiot, abruti par les tares génétiques, il ne possède aucune force hors du commun. C'est un universitaire, un intellectuel. *Grimm Love* est avant tout l'histoire d'une rencontre sans contrainte : la victime est volontaire, le ''plaisir'' est partagé. *Grimm Love* ne raconte pas un homicide au sens strict

du terme et interroge le spectateur, comme le citoyen, sur la liberté de l'homme à disposer de son corps, bien que celui-ci soit un malade mental, jusqu'au désir de castration et de mort.

Le film fait le lien entre la pulsion cannibale criminelle et une pulsion cannibale d'ordre érotique. On pourrait en formuler le principe ainsi : aimer l'autre, c'est aimer manger l'autre. Depuis les récits mythologiques aux faits divers les plus actuels, le désir humain peut souvent s'apparenter à un « désir cannibale ».[36] Sigmund Freud et après lui Karl Abraham, avaient introduit l'idée d'une pulsion cannibalique dans le développement psychosexuel d'un individu, allant parfois jusqu'à confondre le stade cannibalique avec le stade oral. Le terme de *cannibalique* « exprime de façon imagée les différentes dimensions de l'incorporation orale : amour, destruction, conservation à l'intérieur de soi et appropriation des qualités de l'objet. »[37]

Le lien entre sexe et nourriture sera souvent mis en évidence. On parle ainsi de faim ou d'appétit sexuel.[38] Claire Denis montrera dans *Trouble every day* (2000) les conséquentes terrifiantes d'une pulsion sexuelle maladive, vampirique et absolument dévoratrice, en insistant sur le désir conjoint du ''mangeur'' et du ''mangé''. De manière très différente, Peter Greenaway, qui s'intéresse au lien qui unit sexualité et nourriture, tourne *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover* (1989), dans lequel il ajoute le motif du cannibalisme. Le film s'achève sur le meurtre de l'amant donné à manger par l'amante à son monstrueux mari. Ce film est une variation sur le motif littéraire, issu du Moyen Âge, du *cœur mangé*.[39] Il s'agit le plus souvent d'histoires adultérines où le mari trompé donne à manger à sa femme le cœur de son amant ; la vengeance de l'un se change pour l'autre, une fois l'horreur dépassée, en une absorption fusionnelle et définitive du cœur de l'aimé, qui lui appartient alors à jamais.

Deux films vont directement illustrer le principe d'une dévoration passionnelle : *La Chair* (1991) de Marco Ferreri et *Chamanka* (1996) d'Andrezj Zulawski. Ils illustrent à leur façon — l'un sur un mode parodique et mystique, l'autre sur un mode passionnel et hystérique — cette impossibilité de se séparer de l'autre aimé, faisant du sujet adorant-dévorant ce que Pierre Fédida a nommé le « cannibale mélancolique ». Ce dernier « porte la vocation imaginaire de ne jamais perdre l'*autre* »,[40] cet autre qui reste pourtant absolument séparé de soi. Comme l'écrit Fédida, « le cannibalisme comprend cette agressivité présente à l'angoisse elle-même de perdre l'objet d'amour et de l'anéantir plutôt que d'y renoncer en s'en détachant.[41] » Le cannibalisme est ainsi l'expression mythique d'un deuil mélancolique où « le plus sûr moyen de se préserver de la perte de l'objet est de le détruire pour le maintenir vivant ».[42]

En élargissant la question et en sortant du fait clinique, nous retrouvons la fameuse formule de Lévi-Strauss : « Nous sommes tous des cannibales. Le moyen le plus simple d'identifier autrui à soi-même, c'est encore de le manger. »[43] Fernando Arrabal en présente une illustration à la fin de son film, *J'irai comme un cheval fou* (1973), où l'ingestion complète de l'autre — l'autre aimé, que l'ermite mange et embrasse tout à la fois — entraîne la renaissance de l'être dévoré : « Oui Aden, je te mangerai jusqu'à ton dernier os, pour communier avec ton essence. Je reçois le corps de ton corps pour les siècles des siècles et je t'enfanterai dans la douleur. » On retrouve ici une dimension religieuse, celle du sacrement eucharistique, comme dans *La Chair* de Ferreri qui mêlait l'acte cannibalique final du père avec la communion catholique du fils.[44] Comme il est écrit dans *L'Evangile selon Saint Jean* :

> En vérité, en vérité, je vous le dis,
> si vous ne mangez la chair du Fils de l'homme
> et ne buvez son sang, vous n'aurez pas la vie en vous.
> Qui mange ma chair et boit mon sang a la vie éternelle
> et je le ressusciterai au dernier jour.
> Car ma chair est vraiment une nourriture
> et mon sang vraiment une boisson.
> Qui mange ma chair et boit mon sang
> demeure en moi
> et moi en lui.[45]

Citant ce passage, Georges Didi-Huberman souligne d'ailleurs le lien de la communion eucharistique avec la communion amoureuse et sexuelle, qualifiant ces phrases évangéliques de « Phrases sexuellement abyssales » : « Phrases d'amour mystique, c'est-à-dire porteuses d'une totale voracité : aime-moi, viens en moi, demeure en moi — *mange-moi*. Et tu jouiras éternellement. »[46]

Enfin, si aimer l'autre, ou connaître l'autre, consiste à le manger, alors le *connais-toi toi-même* socratique peut être assimilé à un acte autophagique. C'est ce que raconte le film de Marina de Van, *Dans ma peau* (2002). Sévèrement blessée à la jambe, Esther va s'intéresser à sa plaie comme si s'ouvrait ainsi un accès à son propre corps : bientôt, elle suce son sang, mange sa plaie, tanne des morceaux de peau,… Si la dimension sexuelle et clinique n'est évi-

demment pas absente, c'est la découverte de soi qui alimente cette pulsion, où se connaître soi-même suppose cette auto-dévoration du corps propre, dans une relation quasi-mystique. Ceci est mon corps — *Hoc est enim corpus meum*. On trouverait ici le point nodal d'un amour de l'humanité pour elle-même — alimentant et léchant ses propres plaies —, qui serait assimilable à une pulsion cannibalique — entre réalité et symbole. A l'image du principe théophagique, l'humanité se préserverait et apprendrait à se connaître en s'auto-dévorant. Il s'agit ainsi, « selon le principe sauvage d'une véritable anthropophagie », comme l'écrit Didi-Huberman,

> de penser *le corps qui mange comme devenant cela même qu'il mange*, à savoir une substance de grâce divine. Mangez-vous les uns les autres, vous qui êtes les membres de ce grand corps du dieu que vous vous devez d'incorporer en sacrement. Tel serait l'énoncé impératif de cette forme d'amour et de cette alliance vorace avec le dieu – un amour, une alliance de chair mangée et de sang bu.[47]

Et si le cinéma portait en lui ce désir absolu et théophagique ? Et si ce désir de tout voir, de filmer les interdits, mais également d'incorporer une humanité en devenir dans un grand corps imaginaire, n'était au fond un désir sacré du cinéma : celui de mêler tous ces corps dans un grand carnaval cannibale ? *Cannibale* serait ainsi ce cinéma toujours prêt à se repaître des corps filmés — pour le meilleur ou pour le pire.

Le cinéma n'a pas seulement renouvelé l'approche du cannibalisme dans sa pluralité. Nouvelle hostie d'une réalité à rédimer, il donne à manger ses images — et l'on pourrait élargir ce constat à toute forme d'image animée (vidéo, télévisuelle,…). Dans son désir, proche d'un voyeurisme, de capturer l'humain (le vivant) dans l'image, le cinéma *mange l'homme* : les corps filmés sont dévorés par la caméra qui se repaît de la figure humaine — pour mieux l'identifier, le connaître, aurait dit Lévi-Strauss. Le cinéma pose ainsi, quant au *savoir* sur le cannibalisme, la question du *voir* : il interroge notre pulsion scopique en l'assimilant à une pulsion cannibale. Ce n'est pas le cannibalisme qui choque ou attire, mais le fait de le montrer et de le regarder. *Cannibal Holocaust* en déconstruisait le principe, et *Grimm love* nous en a rappelé la réalité : nous voyons un film sur une jeune chercheuse qui veut voir la vidéo tournée par le cannibale. C'est ce désir, peut-être, plus que tout, qui intéresse et hante le cinéma.

En effet, le cannibalisme intéresse le cinéma parce qu'il pointe, non seulement un désir, mais aussi une inquiétude : celle qui voudrait que l'acte de filmer, repris par celui de regarder, soit un acte de dévoration. Une dévoration malsaine, inhumaine, barbare. C'est un principe propre au cannibalisme : manger l'autre, c'est le tuer. Comment se manger les uns les autres dans la joie ? Que l'on pense à la fable des *Cannibales* de Manoel de Oliveira (1988), film mystérieux qui semble autant nous regarder que nous le regardons : à l'horreur d'avoir mangé de l'humain *sans le savoir*, succède un final carnavalesque et cannibalique où se manifeste la joie festive des transformations. Dans une tradition que l'on pourrait qualifier de « tropicaliste », tout spectacle culturel est aussi anthropographique qu'anthropophagique.

Le cannibalisme interroge et analyse les limites (les bords, les frontières) de l'humanité de l'Homme. C'est pourquoi le cinéma, qui contrairement à d'autres médias sait aussi réfléchir sur ses propres pouvoirs, a souvent observé ce phénomène humain-inhumain. Exprimant tout à la fois sa hantise et son désir, il a su, souvent avec succès, affronter des questions dérangeantes à une époque où toute une tradition de pensée, que l'on dit humaniste, était confrontée à la réalité de son désaveu. Il est sûr que la question restera ouverte, et que le cinéma aura encore à interroger cette pratique, aussi réelle que symbolique, qui le concerne — comme il *nous* concerne — de si près.[48]

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1. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques* (Paris: Plon, 1955), 463.

2. Georges Bataille, *L'Érotisme* (1957; Paris: Minuit, 2011), 75.

3. L'ouvrage de Martin Monestier, *Cannibales. Histoire et bizarreries de l'anthropophagie* (Paris: Le Cherche Midi, 2000), en fait une recension exhaustive.

4. Claude Lévi-Strauss, « Nous sommes tous des cannibales », *Cahier de L'Herne* 82 (Paris: L'Herne, 2004), 34-36.

5. Alain Daniélou, *Mythes et Dieux de l'Inde / Le Polythéisme Hindou* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009), 211.

6. Maître Eckhart, *Les Sermons* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2009), 110.

7. Voir Merrall Llewelyn Price, *Consuming Passions: The Uses of Cannibalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Londres: Routledge, 2011), 2.

8. Sur le lien entre catholicisme et cannibalisme, voir Franck Lestringant, *Le Huguenot et le sauvage* (Genève: Droz, 2004), 441, ou « Catholiques et cannibales. Le thème du cannibalisme dans le discours protestant au temps des guerres de Religion », in *Pratiques et discours alimentaires à la Renaissance*, éd. J.-C. Margolin et R. Sauzet (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1982), 233-45.

9. « […] the mystic and philosopher Simone Weil (1909 - 1943) describes ''the beauty of the world'' as the ''mouth of a labyrinth'', at the center of which ''God is waiting to eat'' the lovers of beauty, but only to transform them. » — Ann W. Astell, *Eating Beauty: The Eucharist And the Spiritual Arts of the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 5.

10. Voir Franck Lestringuant, *Le Cannibale. Grandeur et décadence* (Paris: Perrin, 1994).

11. Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques*, 463.

12. Roland Villeneuve, *Histoire du cannibalisme* (Paris: Le Livre Club du Libraire, 1965), 52.

13. Voir Jean de Léry, *Histoire d'un voyage en terre de Brésil*, éd. Franck Lestringuant (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994), 376.

14. Montaigne, *Essais. Livre I* (Paris: GF-Flammarion, 1969), 259.

15. Ibid., 258.

16. Voir Voltaire, « Anthropophages », *Dictionnaire philosophique*, éd. Raymond Naves et Olivier Ferret (Paris: Éditions Classiques Garnier, 2008), 27-28.

17. Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques*, 464.

18. Voir l'ouvrage de référence sur le sujet : Sébastien Gayraud et Maxime Lachaud, *Reflets dans un œil mort. Mondo Movies et films de cannibales* (Paris: Bazaar, 2010), 17.

19. Voir Aylward Shorter, *Cross and Flag in Africa: The "White Fathers" During the Colonial Scramble (1892-1914)* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), xxi.

20. Voir Cedric J. Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film before World War II* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

21. Voir Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film (Culture And The Moving Image)* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1993).

22. Voir Alex Vernon, *On Tarzan* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008).

23. Emil Michel Cioran, *De l'Inconvénient d'être né* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 194.

24. Entretien avec Ruggero Deotato, *Mad Movies* 162, cité in Gayraud et Lachaud, *Reflets dans un œil mort*, 137.

25. *Cinema Inferno: Celluloid Explosions from the Cultural Margins* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 86.

26. Voir le débat qui oppose l'anthropologue William Arens à ses confrères quant à la réalité du cannibalisme comme rite institué et sanctionné par la société dans William Arens, *Rethinking Anthropology, Cannibalism and the Colonial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

27. « C'est un film qui déplaira sûrement à la majorité des spectateurs. Parce que c'est très méchant, grossier, caricatural. » — propos de Godard cités dans Jean-Luc Douin, *Jean-Luc Godard* (1989; Paris: Rivages / Cinéma, 1994), 185.

28. Joaquim Pedro de Andrade cité dans *Le Cinéma brésilien*, dir. Paulo Antonio Paranagua (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1987), 100.

29. Ibid.

30. De Andrade cité dans *Le « cinema nôvo » brésilien. 2. Gláuber Rocha*, « Études cinématographiques » 97-99 (Paris: Minard, 1973), 45.

31. Il est la libre adaptation du récit de l'allemand Hans Staden, *Nus, féroces et anthropophages*, trad. Henri Ternaux Compans (Paris: Métailié, 2005), qui fut captif des Tuppinambas au XVIè siècle.

32. Voir le « Manifeste anthropophage » (1928) d'Oswald de Andrade in *Anthropophagies* (Paris: Flammarion, 1982).

33. Jean-Claude Bernardet, « Méandres de l'identité », in *Le Cinéma brésilien*, dir. Paulo Antonio Paranagua (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1987), 239.

34. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Entretiens avec Jean Duflot* (Montréal: Gutenberg, 2007), 115.

35. Pasolini interviewé dans *Le Monde* daté du 12-13 octobre 1969.

36. Voir Julien Picquart, *Notre désir cannibale. Du mythe aux faits divers* (Paris: La Musardine, 2011).

37. J. Laplanche et J.-B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de psychanalyse* (1967; Paris: Quadrige / PUF, 1998), 59.

38. Lévi-Strauss a ainsi montré que dans toutes les sociétés, « rapport sexuel et rapport alimentaire sont immédiatement pensés en similitude », une analogie le plus souvent logée dans le langage — voir *La Pensée sauvage* (Paris: Pocket-Agora, 1990), 129-30.

39 Voir l'ouvrage de Mariella di Maio, *Le Cœur mangé. Histoire d'un thème littéraire du Moyen Âge au XIXè siècle* (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2005).

40. Pierre Fédida, « Le cannibale mélancolique », in *L'Absence* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), 64.

41. Ibid. 65.

42. Ibid., 66.

43. Lévi-Strauss, *Nous sommes tous des cannibales* (Paris : Seuil, 2013).

44. Paolo, le personnage principal, s'écriera : « Je voulais la manger, je ne le pouvais pas sans la tuer. Nous sommes limités. On ne sait pas encore faire certains miracles. Pas un petit bout de Dieu : je voulais manger Dieu tout entier. »

45. *Je* 6,53-56.

46. Georges Didi-Huberman, « Disparates sur la voracité », in *Phasmes. Essais sur l'apparition* (Paris: Minuit, 1998), 178.

47. Ibid., 181.

48. Remerciements : Noëlle Batt et Nathalie Montoya.

A CANNIBAL'S SERMON: HANNIBAL LECTER, SYMPATHETIC VILLAINY AND MORAL REVALUATION

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If one does as God does enough times, one becomes as God is.

— HANNIBAL LECTER in *Manhunter* (1986)

A commonplace truism is that horror cinema provides a valuable — if not slightly risqué — opportunity for viewers to traffic in the perverse and the taboo. Specifically, one of horror's signature pleasures is its eagerness to give the devil his due. The monstrous, psychopathic, and altogether villainous are permitted to take center stage, and not always in the interests of the kind of homiletic instruction that is so instrumental to the melodramatic tradition. Instead, horror's distinct appeal is its promotion of our so-called identification with morally compromised, if not downright evil, characters. In an influential essay on our attachment to despicable individuals, Murray Smith advances the concept of *perverse allegiance* to describe our strange readiness to form sympathetic engagements with villainous fictional individuals. But unlike Smith — and many other aesthetic philosophers who have treated on the problem of attractive evil in fiction — I would like to advance the notion that viewers might occasionally form perverse allegiances with villainous characters in horror cinema *because of* — and not in spite of — their abhorrent natures.[1]

It is profitable to consider the problem of perverse allegiance in horror cinema as a kind of moral paradox. Phrased as a question, we might ask how is it that we come to form an allegiance with an immoral individual, especially given the prohibitions against condoning behaviour one knows to be despicable? Breaking this paradox into three independently valid but collectively conflicting premises, it is understood: *1) that a viewer feels sympathy for a character; 2) that the character in question is immoral; and 3) that the viewer ought not to sympathize with an immoral individual.* If we are to provide a solution to this paradox — that is, prove perverse allegiance to be a meritorious exercise in some way — we must demonstrate

that one of the above assumptions is a fallacy. For our purposes here, however, I would like to focus on the second premise and suggest that perverse allegiance with a villainous character can be a matter of *moral revaluation* — a term conceived by Friedrich Nietzsche to refer to the "hypermoral" reconfiguration of that which is consensually (and speciously) regarded as "good."[2] In other words, revaluation implies a complete reworking of a conventionally moral framework by an individual who transcends those limited ethical strictures.

I would like to focus on a pair of wildly popular films whose horror explicitly treats on the moral bankruptcy of various paternalist institutions, and the readiness of our investment in the specious good of the value systems they propagate. *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and *Hannibal* (2001) are two films that represent an instructive relationship between an evil mastermind *par excellence*, Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins), and a woman, Clarice Starling (Jodi Foster/Julianne Moore) who initially serves as a protégé but becomes something more like the villain's peer. My suggestion is that these entries in the Lecter franchise invite a truly perverse allegiance with its popular villain — an engagement that implies an examination, even reconsideration, of our internalisation of dominant Judeo-Christian ethics.

I am deliberately singling out these two films even though Lecter makes other filmic and televisual appearances, including two subsequent filmic instalments — both of which serve as prequels to *Silence*. The first is *Red Dragon* (2002) — a "reboot" of the earlier adaptation of Thomas Harris 1981 novel, *Manhunter* (1986), that retroactively retains the narrative continuity established in Demme's film (thus overwriting the previous incarnation of "Dr. Lektor" played by Brian Cox). The second is *Hannibal Rising* (2007), which features the criminal origins of a young Lecter (Gaspard Ulliel). The De Lauretiis Company also produces the ongoing *Hannibal* television series (2013-), in which Lecter is portrayed by Mads Mikkelsen and depicts the initial professional relationship between Lecter and *Red Dragon*'s protagonist, Special Investigator Will Graham. While each of these works are interesting in their own right — particularly the television series' representation of Graham's hyper-empathetic faculties as a debilitating psychic ailment — they arguably do not programmatically pursue the 1991 and 2001 films' concentrated investment in moral revaluation and sadistic tutelage. And with their predominant focus on male characters, they also lack these films' explicit investment in feminist challenges to the masculinist moral "good." Therefore, the related but differing philosophical ambitions of the other instalments in the ongoing Lecter multimedia franchise are beyond the scope of this essay.[3]

HORROR AND REVALUATION

Perverse allegiance is the acceptance of the villain on his own terms. It is the affirmation of Milton's Lucifer: in making evil one's good, one finds gratification in the villain because of, and not in spite of, her immorality. It is essential to note that such revaluation is not undertaken in order to minimise villainy's reprehensibility or explain it away. By that rationale, "the more compelling the motive for evil behaviour, the less evil the act. Ergo, evil isn't a discrete variable. There are degrees of evil, and these degrees can be negotiated. The more logical the reasons behind the act, the more likely that it's a 'necessary evil' — something done for larger purposes."[4] A villain's cruelty is not always an act of necessary evil, but it occasionally can be recognised as an important albeit neglected aspect of our conception of kindness.

In an enquiry into the potential "splendour" of evil, for example, Daniel Lyons investigates whether or not a villain may have admirable traits and concludes that there are occasions in which "aesthetic norms" ("the demands of honour" and "the code of achievement") might override moral norms ("the rules of decency" and "the code of beneficence").[5] *I Saw the Devil* (*Akmareul boatda*, 2010) provides a rather spectacular illustration of this argument: here, bereaved NIS agent Soo-hyun (Lee Byung-hun) visits a terrible vengeance upon a serial killer, Kyung-chul (Choi Min-sik), who has murdered his fiancée. Soo-hyun systematically tortures the murderer over a period of several days before finally arranging Kyung-chul's beheading — an execution unwittingly carried out by the murderer's own parents and child. Determining the splendour of a villain (or in the case of *I Saw the Devil*, an anti-hero) becomes a matter of deciding whether or not a particular situation merits the prioritising of honour and/or achievement over decency and beneficence. And of course, while a text may prioritise aesthetic norms before moral norms, a viewer is certainly free to resist this assertion of priorities, or vice-versa.

Although Lyons does not make explicit reference to the moral philosophy of Nietzsche, his approach has definite affinities with Nietzsche's didactic assault on Christian values. Accusing Christian spirituality of a hopeless "decadence" — that is, of moral obsolescence in the present age — Nietzsche's ambition is to promote the revaluation of honour, pride, personal achievement, and self-prioritisation over the repressive values of Christian altruism, selflessness, unconditional love, and humility, which he regards as tantamount to self-denigration. Just as Lyons assesses whether or not a film's aesthetic norms of honour and

achievement outweigh the moral norms of decency and beneficence, so too does Nietzsche demand that his readers consider whether the latter should always be prized over the former. What is remarkable about Nietzsche's project is the means by which he strives to revalue these apparently "aesthetic" values in moral terms. As some of Nietzsche's role models include Julius Caesar, Napoleon, and Goethe — all figures who he valorises for their lack of pity — it is clear that the Christian doctrines of meekness and unconditional love are not to be unilaterally celebrated.

At the same time, however, it is important to stress that Nietzsche is not promoting an all-out ruthlessness. In *The Will to Power*, he posits "the Roman Caesar with the soul of Christ" as the ultimate ideal for mankind — a synthesis of the most drastically incompatible antitheses.[6] Before jumping to the easy conclusion that what Nietzsche is referring to is the need for the simultaneity of sympathy and hardness in individuals of power, and the sensible pursuit of "*Machtgefühl*" (the feeling of power that accompanies the prevailing over an obstacle), it must be remembered that Nietzsche describes Christ as an "idiot."[7] This is not at all to say that Nietzsche deplores Christ; on the contrary, he accords Jesus a great (albeit qualified) measure of respect. Specifically, he esteems the martyr's absence of resentful hate for his persecutors — an exemplar of Nietzsche's idealised morality, which is self-affirming, and does not issue from a resentment of the powerful. Within its context, the term "idiot" is used as a reaction to Ernest Renan's claim of Christ's "genius," and as part of Nietzsche's larger criticism of Pauline Christianity, which he regarded as a gross corruption of Christ's lack of resentment. Nevertheless, for Nietzsche, Christ's idiocy is equated with a fundamental weakness. Christ is made into a "veritable Ideal Type of weakness to whom not merely moralistic aggressiveness, but anything else indicating strength, was totally foreign" — hardly an ideal guide for the moral candidate who seeks an adequate and positive way to express her will to power.[8] Is it possible, then, for the tyrant and the weakling to converge within a single, venerable figure? What might such a figure be like?

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche proclaims that "what [a people] accounts as hard, it calls praiseworthy [...] and that which relieves the greatest need, the rare, the hardest of all — it glorifies as holy."[9] And nothing can be more difficult than the rational and tempered realisation of the will to power. In a particularly concise aphorism, Nietzsche indicates the folly of equating goodness with a lack of ruthlessness: "I believe you capable of any evil: therefore I desire of you the good. In truth, I have often laughed at the weaklings who think themselves

good because their claws are blunt."[10] Interestingly, it is aphorisms such as these that are counter-intuitively valued by certain contemporary Christian philosophers for challenging "the mediocrity of 'Christendom'" — in a manner not unlike Kierkegaard's insistent restoration of courage and difficulty to a faith rendered complacent through its hegemonic institutionalization.[11] However, Nietzsche's words here are also an admonishment to those who wield power — a demand for kindness from the powerful as their "final self-conquest." For the oft-discussed *übermensch*, kindness is the greatest of difficulties as it involves the suppression of the noble individual's will to power in the interests of mercy.[12]

It obviously would be untenable to suggest that horror cinema's frequently merciless villains could ever qualify as Nietzschean *übermenschen*. But it is possible to discuss one's perverse allegiance with them in accordance with the philosopher's notion of *revaluation* — the transformation of values typically regarded as morally laudable. Revaluation is not simply moral interrogation, nor ethical revisionism; it is a complete reordering of one's moral framework. "One thing is needful," Nietzsche exclaims, "— To 'give style' to one's character — a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weakness delights the eye."[13] Similarly, Christopher Hamilton asserts that "one of the most important things [art] can do is allow us to see a person's concrete, enacted attempt to achieve his own style," and that this enacted example may provide a potential model for our own "stylistic" endeavours.[14] "Style" is used here as a conflation of the character, quality and authenticity of one's ideals. Revaluation is conceived in this regard as a kind of aesthetic enterprise in which even repellent qualities are recognised as integral aspects of character. In John D. Caputo's words, Nietzsche is advocating for "a perverse totalization, an affirmation of the *whole* of life, of the position and the opposition, of creation and destruction, of joy and suffering, of pleasure and pain."[15] The goal of this "stylistic," and "perversely totalizing" self-recognition is inward reconciliation and self-contentment.

Hannibal Lecter, whatever else he is, is a profoundly self-contented individual, for what better way to put one's own demons to rest than by becoming one? As a demented aesthete, Lecter's *raison d'être* seems to be "to give style" to his character in the Nietzschean sense. His preoccupation with the finer things is reflective of this constructive process. Through the revaluation of virtue, he fashions himself into a figure in which the disparate qualities of

"good" and "evil" are realigned and ultimately reintegrated. This is a process that removes him from the normal sphere of ethics, rather than one that places him in opposition to the good. Unlike the rebel-hero — whose heroism is predicated upon the defiance of a corrupt social order, but through moral means only — the Nietzschean villain transcends conventional morality altogether by restructuring the dominant value system itself.

What is at stake in forming an allegiance with such a character? If Hannibal's actions are not motivated by a kind of moral sedition, might the pleasure we take from this character be a sign of some kind of rebelliousness on our part? In *Hannibal*, we are invited to ally ourselves with the film's eponymous antihero as he attempts to evade both re-incarceration by the FBI, as well as kidnapping and execution by his only surviving victim. While the film's textual indicators often delineate him as monstrous, various other textual strategies mitigate against us desiring both his capture and demise. I would like to argue that although the film prompts an intended perverse allegiance with a mass murderer, one might also fashion an unintended allegiance with Lecter that is even more "perverse" than the film's intended ambitions. Ridley Scott has asserted that *Hannibal* strives to invite a sympathetic engagement with Lecter, to create a desire to share in "his culture," until the psychotic antihero severs this attachment by revealing the depths of his depravities.[16] Thus, the film still maintains a sharp distinction between instances of sympathetic investment and antipathetic retreat. Therefore, an allegiance that does not comply with the general attitudinal thrust of the Hannibal films involves responding with pleasure to the character's reprehensible rather than "gentlemanly" qualities.

NOBLES AND SLAVES

Both *Silence* and *Hannibal* approach their representations of villainy through strategies of immersion — we are not kept at an ironic distance from the protagonists of these films. While it would be incorrect to assume that *Silence* and *Hannibal* intentionally share a wholly coherent moral vision (the films have different authors, separate circumstances of production and a decade spans their respective release dates), there is a certain amount of continuity between the two films. Principally, neither film shies away from the prospect of sympathetic allegiance with its principal sociopath. Indeed, *Hannibal*'s very aesthetic of presentation seems to be filtered

through the twisted sensibilities of its antihero. At the beginning of the film, a close-up on Lecter's iconic restraint mask — placed in a gift box and surrounded by tissue paper — announces a shift into his world. Throughout the opening credit montage, bizarre occurrences in Florence are captured by surveillance cameras: monuments appear out of thin air, pigeons appear to feast on flesh, and a flock of birds choreograph their amblings to form Lecter's face in the middle of a palazzo. All of these occurrences are captured in a series of jump cuts and in jerky time-lapse photography. The suggestion here is that the force of the principal character will be potent enough to overwrite the constraints of the moral law — allegorised as the all-seeing technological vision of the FBI. There is even a similar subtle clue as to where our allegiances should be placed at the beginning of *Silence of the Lambs* when Clarice (Jodi Foster) jogs past a series of signs on Quantico training grounds that read: "HURT AGONY PAIN LOVE IT." Could these signs serve as the recognition of illicit desires in the audience that the film wishes to tap into and release? Would sympathy for a mass murderer accomplish this goal?

Hannibal.

One way to approach this question might be to consider how the "noble" connotations of the villain's cruelty might actually represent humanity's reparations for the damage of a potentially life-denying Judeo-Christian morality. Such "nobility" is a reminder that alternative value systems that precede Christianity still exert residual (yet potent) influence. One of Nietzsche's most important contributions to moral philosophy is his determination to historicize ethical principles, which might otherwise run the risk of assuming universalist dimensions as "timeless" rules of conduct. Indeed, even certain contemporary Christian philosophers have come to value Nietzsche's efforts to reveal the occluded ideological valences within particular "transcendent" Christian values. John Caputo, for example, supports Nietzsche's argument "for the historical contingency of our constructions, the revisability and reformability of our

beliefs and practices, all of which […] are 'perspectives' we take on the world and that have emerged in order to meet the needs of life."[17] In this light, *On the Genealogy of Morality* suggests that noble values were initially established to distinguish the "powerful, high-stationed and high-minded" from the "low-minded, common and plebeian."[18] Interestingly, these values were also without moral connotation, as they were not attributed to the efforts of personal agency. Thus, the "low-minded" individual is not immoral; unlike the noble, he is merely denied the means to exercise his will to power. Nietzsche describes this mode of valuation as *master morality*, from which naturally sprang the resentment of the ignoble or, more precisely, the weak and powerless. In *The Gay Science*, he speaks both of the cruelty and innocence of this master morality.[19] However, "he did not tend to use the word *innocence* as the opposite of cruelty or as an incapacity of it, but as the absence of a bad conscience about it."[20] Indeed, a noble may look on the weak with contempt, but without hate, whereas slave morality is born of hatred as it is a product of the envy of the powerless towards the empowered.

As a means of wresting power, the disenfranchised give birth to a new system of values in a gradual process of creative *ressentiment*. Thus, the origins of "slave morality" — which declares all that is proud, strong, and self-affirming to be "evil" — are inherently reactionary and hence, parasitical: "the *ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge."[21] "Goodness" becomes just a euphemism for "weakness" and Christian values are exemplars of the slave morality Nietzsche has in mind (just as the values of Imperial Rome exemplify noble morality). "Christianity has taken the side of everything weak, base, ill-constituted," he claims. "It has made an ideal out of *opposition* to the preservative instincts of strong life."[22]

The value system in both *Silence of the Lambs* and *Hannibal* is connotative of this noble/slave dichotomy, especially in its juxtaposition of Lecter with high-ranking officials in various institutions: Dr. Fredrick Chilton (Anthony Heald), Inspector Renaldo Pazzi (Giancarlo Giannini), and Paul Krendler (Ray Liotta) in particular. Each of these men hold prominent positions in publicly regarded organisations (the medical community, the Italian Police, and the FBI, respectively), but all of them are represented as ingratiating, overreaching, and/or sexist charlatans. Not only are they professionally incompetent or ineffectual, but their devotion to "illegitimate" institutions of power mark them as servants to facile gods (consider Lecter's derisive attitude towards the "Eff-Bee-Eye," and his dismissal of psychiatry, which he "doesn't consider a science"). Each of the men attempts to match wits with Lecter and suf-

fer the consequences for their folly. And though their attitudes towards him are envy, fear, and ignorance respectively, Hannibal's malice towards them is not borne of hate. The cruelty with which he remorselessly dispatches them is "innocent" insofar as it is a product of contempt (as an indication of power) rather than spite. While each of them is killed in a spectacular or comic fashion, Hannibal undertakes their executions with a perfunctory attitude: he wears the same expression disembowelling Pazzi as he does whilst mincing parsley for Krendler's last supper.

Hannibal.

In the films' moral universes, then, the institutions of the specious "good" and their agents are clearly aligned with the "low-minded, common and plebeian." As with Nietzsche's provocational tribute to the noble's aggressive self-assurance, the films solicit our admiration of Lecter's elevated stature. And if our admiration is tempered by horror at the villain's ruthlessness, we may wish to consider the extent to which such a reaction is informed by our residual investment in the slavish values Nietzsche wishes to expose as a covert will to power.

Crucially, our perverse allegiance with Lecter along these grounds is instrumental to the films' feminist politics. As a patriarchal institution, the FBI is a frequent target of Lecter's ire, and the films' criticisms of its restrictive powers can be compared with Nietzsche's attack on the repressions of an equally patriarchal Church.[23] The Bureau is accorded the status of false god, especially in the importance Clarice places in her "legitimisation" by this institution — both as a recruit in *Silence* and as a Special Agent in *Hannibal*. Certainly, both films are at pains to depict the FBI as an institution that will not ever credit her achievements, and moreover, exacts punitive measures against her in the interest of securing the Bureau's own infallibility. *Silence* establishes the Bureau as a glorified Boy's School: witness the shot which

places her in an elevator surrounded by towering male cadets, as well as her patronisation by Section Chief Jack Crawford (Scott Glen) during the autopsy sequence.

Subsequently, her suspension from active duty in *Hannibal* is not merely a result of Krendler's explicit misogyny, but is a decision that originates from a more fundamental hatred. Nietzsche argues that Christianity affects a diminishment of "militaristic" values, which even now maintain barbarous connotations: "Being a soldier, being a judge, being a patriot; defending oneself; preserving one's honour; desiring to seek one's advantage; being *proud* […]. The practice of every hour, every instinct, every valuation which leads to *action* is today anti-Christian."[24] Clarice's desperate act of self-defence against Evelda Drumgo (she shoots the armed drug dealer who uses a baby for a shield), for example, becomes ammunition for her eventual censure and public disgrace. The film suggests that it is her fierce dedication to her vocation, her brilliance, and her success within a "man's" profession that has secured the envy of her "superiors." As with the fealty she accords to the memory of her father, the *pride* she would otherwise take in her work is suspended as she waits for words of accreditation that will never come. While her male colleagues too have their pride (in their status, efficiency, power, symbolic position), hers is of a different nature. Her pride emerges not from a privileged relational position within an institutionalized system of values; rather, it is the correlative of her self-sufficiency, self-assurance, resilience, and agency — qualities that gain considerable poignancy given patriarchy's concentrated historical efforts to disavow or undermine these very accomplishments when achieved by women. Thus, like the individual who pays fealty to the Christian ethic, Clarice suffers from the "seminal No" that "has become foundational to the economy of the contemporary psyche."[25] This "seminal No" describes the dominant values that discourage the individual — and women especially — from aspiring to self-satisfaction, perfection, even greatness.

STYLISH SADISM, TASTELESS TRANSGRESSION

However, is it feasible to place Lecter as the legitimate usurper of this restrictive economy? It is not simply that villains such as Lecter stand in as the embodiments of "noble" values, but their villainy may be revaluated as actions that aberrantly serve alternative aspects of a greater good. In this sense, intended perverse allegiance with the villain is often effected by a

softening of the character's reprehensible qualities. One method of softening villainy is to demonstrate it to be a form of dark poetic justice. As I have established, both *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Hannibal* perpetuate horror cinema's familiar "moral" logic by suggesting that Lecter's "ignoble" victims are frequently deserving of their fate (see *Carrie* [1976], *Hostel* [2005], *Teeth* [2007], etc.). The assertion of his will to power over these individuals is made even more palatable by the blackly comic tone adopted during scenes of murderous *grand guignol*. Towards the film's conclusion, the good doctor scoops portions of Paul Krendler's lobotomised brain from his exposed skull, sautés them in a caper berry sauce, and serves them to his anaesthetised victim. "It *is* good," Krendler says, munching happily. Despite the horrific subject matter, the humour is not out of place in the scene as, again, Krendler is depicted as a misogynist ingrate who continually sabotages Clarice's career. Krendler's murder may remind us of the unfortunate inmate, Miggs (Stuart Rudin) in *Silence*, whom Lecter convinces to swallow his own tongue as castigation for hurling semen at Clarice as she passed by his cell. In dispatching these two cretins, Hannibal acts as Clarice's avenging angel.

Hannibal.

So, while horror films can invite our allegiance with an antihero who eliminates characters that embody ignoble values, a second reason that an intended allegiance with a murderous character might be formed is on the basis of his indirect support of an unimpeachable protagonist. The violence Lecter visits upon Krendler on Clarice's behalf, then, is doubly pleasurable: Clarice does not have to accept responsibility for such violent wish-fulfilment, while a viewer may potentially receive moral satisfaction from observing a swinish misogynist receive his comeuppance. As Dolf Zillman indicates, "negative affective dispositions […] set us free to thoroughly enjoy punitive violence," even when said violence is excessive and especially when the (anti-)hero's deeds receive the "moral sanction" of the audience.[26]

Moreover, it might also be said that his murders are often committed as acts of revaluative counter-art, as matters of *style*. The doctor is the consummate aesthete, and those whose philistinism affronts his sensibilities often find their way to his dinner plate. As Barney (Frankey Faison), his jailer claims in *Hannibal*, "Whenever feasible, he preferred to eat the rude." Taste is everything, and the film promotes an alliance with a sophisticate whose aesthetic refinement actually informs his unusual morals. As suggested earlier the malignity of his aesthetic sensibilities seems to determine *Hannibal*'s formal logic and certain moments in the film overtly acknowledge a viewer's propensity for appreciating perversion. As Clarice listens to a recording of her interviews with Lecter, the camera pans rapidly across a grisly photo-collage of mutilated corpses from various crime scenes. "Don't you feel eyes moving over your body," Lecter inquires in voiceover, "and don't your eyes move over the things you want?" As viewers are caught in the process of moving their eyes over a series of disfigured bodies, his commentary suggests that for us the observance of these "things" is just what the doctor ordered.

Hannibal.

But although Lecter kills and provokes others to kill, both films still attempt to temper his villainy by ensuring that the most disturbing element of his psychosis — his cannibalism — is never graphically represented. It is worth noting that films often measure character's moral behaviour in degrees of propriety, and employ comparative strategies essential to soliciting our allegiance.[27] The key here is relativity: we are asked to consider what the character is like *in relation* to other characters. Lecter's potential for moral revaluation, then, is further buttressed by narrative strategies that place his tasteful villainy in contradistinction with two rather tasteless psychopaths: Jame Gumb (Ted Levine), a would-be transsexual who fashions himself a "woman suit" from the skin of his victims, and Mason Verger (Gary Oldman), a disfigured,

crippled paedophile. Neither of these monsters possesses the icy charisma of Lecter, which might otherwise offer a more "balanced" mania.[28] In fact, we only catch glimpses of Gumb throughout the first two thirds of *Silence* — no sign of an engaging subjectivity here.

However, I believe such comparative moral logic to be flawed if it is being used to mitigate against the abhorrence of a character's actions, for morality is not always a quantifiable property. On the one hand, films *do* occasionally employ such a tactic — often to comedic effect. In *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1944), for example, the homicidal tendencies of two doddering spinsters are played for laughs, especially when compared to the sadism of their murderous nephew. On the other hand, once a certain degree of depravity is reached such a graduated moral range is rendered irrelevant. How might one go about formulating an ethical scale in which, say, flaying women alive or paedophilia are somehow "worse" than cannibalism? If we are to have a sympathetic response towards Lecter and an antipathetic response towards Gumb and Verger, we must agree with the films' representation of the latter two characters' villainy as the more repugnant — an ultimately specious agreement. There is a sense in *Silence* especially, that the psychosis of Gumb is overdetermined — even his bedsheets, with their prominent swastika patterns, are used as an alienating device. Although the judicial system is responsible for quantifying the seriousness of a legal transgression for the purposes of sentencing, viewers are in a less authoritative position to compare the "wrongness" of characters' immorality. While *Silence* and *Hannibal* both encourage a (qualifiedly) positive response to Lecter, they do so according to a spurious moral comparison between characters.

Again, the only way it might make sense to compare degrees of villainy for the purposes of allegiance would be to assess the context of his motivations. For example, one may accredit a certain degree of perverse altruism in the doctor's murders. In *Hannibal*, Clarice remarks that Lecter believes he is performing a "public service" by wiping the uncultivated from existence.[29] In *Red Dragon*'s pre-credit sequence, he turns a flautist from a Philharmonic orchestra into sweetbreads with ragout for performing slightly off-pitch, and serves the dish to the unsuspecting leading members of the orchestra at a dinner party. While the doctor's murderous obsession with cultural refinement is taken to absurd lengths, his actions are not indicative of the petty selfishness that motivates Gumb and Verger. The suffering they cause to their victims is Epicurean — in the interest of their own personal benefit — compared to the paradoxically philanthropic violence Lecter utilises.

But this psychotic snobbery is admittedly a flimsy foundation upon which to build a

perverse allegiance. It is not simply that Lecter's intellectualism and theatricality transcends the baseness and carnality of Gumb and Verger. Such mind/body distinctions remain culturally prominent and may influence the films' preferred evaluations of their pair's perversities, but this dualism is facile. Lecter's murderous proclivities are just as sensuously based as Gumb's and Verger's (recall the "*thff-ff-ff*" sound he utters after reminiscing on the census-taker's liver he ate "with fava beans and a nice Chianti"). Moreover, the sexual nature of Gumb and Verger's crimes are implicitly sublimated within Lecter's cannibalism. Verger and Lecter especially are linked through their sadism, which in both cases amounts to the defiling of innocence. We may smile knowingly when Lecter feeds a portion of Krendler's brain to a curious child on an airplane ("It's always important that we try new things"), until we recognise the gesture chimes with Verger's means of entrapping his young victims by offering them chocolate.

To put it simply, we cannot deny the fact that Lecter is, first and foremost, a sadist. As Verger himself remarks, "Lecter's object… has always been degradation and suffering," and in this observation he is quite accurate. As a way of distinguishing acts of true evil from those of mere immoral self-interest Georges Bataille offers the example of the sadist, for whom "the abyss of Evil is attractive independently of the profit to be gained by wicked actions — or at least by some of them."[30] That is, unlike his spiritual predecessor, the criminal mastermind, Dr. Mabuse (Rudolph Klein-Rogge), who profits financially from his manipulation of others in *Dr. Mabus the Gambler* (*Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler*, 1922), Lecter manipulates and debases others simply because he can. The object of the sadist's attacks is a fundamentally ingrained value-structure: the desire to live. "What the sadist is primarily aiming at is the desire system of the victim — he wants to alter it from being pro-life to being anti-life. He does not primarily seek the death of the victim, only the victim's desire for his *own* death."[31] Verger certainly has firsthand experience of this desire: in a flashback sequence, Lecter persuades a narcotised Verger to slice off his own face with broken glass and feed it to his dogs.

Moreover, the relationship between Lecter and Clarice is marked by a certain degree of sadism. Without question, the doctor's continued correspondence with Clarice is undertaken because he is fully aware of the distress he causes her. What is interesting about Lecter's sadism, however, is that in Clarice's case, it is employed in a paradoxically constructive fashion. Unlike the pure carnality of Verger's sadism towards his young victims, Hannibal's sadism towards Clarice is actually performed as an induction. It is true that sadists bring about

an alteration of their victim's value systems to that of anti-life, but the revaluation Lecter seeks from Clarice is that she bring about the virtual "death" of her commitment to her old ways of living.

To elaborate, we may identify here Lecter's disguised role as an *oppugner* — the villain who encourages us to question the merit of the hero's values. While he does enjoy the psychological anguish he causes to everyone with whom he comes in contact, Lecter's sadism is also a method by which to eradicate naiveté, crudity, and/or investment in a limited/limiting system of values. In a way, he *does* relish appropriating the role of God — not through murder, but rather in his separation of the wheat from the chaff. Richard Dyer claims that viewers are invited to admire Lecter's *power* and that "his whole persona, not the least his ineffable sarcasm, is founded on the supremacy of the powerful and the expendability of the weak, a glorification that sits easily with notions of masculinity."[32] The glorification of power does seem to be part of the text's operation, but this power also rests in his distinctions between the irredeemable, whom Lecter eats, and the individuals he grants a modicum of respect through a re-education (or, "revaluation"). One might cite as examples his efforts to help Barney obtain a B.A., and his assumption of the role of Clarice's "mentor." In cases such as these he undoubtedly aids those individuals who cannot recognise their own potential. Even if we may prefer to ally ourselves with Clarice we must still concede that it is Lecter who provides her with the means to acknowledge her misplaced investment in various authority figures. Their relationship has as much to do with a mentor/pupil dynamic as it does with the degrading hierarchy of sadist/victim.

The Silence of the Lambs.

The Silence of the Lambs.

That the two characters are more closely related than is immediately apparent is also suggested by the "twinning" strategy evident in *Silence*'s first interview sequence, in which the characters meet. Parallels are immediately established between the two through a subtle formal symmetry: shots alternate between their respective point of views, and the characters perform strikingly similar actions whilst placed in the same positions within the frame. Curiously, the two are *never* framed in a two-shot together throughout the entire film (with the exception of that brief touch of fingers in their last scene), and their faces are joined but once in the glass partition that separates them. The potentially reflective nature of their relationship is thus underlined. The unsettling suggestion is that some unnamed quality belonging to Clarice is brought out by and mirrored within the image of her mentor-nemesis.[33]

So, one may be tempted to argue that perverse allegiances are formed when we are able to overlook the more unsavoury aspects of their personality. Smith, for example, claims that our pleasurable engagement with Lecter does not have to do with the doctor's cannibalistic

tendencies, but revolves around his more attractive qualities instead. "Any allegiance we form with Lecter," he asserts, "is one that develops in spite of rather than because of his perversity."[34] We are attracted to the gentleman, Smith claims, and overlook the monster.

But is Lecter's charm and sophistication enough to transcend the truly fearsome aspects of his explicitly presented violence? Does his status as an *alloy* (or "rounded" character) somehow lessen the degree of his villainy in a manner not enjoyed by the other "less rounded" villains? Smith implies that our allegiance with an alloy will depend on whether or not the sum of the character's positive qualities outweighs the sum of the negative ones.[35] Berys Gaut's "merited response" to characters also has relevance here as establishing sympathy with a villain implies a similar "tallying up" of their immoral deeds.[36] But it must be asked at what point does a villain's attractive qualities override their repugnant ones? Even if it were possible to gauge a character's level of iniquity in this fashion, the conclusion reached is perhaps inaccurate. It is not that the two other aforementioned villains deflate Lecter's unpleasantness; rather, *they pale in comparison to the doctor's wickedness*. Instead of accepting them as worse than Lecter, a truly mutinous viewer would claim that they do not measure up to his standards of villainy. I have indicated that weighing degrees of depravity is fallacious, but if we change the nature of the scale, we can establish a transgressive hierarchy of a different order. That is to say, one might find Lecter's villainy attractive because it possesses a grandeur that cannot be located in the "lesser" perversities of Gumb and Verger.

SUBLIME EVIL

If one is to respond in a truly perverse fashion to Lecter's evaluation by both films, one must reject the notion that our allegiance will be sought *in spite* of his murderous appetites. Describing his actions as a form of "moral immoralism" as I have done is one possible perverse evaluation of Lecter's villainy, but again, it still reduces the ferocity the doctor displays during moments of violence. To ally oneself with Lecter in a truly perverse fashion, it is necessary to *re-vilify* him — to use his status as an alloy against the attitudinal grain of the narrative. Although a villain might hold both repellent and attractive qualities, a perverse viewer would find him engaging not because the latter qualities mitigate against the former, but because they amplify the splendour of his evil. As a final move, I would like to shift the evaluative

emphasis to Lecter's more feral qualities, for it is these traits that promote rather than repel our allegiance. During moments of violence — especially random violence — he achieves a kind of magnificence that is awe-inspiring because it suggests that his evil is not containable.

How can one conceive of the representation of unmotivated violence as "awe-inspiring" without incurring the objection of moralists? One might turn again to Nietzsche for a solution. Throughout his work, Nietzsche argues for a need to retain certain aspects of what might be considered "evil" within one's notion of the holy. Indeed, the notion of "cruelty" is integral to Nietzsche's idealised value system. In *The Anti-Christ*, he argues that Christianity has watered down divinity by claiming God as the God of the good (read: weak). Such a reduction of the divine occurs "when everything strong, brave, masterful, proud is eliminated from the concept of God."[37] An all-loving God is both incomprehensible and useless for Nietzsche; the god of a people who believe in themselves "must be able to be both useful and harmful, both friend and foe — he is admired in good and bad alike."[38] Again, this is John Stuart Mill's morally inscrutable God, whose power evokes fear and trembling as well as love. But for Nietzsche God's fearsome nobility is reconceived as cruelty by Pauline Christianity, and thrust far away from our conception of Him.

At the same time, Christianity's "diluted" spirituality brings about the devaluation of evil. It is not even precise to say that the Christian reinvention of Satan was the means to conceptually house God's displaced "cruelty," for even the Antichrist is stripped of majestic properties. Under Christianity, evil is equated with shame (in the form of sin) and weakness (of one's moral resolve). Before the ascendancy of Good, evil's suffering could be borne with pride. "Here the word 'Devil' was a blessing: one had an overwhelming and fearful enemy — one did not need to be ashamed of suffering at the hands of such an enemy."[39] With the minimisation of evil, good actions are no longer morally difficult, and thus, no longer meritorious in any meaningful way nor cause for pride (which in itself is regarded as sinful). Moreover, the idea of divinity is excised of fearful connotations, and being godly is now equated with mere "selflessness."

Hannibal's demonstrations of violence are a diabolical return of this repressed godliness: murder as the wilful imposition of the Self on another in the most brutal form. Hannibal's violence is pre-Christian in a sense and evocative of the ancient world. His cannibalism is not the sign of a subject who consumes his god (like the Catholic receiving communion), but of a god who devours his subject (like Cronos eating his children). There are only

four instances in both films in which the doctor's murderous actions are explicitly represented, and each of them are the most ferocious moments of onscreen violence: his bludgeoning of Sergeant Pembrey (Alex Coleman), allowing his escape in *Silence*; his dramatic disembowelment of Inspector Pazzi, his near-decapitation of Matteo Deogracias (Fabrizio Gifuni), and his unmotivated attack on a nurse in *Hannibal*. The dramatic weight of these scenes, the graphic force by which they are depicted, and the fact that viewers are confronted with a character who kills without compunction, without necessity and without provocation is enough to short-circuit any allegiance we might form on the basis of his "positive" traits. In fact, it may be that these sequences are the pivotal ones in evoking our sympathetic engagement with the character. It is worth looking at one of these instances in detail in order to outline briefly the formal mechanics that incite our engagement.

The second of the four represented attacks occurs in *Hannibal*, in which Clarice watches surveillance camera footage of Lecter mutilating a nurse in the Baltimore State Forensic Hospital. On the monitor, Clarice observes a black and white video image of a straitjacketed Hannibal standing next to a wall. The overhead medium shot captures the nurse as she walks into the frame and passes by the prisoner. Abruptly, the non-diegetic scores strikes a violent *sforzando* and an inhuman roar is heard on the soundtrack as Lecter lunges at the nurse and pushes her out of the frame. Animalistic growls and gibbering continue throughout the sequence: expressionistic noises attributed to the violence of the event itself. A cut to Clarice depicts her staring at the monitor transfixed — a double for our own viewing position. An eyeline match back to the previous video image reveals Hannibal pushing the nurse to the floor, straddling her, and then brutally savaging her face with his teeth.

Interestingly, the remainder of the brief sequence is then eclipsed by an imaginative reconstruction of the event. That is, the dispassionate eye of the surveillance camera (the clinical instrument of security and law enforcement) is displaced by the subjective eye of an agent who occupies a position outside the story world, and whose evaluative observation of the event colours its representation. Lecter's violence is no longer rendered in objective terms by the security camera, but instead, is focalised in moralistic terms by an extradiegetic narrator, who manipulates the film's mode of representation to amplify the ferocity of this violence. As the orderlies rush in to pull him off of the nurse, the camera suddenly tracks in to a close-up and pans upwards. Colour creeps into the image, and there is a subtle dissolve in the film stock from video to 35mm. Hannibal is yanked up in jerky slow motion and the violent

movement traces motion trails across the screen. His bloodied mouth is agape and his tongue waggles. Most awful of all are his eyes, which are absolutely savage. This hellish expression is caught in a freeze frame and the image is drained of colour and abruptly flares to an apocalyptic white. We cut back to a visibly shaken Clarice, who pauses the video, and the image on the monitor has been reframed back to its original overhead medium shot.

Hannibal.

It is debatable whether or not we should attribute this reflexive moment of overt stylisation to the narrational agency of Clarice. On the one hand, this formal manipulation might be an attempt to represent her imaginative reconstruction of the event, in which case, the final reaction shot of her troubled face cues our analogous response. On the other, it is more interesting to entertain the possibility that these strategies issue from a much more disturbingly ambiguous position within the narrational discourse. It is as if an unnamed narrator who sought to glorify the represented actions briefly directed the narration. The narration of violence is remarkable here because it seems to transcend the rules of the game in two important regards: 1) like the beating of Sgt. Pembrey in *Silence*, Lecter's expression suggests a demented pleasure in his actions; and 2) it is the only sequence in the entire series that does not provide or imply a motive behind Lecter's assault. Certainly his victims have done nothing to warrant the savageries to which they are subjected, and the violence visited upon them seems to exceed the bounds of the perverse moral "logic" discussed above. And yet, these sequences are somehow not forceful enough to guarantee the effective disruption of any allegiance we may have formed with the character. Therefore, the narrational strategies employed here do not problematize our allegiance with Lecter, but actually seek to strengthen it.

The Silence of the Lambs.

The Silence of the Lambs.

This imaginative reconstruction of the attack attributes to his violence an archetypal, almost mythic dimension. However suave and attractive he appears, such moments suggest that he is a figure that we must look upon with some measure of awe. And if we are to find a kind of dark majesty in Hannibal's unfettered savagery, then our typical moral attitudes towards murder are subjected to a revaluation. Lecter commands fear, and fear is too primal an emotion to be assuaged by dressing up the bogeyman in gentleman's clothes. In fact, such a strategy can only make a monster more terrifying as it crawls from beneath the bed, straightening its mask of civility. The attraction of monsters is mesmeric — they draw energy from the language-denying emotion that grips their victims upon their revelation. Such a moment is akin to staring into a solar eclipse, or being drawn into the orbit of a black hole. Etymologically, *monstrum* is "that which reveals, or warns," and when Lecter's true face emerges in moments of violence it is the revelation of a terrifying godhead.

We have seen this face before. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche understood the pleasure gleaned from tragedy to be an embodiment of the *Dionysian*: a condition in which the boundaries between the self and the world are broken down. During this moment of primordial unity in which the principal of individuation is dissolved, one may experience sensations of co-mingled ecstasy and terror because it is a state in which the familiar and grounding principles of form, rules, and order ("the Apollonian") disappear.[40] In these regards, to experience the calamity brought about by a villain's actions is to experience a state of Dionysian intoxication. The Dionysian experience of tragedy shares affinities with the terrifying and elevating experience of the Kantian sublime, as Nietzsche treats the sublime ex-

perience of tragedy "as the artistic taming of the horrible."[41] While neither *Silence* nor *Hannibal* can be regarded as tragedies proper, what seems clear is that in order to experience Lecter as a pleasurable character, and in order to form an allegiance with him on moral grounds, we must evaluate the aforementioned representational strategies as such an "artistic taming." We may locate pleasure in the very act of Lecter's "illegitimate" murders by allying our sensibilities with the narrational strategies that amplify (rather than soften) the character's evil, for in moments such as these, he is elevated to a Nietzschean god of the cruel. An allegiance such is this is not idle demonolatry, but a re-embracement of a discarded conceptualisation of evil as a potent and awesome force. Therefore, a radically perverse allegiance with certain villains is a relationship that is akin to the worship of an ineffable force. Such an act can be perceived as "good" (or at least beneficial) in ways that do not immediately seem to be "moral" as the term is understood.

I have argued that an intended perverse allegiance with a villain can be formed by revaluing his actions as serving a greater good — whether it be noble morality, poetic justice, or the principles of aesthetics and high culture. But I am also suggesting that perverse allegiance in the horror film can amount to allying oneself with the potential sublimity of an unfettered evil, rather than indulging in the safer pleasures of appreciating a murderous wit. Furthermore, the evil, monstrous characteristics of the alloy occasionally amplify rather than diminish the appeal of villainy. At the very least, such characters invite viewers to believe that the stigmatisation of arrogance, vanity, and selfishness as villainous qualities is effected at the expense of self-confidence, pride, and a productive egoism. At their most radical, the brutal murders represented in the Hannibal Lecter films are not only revalued as perversely altruistic, but are also regarded as signs of an aspect of the sacred (or, simply the good) that has long been exiled from popular theological and ethical fashion.

Finally, perverse allegiance is a valuable narrational strategy for those interested in making a claim for the progressive feminist politics of horror. Charismatic villainy can be a worthy rhetorical strategy when it prompts viewers to engage in moral revaluation. In the Lecter films, the doctor's psychopathic preoccupation with aesthetics is administered as a cure-all for ignorance, misplaced values, rampant philistinism, and above all unchecked institutionalized misogyny. Thus, my proposed solution to the paradox of perverse allegiance in horror cinema suggests that sympathy for the villain is possible when the monster's apparent immorality actually represents a revaluation of accepted moral norms. In its ability to prompt

audiences' to recognize and critique certain entrenched forms of sexism and self-abnegation, this oppugner's apparent "evil" can be reconceived as a necessary, and much needed good.

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1. Murray Smith, "Gangsters, Cannibals, Aesthetes, or Apparently Perverse Allegiances," in *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition and Emotion*, ed. Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (1882; Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 227.

2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 232.

3. As an indication of Lecter's prominence within the pantheon of film heavies — established solely on the basis of his appearance in *Silence of the Lambs* — one might refer to his position at the top of the American Film Institute's list of 100 Greatest Movie Villains (www.afi.com/100years/handv.aspx).

4. John Stone, "Evil in the Early Cinema of Oliver Stone: *Platoon* and *Wall Street* as Modern Morality Plays," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 28.2 (2000): 84.

5. Daniel Lyons, "The Spectre of the Splendid Villain," *International Journal of Moral and Social Studies* 4.2 (1989): 3-16.

6. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (1910; New York: Vintage, 1967), 513.

7. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (1895; London: Penguin, 1990), 153.

8. John Andrew Bernstein, *Nietzsche's Moral Philosophy* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1987), 38.

9. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (1883-85; London: Penguin Books, 1961), 84.

10. Ibid., 141.

11. John D. Caputo, *On Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 52-53.

12. See Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*.

13. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 232.

14. Christopher Hamilton, "Art and Moral Education," in *Art and Morality*, ed. José Luis Bermúdez and Sebastian Gardner (London: Routledge, 2004), 54.

15. Caputo, *Against Ethics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press,1993), 51.

16. Charlie Rose, "Ridley Scott on Ridley Scott," *60 Minutes*, 28 Jan. 2001, www.cbsnews.com/news/ridley-scott-on-ridley-scott/.

17 Caputo, *On Religion*, 58.

18. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Carol Diethe, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (1887; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 12.

19 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 295.

20 Bernstein, *Nietzsche's Moral Philosophy*, 71.

21 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 22.

22. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (1886; London: Penguin, 1990), 129.

23. It bears noting, however, that Nietzsche's own sexual politics are hardly progressive. Moreover, the intrinsic classism of his "noble" ethical system presupposes an institutionalized sexism. This means that our attempts to extend Nietzsche's revaluation to Christianity's paternalism can only be accomplished through a retroactively feminist appropriation of his methods.

24. Ibid., 162.

25. Ruben Berrios and Aaron Ridley, "Nietzsche," in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes (London: Routledge, 2001), 81.

26. Dolf Zillman, "The Psychology of the Appeal of Portrayals of Violence," in *Why We Watch: The Attractions of Violent Entertainment*, ed. J. H. Goldstein (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 202.

27. Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 188.

28. Again, I am deliberately ignoring Lecter's appearance in *Manhunter*, as well as the remake, *Red Dragon* (2002). It is not that the character's role in both versions is minimal enough to be almost unnecessary, but because the films do not "use" the psychosis of the central villain, Francis Dollarhyde (Tom Noonan/Ralph Fiennes), to offset Lecter's. Indeed, the gradually sympathetic representation of Dollarhyde benefits from the relative detachment the films employ in depicting Lecter's megalomania.

29. Similarly, in *Arsenic and Old Lace*, the two elderly aunties perform acts of poisonous "charity" on lonely, old men "who have nothing left to live for."

30. Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, trans. Alastair Hamilton (London: Calder & Boyars, 1973), 47.

31. Colin McGinn, *Ethics, Evil, and Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 81.

32. Richard Dyer, "Kill and Kill Again," in *Action/Spectacle Cinema: A Sight and Sound Reader*, ed. José Arroyo (London: BFI, 2000), 149.

33. It is also worth mentioning the denouement of *Hannibal*'s original literary source. Notoriously, Thomas Harris' novel ends with Clarice's decision to become Hannibal's lover following her "re-education," which includes the exhumation of her father's corpse in order that she make a conclusive symbolic break from a repressive patriarchal regime.

34. Smith, "Gangsters, Cannibals, Aesthetes," " 227.

35. Smith, *Engaging Characters*, 209.

36. Berys Gaut, "The Ethical Criticism of Art," in *Aesthetics and Ethics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 196.

37. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, 139.

38. Ibid., 138.

39. Ibid., 144.

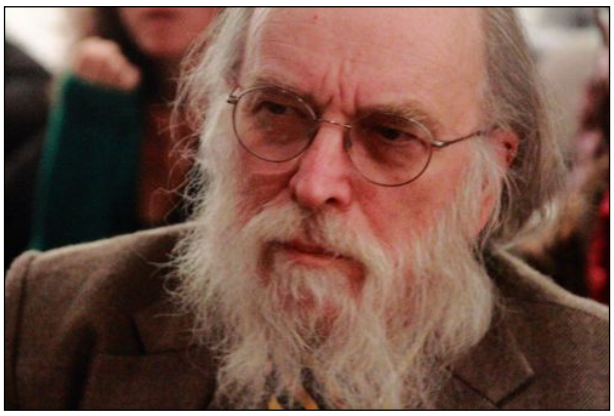
40. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (1872; New York: Vintage, 1967), 60.

41. Ibid.

INTERVIEW | ENTREVISTA

FILM/RELIGION:
A CONVERSATION WITH P. ADAMS SITNEY

by Sérgio Dias Branco (University of Coimbra/IFILNOVA)



The film studies community knows you mainly from your authoritative work on avant-garde cinema. Your work on religion and film is often forgotten or unknown, even if these strands are sometimes intertwined in your books on avant-garde films and filmmakers. How do you look at this split and connection as author and scholar?

It is reasonable that my writings on film and religion would be little known. I have written five books on cinema. Two of them, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde* (1974, 1979, 2002) and *Eyes Upside Down: Visionary Filmmakers and the Heritage of Emerson* (2008) are explicitly studies of American avant-garde cinema. The other three, *Modernist Montage: The Obscurity of Vision in Cinema and Literature* (1992), *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema: Iconography, Stylistics, Politics* (1995, 2013), and *The Cinema of Poetry* (forthcoming) touch occasionally on aspects of religion (i.e., Dreyer, Bresson, Rossellini, Fellini, Olmi, Pasolini, Tarkovsky, Cornell, Dorsky) but never as a thematic thread to delineate the chapters of a book. My essays on religion in the work of Hitchcock, Scorsese, Allen, and my general essay for Eliade's *Encyclopedia of Religion* were written intermittently over thirty years and have not been collected in a single volume. Therefore, this persistent strain in my writing might well escape attention.

Furthermore the aspects of religion that I discuss in my writings on avant-garde cinema are never the center of an exegesis. They do not even treat conventional aspects of religion, as

understood in cinema studies. For instance, Maya Deren's concern with ritual and Voodoo, Kenneth Anger's Satanism, Stan Brakhage's Emersonian stance, Larry Jordan's mysticism, Joseph Cornell's allegiance to Christian Science and Nathaniel Dorsky's concept of filmic devotions are all functions of their aesthetics, and in differing degrees are latent in their films. I touch on them in passing while concentrating on their cinematic inventions and the evolution of their film styles. The earlier avant-gardes, in France and the Soviet Union, were explicitly anti-religious or deliberately blasphemous. Consequently, my discussions of their works do not fall within the usual rubrics of religious studies.

At Princeton University, you have been involved in the research project Cinema and Religious Expression, *sponsored by the Center for the Study of Religion, which you co-directed with Jeffrey Stout. Also with Stout, you have taught a course on religion and cinema. Can you talk about the approach, scope, and aim of this project and this course?*

Jeffrey Stout is a distinguished philosopher of religion. Like many of my colleagues who teach Religion he does not profess a faith. I, however, am a practicing Roman Catholic and an oddball one at that: liberal in matters of morals, but liturgically ultraconservative. Our personal religious views plays absolutely no role in the course we gave together. We have congruous tastes in film: Brakhage, Dreyer, Kurosawa, Bergman, Tarkovsky, Bresson, Landow, Dorsky, etc. are shared enthusiasms. Both of Stout's sons, Noah and Livingston, are filmmakers. His participation in their education and early careers played a fundamental role in the formation of his views of cinema.

It was very easy for us to agree upon a syllabus. Our readings included Kierkegaard, Tarkovsky, New Testament, Girard, Santayana, Bresson, Bernanos, O'Connor, Nietzsche, Augustine, and Emerson.

Your readers, or European audiences in general, might not realize that the aesthetics of American artists have been massively dominated by often contradictory aspects of Emerson's philosophy. One might even say that Emerson brought into focus a native American religion of "self-reliance" and "experience" (his terms) to which most of our artists, even atheists, have subscribed, often without realizing it. Stout is an authority on Emerson. As such he was later of enormous help to me when I wrote *Eyes Upside Down*. In turn, I believe I have been influential on his understanding of the technical and formal aspects of cinema. After we taught a course together in 2000-2001 he has continued to teach Cinema and Religion on his own. In

2007 he gave the Stone Lectures at the Princeton Theological Seminary: "A Light That Shines in the Darkness: Evil, Egotism, and the Sacred in Film," which will appear as a book.

Let me pick up on the importance that you, as a Christian, attach to liturgy. Has your aesthetic immersion in religion impacted on your study of film? Have you ever been interested in the field of theological aesthetics? I am also thinking about the connections between the poetic, often lyrical, writings of mystics like John of Cross and the work of avant-garde filmmakers like Bruce Baillie.

Although I do not see offhand a relationship between St. John of the Cross and Baillie, I would be eager to read an essay on that subject if you have one. I am too literal-minded to make that leap myself. I do discuss St. John of the Cross when I lecture on the Straub/Huillet film, *Der Bräutigam, die Komödiantin und der Zuhälter* (*The Bridegroom, the Actress and the Pimp*, 1968) , because they cite his poetry in the film. Generally, I do not find analogical criticism particularly useful. I want to know what the filmmakers were reading and thinking and how their sources shaped their films. With considerable caution one might want to extend those sources to forces active in the filmmakers' culture. I did that when I repeatedly invoked passages from Dante in analyzing films in *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema* or Emerson and Whitman in *Eyes Upside Down*. But I would not bring up Emerson or Whitman in discussing an Italian filmmaker unless I had evidence he or she had read either of them, nor Dante for an American avant-garde filmmaker without similar evidence.

Of course, my liturgical worship and my theological readings have influenced my film criticism, but so has my examination of Protestant writings, ancient Greek religion, Stoic and Epicurean philosophy, Nietzsche, etc. I will grasp at anything that throws light on the films that occupy my mind.

I am not sure what you mean by "theological aesthetics." I assumed that all aesthetics had theological implications. I have never consciously explored that domain as an academic discipline.

I was not suggesting a direct connection between John of the Cross's writings and Baillie's films — although perhaps I could do it in regard to David Lynch's films... — but merely pointing out that they can both be seen as lyrical poets.

Catholic film thinkers such as André Bazin and Robert Bresson have been interested in discussing the role of reality in cinematographic art, even though their reflections are not identical since they

come from different perspectives and reach different conclusions. You are more concerned with artistic ideas and expression embodied in film. Do you regard these differences as subjective, connected with different ways of understanding and experiencing the Catholic faith (understandings and experiences fostered by catholicity and the way it points towards ecumenism)? Or do you think that this aspect is irrelevant and we are just talking about three distinct film thinkers who also happen to be Catholic?

I am tempted to answer that these are just three distinct film thinkers who happen to be Catholic, but for two important points. In the first place, it would be absurd for me to put myself in a class with Bazin and Bresson. More to the point, however, is the fact that I find the question fascinating and provocative. I have not felt the influence of Bazin in my work. In fact, I think my concentration on the Romantic tradition and the function of the imagination in cinema has been, if anything, anti-Bazinian. But I have been greatly influenced by René Girard, a Catholic scholar of literature (never on film) who has devoted his very distinguished career to aspects of literary realism and its relation to Truth.

Therefore, your question makes me somewhat uncomfortably aware of the "Protestant" bias of my aesthetics. In this I am not alone, as an American. Even our greatest Catholic fiction writer, Flannery O'Connor, chooses radical Southern Protestants for her subjects. Catholic thought has had little effect on the arts in America. My own aesthetic formation emerged from reading ancient Greek and Roman writers — with a Nietzchean emphasis on ritual — and from a thorough emergence in the English-language Romantics. Blake and Wordsworth, whom I adored, may have been nominally Christians, Emerson and Melville perhaps not even that, but none of them had any use for the Roman Catholic Church.

It was not until I began to write on Bresson in the late 1970s that I ventured onto a Catholic subject. I found Girard's examination of mimetic desire particularly productive in understanding *Mouchette* and other Bresson films. Even then, my early Sunday School training in the provincial bigotry of lower class Irish-American Catholics was no use to me. Eventually my own study of the Gospels (influenced by the Protestant theologian, Rudolf Bultmann), the Church fathers, Augustine, Aquinas, and Dante informed my approach to a range of Italian filmmakers as well as Scorsese and Hitchcock. Later, in order to conduct a seminar on Tarkovsky, I made myself familiar with the history and major tenets of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Jean-Luc Godard once said "I'm not a religious person, but I'm a faithful person. I believe in images." This opens the door for a discussion that goes beyond works of art with religious subjects, which of

course may be rich and complex. What are your thoughts about the connection between faith and visual art, particularly in film?

Gilles Deleuze, apparently elaborating on Godard's point, makes the more lucid case the we (and the modern cinema) no longer believe in the world. He understands this as a transformation of what he posits as the affinity between cinema and Catholicism. In fact, he cites Godard's cinema as precisely the locus where belief in the world is most decisively at stake.

I find Deleuze's notion fascinating. However, I do not see any relationship at all between the theological virtue of faith — the gift that convinces me that God is in Three Persons, for example; or that I am subject to an infinity of hell or heaven — and cinema, which can astound me, move me to tears, thrill me, bore me or disgust me, but can convince me of nothing.

In short, visual art can evoke or merely refer to theological revelations, but it cannot conjure or even reenforce faith..

What do you see as the prospects for the scholarly interaction between cinema, philosophy, and religion?

There is already a fecund interrelationship between philosophy and film studies. I am thinking particularly of the writings on film by Gilles Deleuze and Stanley Cavell. As far as I know, there is nothing of comparable sophistication on religion and cinema, unless it would be the yet unpublished work of Jeffrey Stout.

Die große Stille.

Such an interaction will always depend on the work of filmmakers and the elements that they use and evoke — like the Christian components in some of Stan Brakhage's films. Are there any recent films that have made you think philosophically and religiously about them?

Die große Stille (*Into Great Silence*, 2005) and the recently unveiled films of Jerome Hiler (made over the last fifty years) touch upon religious issues, very obviously. However, I would not ever claim to "think philosophically and religiously." I am merely a film historian. By the way, as a film historian, I find the "Christian components" in Brakhage's later films of minimal interest, even in regard to what I consider the religious strain in his work.

2013: A SLOW YEAR

William Brown (University of Roehampton)

When I say that 2013 has been a slow year, what I really mean to say is that slow cinema seems to have dominated many of the conferences that I have attended in the past few months.

Even at a conference as vast and as fast as SCMS (The Drake Hotel, Chicago, 6-10 March), there was already time for Tina Kendall (2013), Karl Schoonover's "Embroidered Time: Slow Gays, World Cinema, and Classical Film Theory" (2013), Scott Richmond (2013) and Eugenie Brinkema's "An Oasis of Boredom in a Desert of Horror: Language and Time in *Pontypool*" (2013) to address the topic of slow cinema via the concept of boredom. But while slow cinema found a tiny niche at the behemoth of SCMS, it is perhaps fitting that, to appropriate the title of Tina Kendall's talk in Chicago, boredom and slowness are found mainly *in extemis* — that is, on the margins of film studies, in smaller, more specialised locations than the hub of film (and media) studies that SCMS incarnates. Indeed, as Kendall argued, after Mackenzie Wark, boredom requires certain conditions in order to come into being — and the hyper-stimulation that is going to SCMS perhaps does not provide the best conditions for thinking slowly and/or about boredom.

Fittingly, it is Kendall herself, then, who, together with Neil Archer, created the conditions for assembled scholars to think about slowness and boredom at the *Fast/Slow: Intensifications of Cinematic Speed* symposium at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, on 4-5 April. Given that the symposium explicitly mentions "fast" in its title, its subtitle also being "Intensifications of Cinema Speed," it seems strange that the overwhelming majority of papers given at the symposium were on slow cinema. It is as if the rise of long take, not-much-happens films (think of works by Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Jia Zhangke, Belá Tarr, Abbas Kiarostami, much recent Romanian cinema — as Diana Popa's "Slowness in Contemporary Romanian Cinema" [2013] discussed, and even relatively mainstream films like Nicolas Winding Refn's *Drive* [2011], as considered by Miklós Kiss and Anna Backman Rogers's "Dead Time and Intensified Continuity in Nicolas Winding Refn's *Drive*" [2013]) are somehow more noteworthy than the enormous number of mainstream films that employ super-rapid editing

and fast-paced plots. As if we were resigned now to acceleration and the velocity of contemporary mainstream cinema, even if, as Henry K. Miller's "1922 Fast, Too Continuous: Fast/Slow Cinema and Modernism" (2013) reminded us at the *Fast/Slow* symposium, previous generations have also argued about these same issues for many years, as his case study of the same concerns as aired in 1922 onwards made clear.

Overall, slowness at the *Fast/Slow* symposium was approached from the perspective of politics and/or ethics — Asbjørn Grønstad's "The Ethics of Slow Cinema" (2013) is an example. That is to say, slow cinema is a political act that, broadly speaking, involves resistance against the acceleration engendered by the all-encompassing forces of neoliberal capitalism and globalisation, translated in cinema into kinetic mainstream action spectacles. Much like the "slow movement" elsewhere (in food, in gardening, in travel, etc.), it is a conscious protest of sorts, an "ethical" choice on the part of the filmmaker, much as tracking shots were once considered a question of morality. Indeed, it is perhaps also part of a validation of the real and realism in cinema, since many "slow" films allow events to unfold in their own time (and spaces), rather than rapidly and in an (often literally) animated fashion. As Sean Cubitt 's "Chronoscapes and the Regulation of Time" (2013) so convincingly argued in his *Fast/Slow* keynote, this is not simply a case of analogue indexicality versus digital simulation, since the analogue image's indexical relationship to reality has long since been unduly fetishised by film theorists given that the chain of reactions that must take place for light to register on a strip of polyester is in fact far from neat and without mediation. Rather, this is about time and imaging different rates of change.

However, given the fact that so many "slow" filmmakers are the doyens of film festivals around the world, and given that buying a Jia Zhang-ke film on DVD will likely cost four or five times as much these days as would a year-old blockbuster, "slow cinema" is also a byword for a cinema of the wealthy and the cultured — for those who have the time to enjoy some time out. For this reason, then, slow cinema might in fact be less oppositional as always already a reinforcement of the accelerated mainstream, as perhaps a crossover film like *Drive* makes clear, even if the success of that film was also in part enabled marketing and the opportunity to ogle the internet meme-friendly Ryan Gosling. In this sense, Kiss and Backman Rogers' identification of the combination of "dead time" and "intensified continuity" in *Drive* is quite telling: *Drive* in fact embodies how both tendencies, fast and slow, are flip sides of the same coin.

If slow films inspire, or run the risk of inspiring, boredom, then it is perhaps not surprising that Emre Çağlayan's "The Aesthetics of Boredom: Slow Cinema and the Virtues of the Long Take" took his paper from *Fast/Slow* also to the Society for Cognitive Studies of the Moving Image (SCSMI) Conference at the Universität des Künste, Berlin, which took place on 12-15 June — for boredom must surely be a matter of cognition. After Çağlayan's paper (2013), which took the work of Belá Tarr as its template for films that inspire or run the risk of inspiring boredom, there followed an intense discussion about boredom as an emotion, or, if it is not (quite) an emotion, as a sensation. Can boredom be considered — as Çağlayan suggested — a positive sensation/emotion? That is, as his paper suggested, can 10-minute long takes in which little to nothing (from the perspective of plot-driven narrative) happens have any benefit for viewers? The discussion seemed quite universally to surmise that boredom cannot be positive, or an emotion/sensation that can yield positive results. For, if in feeling bored I in fact come to reflect upon the nature of time or the minutiae of human house construction — I am thinking of shots in *Sátántangó* (1994) of window frames, curtains and walls — then I probably technically am not bored anymore. In other words, boredom can only be a negative emotion/sensation (even if boredom is a sensation/emotion that has, from the evolutionary perspective, developed in order to inspire action in order for boredom to be quelled, which in turn induces motion, blood circulation, a bit of exercise and thus fitness, if nothing else).

Sátántangó.

What was in particular interesting about this discussion was the possibility that boredom can be proof of cinema's very real effect on audiences. By this, I mean to say that boredom provoked by a film is not tempered by any meta-emotional response, as per fear (I am

afraid, but I also know that I am only watching a film and therefore I am not afraid). Instead, if I am bored by a film, I am *really* bored (I may say to myself that I am only bored because I am watching a film and therefore not really bored, but this would be to be not really bored; *real* boredom, as provoked by a film, can only be to be *really* bored). Now, it may be that *Sátántangó* does not "really" inspire boredom, but that it instead is simply "slow" — with slowness certainly being able to have positive impact on viewers (time to think, to begin to scan the image for oneself rather than at the rhythm dictated by the filmmaker, etc.). Nonetheless, to stick with the issue of boredom, one wonders that the discussion of boredom at SCSMI points to a more generalised boredom in society and, in particular, among filmgoers.[1]

This generalised boredom was pointed to by Scott Richmond in his talk at SCMS, "Vulgar Boredom: On Detachment, Time, and Some Boring Films by Andy Warhol and Christopher Nolan." In addressing boredom in films by Andy Warhol and Christopher Nolan, Richmond suggested — at least indirectly — that boredom can and perhaps does take place not just in art(y) films (Warhol), but also in mainstream films (Nolan). I am reminded of Tina Kendall's ("Boredom *in extremis*," 2013) point at the same conference that, again via Mackenzie Wark, that which "suspends" boredom in fact creates it. To take this discussion in my own direction, then, we have here the possibility that those very films that are supposed not to inspire boredom in fact can and very often do — and these may even include very profitable films such as those made by Nolan.

Let us elaborate on this a bit further. It is in a discussion on cinephilia that Thomas Elsaesser evokes the overlapping concepts of disenchantment and *déception* (a French *faux ami* most commonly translated as disappointment). Elsaesser suggests that disappointment is an important part of the film experience because it "redeems memory at the expense of the present."[2] In other words, to feel disappointment with a film allows us to feel that "they don't make them like they used to" (memory, which is the storage place of images from those old films that we refer to as the ones "they used to make," is redeemed at the expense of the present). In the same collection of essays as Elsaesser's, Drehli Robnik suggests that the mobilisation of cinephilia in part accounts for the success of *Titanic* (1997), but that its commercial triumph was also based upon "the common fact that many people found they had liked the movie after they had paid to see it."[3] What is remarkable about this phrase is that Robnik in fact puts his finger on a very common cinematic experience: that many people find that they have *not* liked a movie after they have paid to see it — and that films like *Titanic*, which

people *actually like*, are few and far between (hence *Titanic*'s status at the time as the most profitable film in history).

I do not discuss this as an excuse to "come out" about *Titanic*. Rather, it is to suggest that we live in a state of generalised *déception*, with most films, which promise to be our friends, in fact turning out to be *faux amis*, both deceptive and disappointing. Whether or not this is a strategy, conscious or otherwise, on the part of viewers to validate memory, *à la* Elsaesser, in the face of the present is not my focus of concern here — but by definition the films that we like most will be films that we have seen in the past, since we cannot like most films that we have not yet seen, though we might be forgiven for suspecting that this is so, because films are now pre-sold so heavily to us via marketing strategies that it can often feel as though we have already seen a film by the time we see it, and we often feel that we are going to (or rather, we *want to*) love a film before we have actually seen it. Two things arise, though: the first is that, precisely as a result of the marketing strategies of the major studios and of other film distributors and exhibitors, we are encouraged to anticipate films so much that it is almost inevitable that most will be disappointing; they cannot live up to their hype, and we realise that Hollywood does not make trailers for films, but it makes films in order to use trailers as the real money-making part of the film industry.[4] And secondly, since we are so often disappointed by movies, this points to and perhaps only reinforces the way in which marketing — the promise of a future experience that will be great — speaks of a culture of boredom in and with the present. If *ennui* used to signal existential angst, it is now the baseline of post-industrial existence, the best friend of the marketing guy because it means that we will always be hoping for something other than boredom.

This might explain why — even though I find the *Transformers* films (2007-present), as well as the work of Christopher Nolan in general, rather tedious — I keep on going back to the cinema to watch them. (And this is a personal example; I am sure many people do in fact truly like Nolan's films — unless they are victims of an *inception* by Nolan and his publicists, believing that they believe for themselves that Nolan is a great filmmaker, when in fact this is an idea planted in their brains by, precisely, Nolan's publicists. Indeed, some people might even like *The Transformers* movies. But whether audiences like Nolan and/or *Transformers*, they may nonetheless feel *déception* at many of the other films that they see — and which I may personally quite like.) In other words, boredom is inherent to the contemporary condition — which is why it is impossible to tear people away from the screens of

their phones, touchpads and other devices, because unmediated reality has become practically intolerable. Meanwhile, movies promise a break from this boredom, although most in fact reinforce it upon delivery. Paradoxically, however, "slow" films, which ostensibly are boring, become quite interesting — provided one attends to them.

I use the term "attends to" quite deliberately. For, while the other keyword uttered most commonly at the conferences that I have recently attended — especially "Beyond Film," the title of the Film-Philosophy Conference at the University of Amsterdam, 10-12 July — was most likely "affect," I wonder that the term "attention" is in some respects a better one for describing how most contemporary films (are designed to) work. Affect is a common aspect of the film experience, and one that evades or sits alongside rational analysis and interpretation of films — and thus is definitely worthy of study. However, films also perhaps quite simply function as stimuli for my attention (just as parents might shove their kids in front of the TV to keep them quiet, regardless of what is actually on). My attention is drawn to the screen as a result of numerous cinematic techniques (fast cutting rates, close ups of human faces, bright colours, loud noises and more), and that is all that matters for the movie studios and their affiliated companies: the only thing that matters is that I am watching, because the only form of bad publicity is no publicity. Enjoyment has little to do with this experience; indeed, getting a movie fix can, like any number of cigarettes, alcoholic beverages or fast food meals, make one feel unhealthy and/or unhappy. So while studying affect is no doubt key, studying the elicitation of attention might be equally important. Indeed, a discussion of boredom seems most important to a conference like the SCSMI, because so many of the psychologist participants thereat speak of cinema as a tool for arousing attention, regardless of the emotions elicited; a film that cannot maintain our attention is almost antithetical to the cinema that these scholars so often study (and take, sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly, for being the "real" or the "best" cinema). A mainstream film might arouse our attention, but a slow film might be something that we instead *attend to*. Many viewers might find this invitation to attend intolerable (and this is not just a matter of an ADHD-infected youth; my mother, who is a great corrective in my life to my enthusiasm for art house cinema, said to me once that she would "rather die" than watch the second part of *Sátántangó* with me, so anaesthetising had she found the first part). Raised on mainstream films, we (some viewers) come to expect everything to rush at them, for it all to be served on a (fast food, fast cinema) plate, our attention filched from us, not something that we give

or pay. It takes a trained viewer to want to watch a film to which we must attend, a film that requires effort. And to do that, one has to flirt with boredom and to get to understand and perhaps even to like boredom, however paradoxical that might sound.

In summary, then, 2013 has been a "slow" year. But the tortoise that is slow cinema seems to be keeping pace with the fast and brained hare of the nimble mainstream. Indeed, by taking part in the same race, it seems that the two mutually reinforce the system that sustains them. Both, then, speak of the generalised boredom that seems the condition for contemporary cinema (and cinema not just as the condition for boredom). Nonetheless, studying fast or slow cinema, 2013 has involved numerous pleasures at numerous conferences as I have heard numerous excellent papers. My thanks to all those organisers who made this possible. At whatever pace it can keep going, may film studies continue to yield such excellent scholarship for a long time to come.

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1. To reference another conference in which slowness and boredom were discussed recently in relation to Belá Tarr, I should mention papers given by Elzbieta Buslowska's "'Give me a Body, then' — Belá Tarr's World of Non-Human Becoming" (2013) and Calum Watt's (2013) discussion of Tarr's films, "Belá Tarr's Disastrous Bodies," at *The Body in Eastern European and Russian Cinema*, University of Greenwich, 21-22 June.

2. Thomas Elsaesser, "Cinephilia or the Uses of Disenchantment," in *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*, ed. Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 33.

3. Drehli Robnik, "Mass Memories of Movies: Cinephilia as Norm and Narrative in Blockbuster Culture," in ibid., 60.

4. The drive to pre-sell movies is only made all the clearer by crowd-funding schemes like Kickstarter. By 2012, 10 per cent of films screened at the Sundance Film Festival were funded at least partially through Kickstarter, accessed 23 Aug. 2013, http://www.kickstarter.com/year/2012#sundance. By 2013, fully professional filmmakers like Zach Braff and Spike Lee were using the site to raise major budgets for their projects — see Ben Child, "Zach Braff's Kickstarter campaign closes on $3.1m," *The Guardian*, 28 May 2013, accessed 23 Aug. 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/ may/28/zach-braff-kickstarter-campaign-closes; Eliana Dockterman, "Spike Lee Film Raises $1.4 Million on Kickstarter," *Time*, 21 Aug., accessed 23 Aug. 2013, http://newsfeed.time.com/2013/08/21/spike-lee-film-raises-1-4-million-on-kickstarter. Initially the preserve of the truly independent, the site quickly seems to be turning into a space where professionals raise the money for their films, while at the same time functioning as an excellent marketing tool. Why would the studios not follow suit? Indeed, given that Hollywood studios encourage viewers to watch their products repeatedly (at the theatre, on DVD, the Special Edition, the Director's Cut, the Anniversary Edition, the upgrade to Blu-Ray, the 3D re-release, the 3D Blu-Ray, and so on), thereby inviting audiences serially to invest in the same film, it only makes sense that the studios would get their audiences to buy the film in advance. What could be more logical? Fifty thousand people 'invest' in a film; only a handful will not go to see the film when it comes out — especially if they get to scour the end credits to see their name on the big screen. And then why would they not buy the DVD, since they are part of the magic? Meanwhile, the stories of how much each film is raising would be excellent marketing fodder, it would remove risk from many films, especially the possibility of flops (if the film did not meet its investment target, it would not get made – standard Kickstarter policy), while really taking the public's money at the outset, investing none of its own money, but yielding pure profit as a result merely of facilitating the relationship between filmmaker and viewer. Capitalism would have melted into air — in a terrifyingly exploitative fashion.