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# ekran

revija za film in televizijo



refleksija refleksije / reflecting reflection ■ lav diaz

nil baskar paolo bertolin lav diaz scott foundas christoph huber gabe klinger  
jurij meden olaf möller stojan pelko vinita ramani filip robar dorin claudia siefen  
andrej šprah alexis tioseco mauro feria tumbocon, jr. noel vera



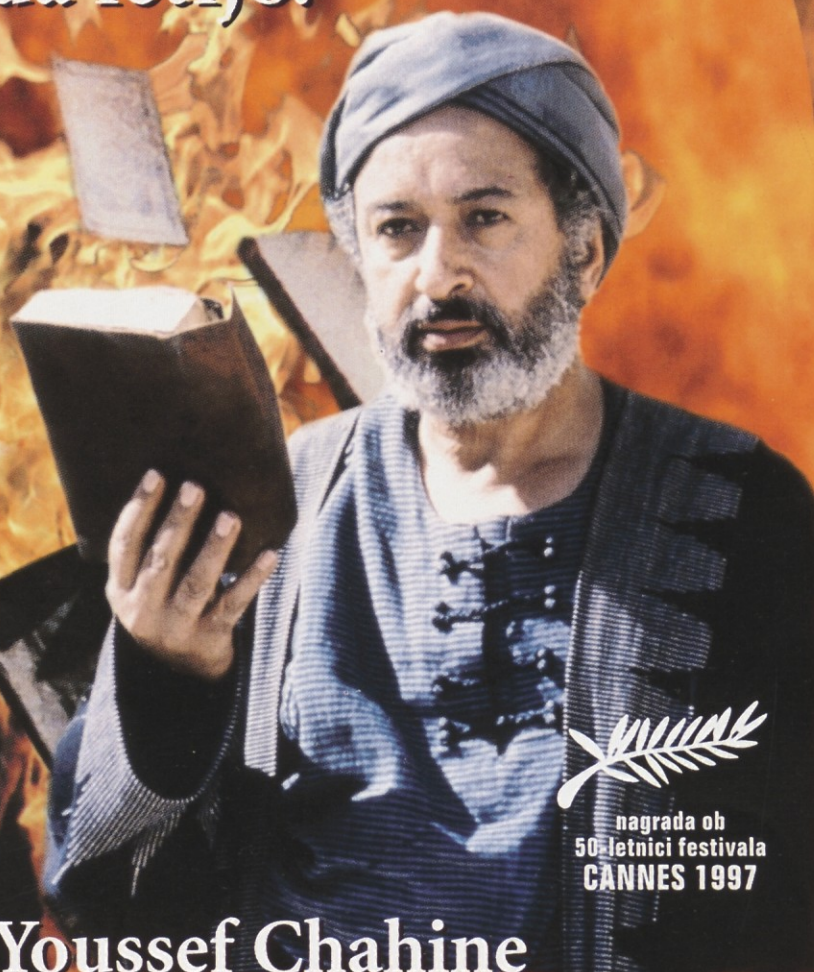
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nihče jim ne more preprečiti,  
da letijo.”



nagrada ob  
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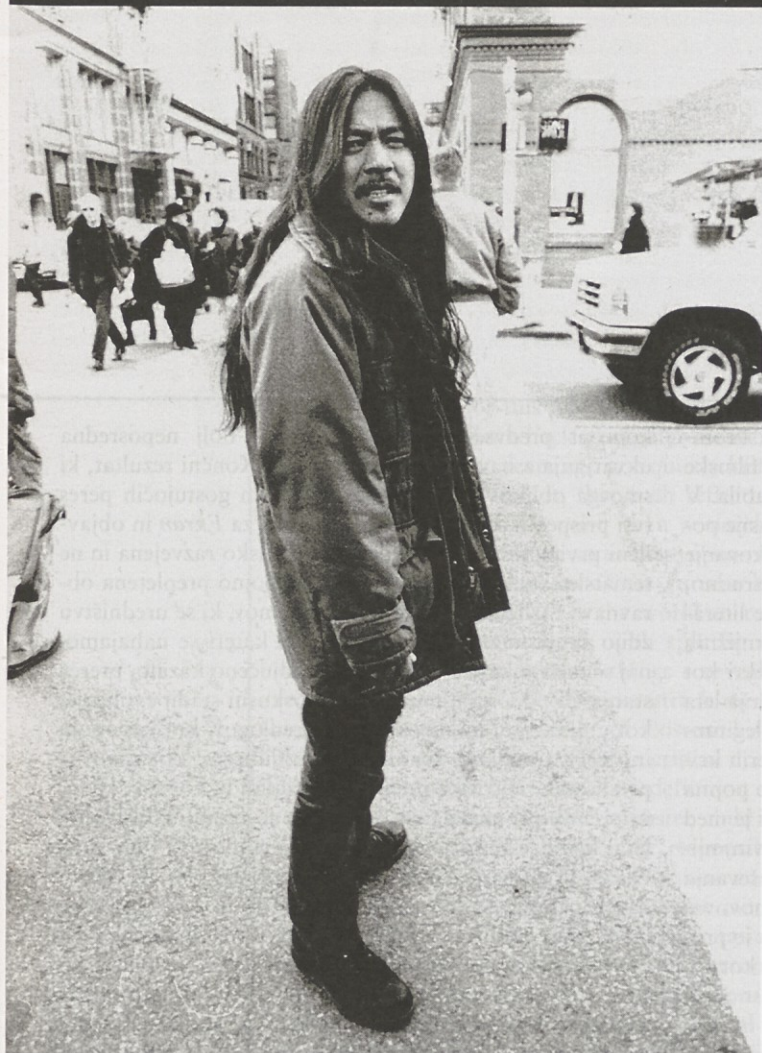
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# Ekran

revija za film in televizijo



Lav Diaz

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Metelkova 6

BLJANA



Prvotna ideja za pričujočo številko *Ekrana* je bila skromna in nujna: vrniti *Ekranu* redno rubriko recenzij filmske publicistike, ki se je po poti, pred leti, potihoma izgubila. V dobri veri pač, da tovrstna refleksija filmske refleksije pogosto naliže čistejšega vina kot neposredno paberkovanje po filmskih platnih, pa naj bo slednje še tako neutrudno, odprte glave in radovedno. Bežen prelet aktualne literature – od filmskih revij širom sveta do recentnih knjižnih izdaj, ki se ne ubadajo toliko s specifičnimi subjekti kot pa grizejo v širše stanje stvari – je razkril, da je zadnja leta na udaru predvsem trdnjava filmskega kanona, legitimnost obstoječih zgodovín, nabrušenost nekdanjih ostrih kritičnih konceptov in posledično poskus redefinicije pojma cinefilija, stoglavega otroka politike in ljubezni, ki je med drugim najbolj zaslužen za obstoj filmskih zgodovín, njihovih mehanizmov in kazalcev. Našteta prevpraševanja so se po eni strani kotila iz defetističnih tarnanj novovalovske generacije o smrti filma, po drugi strani jih je prožil razcvet novih tehnologij (tako za produkcijo kot reprodukcijo), nad vsem pa je ždel skokovit porast zanimanja za kinematografije Azije, Irana, Argentine in drugih “drugih” teritorijev, ki smo mu bili priča v desetletju po praznovanju stoletnice filma. Hrbtna stran tega porasta je zadrega, s katero se bo filmska misel zares šele morala spopasti: vprašanje relevantnosti, celo veljavnosti “zahodnega/severnega” pogleda na “vzhod/jug”, od koder podoba – po zatohli kolonialni logiki – praviloma kapljajo izključno prek posredstva “razvite”, “zahodne” presoje. V luči navedenega se je ožjemu uredništvu zazdelo drznejše – predvsem pa bolj zanimivo – izkoristiti prvotni

koncept predvsem kot iztočnico za bolj neposredna ukvarjanja z navedenimi tematikami. Končni rezultat, ki smo ga oblikovali z izdatnim vložkom gostujočih peres (vsi prispevki so napisani ekskluzivno za *Ekran* in objavljeni prvič), je zažarej predvsem organsko razvejena in tematsko zaokrožena celota. Medsebojno prepletena obravnava različnih konkretnih problemov, ki se uredništvu zdijo simptomatični za stvarnost, v kateri se nahajamo, naj se tako nikakor ne bere kot zaključeno kazalo, prerez stanja ali pika na i, temveč kot poskusni stadij evolucije, kot gojišče idej in alternativnih predlogov, kot nepopoln in nečist (politični) manifest neke ljubezni, kot zagovor preslišanih in kritika preglasnih. Zadnji in obenem ključni premik pri nastajanju številke se je zgodil na prelomu leta, ko se je filmski izkušnji zgodil najnovejši film Lava Diaza, ki mu posvečamo celoten drugi del številke: idealna priložnost, da se v praksi udejanjijo in tako preverijo ideje, ki se iskrijo v prvem razdelku. Poleg nesporne kvalitete, nuje in svežine, ki bruha iz Diazovih zadnjih dveh filmov, je avtor (žal) fenomen tudi po skrajni neizpostavljenosti v še tako ozkih, specializiranih filmskih krogih. *Ekran* je ponosen, da prvi na svetu objavlja natančno in obširno analizo (zlasti) Diazovega zadnjega filma (obenem gre za – po mnenju uredništva – uspešen eksperiment v preseganju tradicionalne (im)potence “zahodnega” pogleda), kar je med drugim tudi razlog za objavo večine tekstov v angleščini, saj bo številka distribuirana tudi na tujem. Ker verjamemo, da imata beseda in podoba še vedno težo.●



The original idea for this issue of *Ekran* was simple and essential: to give *Ekran* back its regular section of film literature reviews that years ago got quietly lost along the way. In good faith, that is, that such reflecting on film reflection is more to the point than a simple gleaning from film screens, be it ever so tireless, open-minded and curious. A fleeting overview of the current literature – from film magazines all over the world to recent book editions dealing not so much with specific subjects as with the more general state of things – revealed that in recent years there have been under attack the fortress of the film canon, the legitimacy of existent histories, the sharpness of the once cutting-edge critical concepts and as the result also the attempts at a redefinition of the term cinephilia, the “many-headed” monster child of politics and love, among other things most responsible for the existence of film histories, their mechanisms and pointers. On the one side, these questionings came out of the defeatist whinings of the New-Wave generation on the death of cinema and on the other, they were caused by the flourish of new technologies (for production as well as reproduction), while above all there hovered the astronomical increase in interest in Asian, Iranian, Argentinian and other “other” cinemas taking place in the decade following the hundredth film anniversary celebration. The backside of this increase is the difficulty film thought has actually yet to face: the question of relevance and even validity of the “Western/Northern” view of the “East/South”, from where as a rule, the images – according to the stifling colonial logic – come dropping almost exclusively under the mediation of the “developed” “Western” judgement. In light of the above, the select editorial board thought it more daring – above all more interesting – to

use the original conception rather as a starting point for a more hands-on approach to the above mentioned subjects. The final result achieved through the substantial input of guest pens (all contributions were written exclusively for *Ekran* and published for the first time) is therefore organically manifold but thematically not a rounded whole. A mutually intertwining consideration of different concrete problems that the editorial board feels symptomatic of the current state of things should therefore not read as a complete table of contents, a crosssection/analysis of the state of things or be considered the icing on the cake, but rather as an experimental stage in an evolution, as a breeding ground for ideas and alternative suggestions, as an incomplete and impure (political) manifesto of a love, as a defence of the overheard and the criticism of the overly laud. The last and most crucial shift in the making of this issue took place at the turn of the year when Lav Diaz’ latest film befell cinematic experience, and to which we dedicate the whole second part of this issue: an ideal opportunity to put into praxis and test the ideas conceived in the first part. Beside the undisputed quality, urgency and freshness emerging from Diaz’ latest two films the author is (unfortunately) a phenomenon also because of his neglect even in ever so narrow or specialized film circles. *Ekran* is proud to be the first to publish a wide and detailed analysis of (especially) Diaz’ latest film (at the same time this is – in the opinion of the editorial board – a successful experiment in overcoming the traditional (im)potence of the “Western” gaze), which is among other things the reason for publishing most of the texts in English, for the issue will also be distributed abroad. Because we believe that words and images still carry weight. •



In 1997 Jonathan Rosenbaum (USA) started an experiment/investigation in/-to contemporary, some would say the new cinephilia: He invited four carefully selected participants – Adrian Martin (Australia), Kent Jones (USA), Alexander Horwath (Austria), Nicole Brenez (France) – to write letters in which they would consider their – life with – cinephilia, which they did, usually in an autobiographical, somewhat confessional mode; none of the chosen said: I'm not a cinephile.

This exchange (well, relay, as the letters weren't written all at once but one after the other) was bookended by an introduction by Rosenbaum and an epilogue by Raymond Bellour (France). These six pieces, collectively called *Movie Mutations*, were first published (in French) in *Trafic* no. 24; translations into Dutch, German, Italian, and English followed, as well as a second set of letters suggested by the Buenos Aires International Festival of Independent Cinema in 2002 (and therefore published first in Spanish, together with the original six, in a small book called *Movie Mutations: Cartas de Cine*), featuring further thoughts by two of the original mutants, Martin and Brenez, as well as two new participants, Quintin (Argentina) and Mark Peranson (Canada), plus, of course, Rosenbaum with some final advice. These two sets of letters, now, bookend a collection of pieces – a lot of them being exchanges of some sort – called *Movie Mutations. The Changing Face of World Cinephilia*, edited by Rosenbaum & Martin and published by the bfi in 2003.

Since it hit the scene several things happened, all of them in one way or another relatable to the *Movie Mutations*-project: Rosenbaum published another collection of his writings, *Essential Cinema. On the Necessity of Film Canons* (John Hopkins UP; 2004), which features as a kind of *conclusio*, a suggested viewing-list of 1000 films called *Personal Canon*; *Trafic* asked in its massive no. 50 “Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?” and got some of the answers from writers connected to the *Movie Mutations*-project: Rosenbaum, Martin, Jones, and Brenez; in celebration of its 40th anniversary, the Austrian Film Museum together with Synema – Gesellschaft für Film und Medien, hosted, in April 2004, an international conference called *Writing/Film/History – Cinephilia and Canonization*; and a few months later, the said Film Museum presented a program of *100 Suggestions for a Different Canon called Utopia Cinema*.

Rosenbaum delivered a talk at the Viennese conference, and so did I; and both of us each presented a film: Rosenbaum *Alphaville, une étrange aventure de Lemmy Caution* (1965, Jean-Luc Godard), and I *Manila in the Claws of Darkness* (Maynila. Sa mga kuko ng liwanag, 1975, Lino Brocka), which in a certain way related to our respective talks: Rosenbaum's on *Film History and Film Criticism on Film: The French New Wave*, and mine on my frustration with the Dominant Discourse, its vision as well as its praxis of cinephilia – actually, it was, as suggested by the people of Synema, a kind of report on my experiences in writing and film programming; about constantly hitting walls of dogmas that got encrusted into axioms as well as about the difficulties of changing people's way of considering cinema, not to mention the power structures that more often than not are just not dis-

cussed – the canon as a natural instead of a social object, so to speak. This piece here grew out of that talk which, by the way, was titled *Cui Bono?*

Let's consider Rosenbaum's original notion behind the *Movie Mutations*-project: There's a younger generation of cinephiles who are critics, programmers, and/or teachers (all of the mutants occupy themselves with at least two of these) holding ever more important positions and changing the way people watch and think about films, so it seems quite sensible to start a dialogue with them, see what common ground there is and also what the differences are.

Generation-wise, Rosenbaum and Bellour belong to the Cinema-Is-Dead-generation – a proposition, by the way, that only works if one thinks that the Hollywood of the studio-era alone is cinema; the same kind of structure which produces a similar kind of cinema still exists today in India, Hong Kong, Nigeria (on video only) ...; cinema is certainly not dead for those who know where to look for and how to appreciate it! –, while the ur-mutants belong to the generation that followed, basically the video-generation for which cinema and film wasn't *an unio mystica*, quite the contrary, cinema was an option, a statement; the two later additions, Quintin and Peranson, belong age-wise to neither, the first being about ten years older, the latter about ten years younger than the ur-mutants. And something else seems worthwhile to note: Quintin is the sole mutant from a country that doesn't belong to what has to be called the Western cultural context.

The main factor for selecting the mutants was – in classical cinephile fashion which has a compulsive need for defining in- and out-groups – a shared taste that doesn't contradict and is even in support of the dominant discourse (Kiarostami etc.) and its history (*Cahiers du Cinéma*, *Nouvelle Vague* etc.): John Cassavetes, Philippe Garrel, Chantal Akerman, Jean Eustache, Monte Hellman, Abel Ferrara etc ... It's equally important that they're from different parts of the world. So: They're from all around yet like, for the main part, the same things.

Which makes it look like an example of a notion Rosenbaum's been cultivating for quite some time: “[...] *global synchronicity: the simultaneous appearance of the same apparent tastes, styles and/or themes in separate parts of the world, without any signs of these common and synchronous traits having influenced one another – all of which suggest a common global experience that has not yet been adequately identified*”. Well, considering that seven of the eight persons involved in the *Movie Mutations*-letters-relay come from a Western cultural context this seems not to be too surprising, and even the eighth comes from a country whose capital at least is legendary for its cosmopolitan spirit (not to mention that its culture is generally defined along Western traditions). And: Four of the eight come from English-speaking countries (pace Quebec) and two from France, while Quintin is fluent in English and French, and Horwath at least in English (although both preferred to write in their native languages). In essence this has little to do with some “common global experience”, but quite a lot with the cultures and lan-



guages of the dominant discourse. A problem that's actually alluded to in *Movie Mutations* several times, most importantly by Natasa Durovicova who talks about the potential losses of a world stuttering away in English and how everybody's humiliating himself this way – namely, that the biggest losers in this game are the English-(or French) monolinguals, I nevertheless call wishful thinking in an 'abstract humanist' vein. And there's something else we need to consider: There're more people with a passive knowledge of a language than with an active, meaning, a lot of people with difficulties expressing themselves in English and/or French are nevertheless quite capable of reading and understanding them/it, so, they can take in stuff but they can't spread it beyond certain borders – not to mention all the ways in which one's socially handicapped this way and therefore kept out of certain levels of discussion or just social circles.

Adrian Martin also touches on the problem of languages when, in his second letter, he talks about how much Western – meaning basically, again, French and American – film criticism and theory is translated into 'other' languages but how little of 'their' writings into 'ours' – meaning, basically, English and French –, and that this is a shame. Right. But what does it mean, i.e., what would a sensible kind of change entail? For one thing: A major financial investment as translators for 'more foreign' languages are expensive – a text by an Iranian critic writing in Farzi would cost something like thrice the amount of a piece by an author capable of expressing himself in English, Iranian or otherwise. But then: How does one find and choose that Iranian critic writing only in Farzi – so, somebody here has to know the language. Then: Does the Western cultural context have the tolerance to feature somebody who's contradicting it, meaning an Iranian critic praising Bahram Beyzai – or more extreme: Ebrahim Hatamikia, e.g., – instead of Abbas Kiarostami, who, by the way, would've had to be chosen by a critic/scholar/"specialist"/whatever from the Western cultural context with a non-dogmatic mind, i.e., somebody who's not 100% in sync with the dominant discourse's party line? And finally: Is the Western cultural context willing to accept these differences and include them into its arguments, and is it willing to live with the probably apparent contradictions? I remember the *Cahiers*-critique of *Le Cinema japonais*, the abridged French translation of Sato Tadao's standard work *Nihon eiga shi*, whose writer was annoyed by the fact that the huge two-tome work just didn't concern itself too much with the stuff he was interested in – instead of asking, Now what does this book tell me about the way a Japanese critic of an earlier generation thinks about his country's cinema?

Which brings us to another inequality in *Movie Mutations*: While five of the book's twelve chapters deal with Asian cinema – there is nothing on African cinemas, barely anything on Latin American cinemas, less than little on Central and Eastern European cinemas: They're just not the topics to talk about for smart cinephiles ... so much for 'global' –, there's only one Asian contributor, Hasumi Shigehiko – okay, there's Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa but her work on the Rosenbaum-Kiarostami-exchange is deemed secondary enough for her name to be put into parenthesis, although this exchange probably wouldn't have been possible without her.

Hasumi Shigehiko is the co-author of Chapter 4, which consists of an experiment in "global synchronicities": Rosenbaum considers the possibilities of such "synchronicities" between Masumura Yasuzo and a few US-mavericks very roughly his contemporaries, Samuel Fuller, Nicholas Ray, Frank Tashlin, Douglas Sirk, while Hasumi was sup-

posed to consider the Japaneseness of Hawks, but didn't really. Hasumi, now, was probably the worst possible choice for this project considering that he's something like the father of postmodern film theory in Japan – put simple: He's more interested in what's French-cinephile American about Makino Masahiro. Sato Tadao, by the way, would probably have been a much more sensible choice for such an exchange – the problem is: I don't think that Sato's English has gotten any better lately; also, Sato belongs to the generation before that of Rosenbaum and Hasumi which might've further confused things. What makes Chapter 4 particularly interesting is that, from Rosenbaum's side, it's something like an auto-deconstruction of the *Movie Mutations*-project: As Rosenbaum comes to realize that his cross-cultural readings only work on the surface. Which is the operative word here. In a certain way contemporary cinephilia is a cult of the universal surface, one of whose most potent expressions is a particular cinephile practice: Watching films without subtitles including films in languages one doesn't have the slightest clue about (for practical purposes we'll just ignore the problem of dubbing). This practice, cinephilia-mythology-wise, originates with Henri Langlois and his legendary programming dogma of showing everything and in the way it's easiest available which quite often meant prints without subtitles. Being close in time to the late silent era also meant a greater general acceptance of the concept of cinema as an art of self-explanatory moving images, meaning that films would generally make themselves understood more through images than through words. Another cinephilia-myth tells of the Nouvelle Vague'ians' problems with English which lead them to look more closely at the pictures and 'feel' their way into the film as they weren't quite able to follow the dialogue. The concept of *mise-en-scene* has also quite a lot to do with enabling the viewer to make sense of a film without the need to understand its language – as Rivette had it, polemically: The language one needed to understand in order to appreciate Mizoguchi was not Japanese but *mise-en-scene*. Personally and equally polemically speaking I think this is utter bullshit but I appreciate the noble sentiment motivating it: the Utopia of a universal language, an Esperanto of the mechano-objectively observed world, a universalist idiom. But why should a Fang or a Japanese be interested in a universalism that has little if anything at all to do with his own culture?

A cinephilia based on the ideal/ideal of *mise-en-scene* is only able to describe a film's 'secondary reality' which is the surface itself, i.e., it can only make an 'abstract humanist' sense of the images and sounds and rhythms – its 'primary reality' which is the film's essence in its cultural conditions gets lost, and with it all possibilities for mistakes and misunderstandings, *per* Goethe, the only things that unite mankind.

This problem is also at the core of Kent Jones' consideration of Tsai Ming-liang – whose first half is actually a polemic against the culture of specialists which, he thinks, limits everybody's access to films from "more foreign" parts of the world by constantly pointing out that we can't understand them properly without guidance. Jones, again, refers to another classical polemic, Stephen Teo's *The Legacy of T.E. Lawrence – The Forward Policy of Western Film Critics in the Far East*. Although: Teo is less concerned with the question of, Are Westerners allowed to love Asian films without being able to appreciate them for what they are?, which, yes they're – but they shouldn't think that they can tell Asian film critics what to think about their own cinemas. Teo fiercely challenges the way a lot of influential Western critics behave in Asia: like Imperialist thugs whose whole manner towards their



Asian counterparts is one huge insult; at the end of his *cri du coeur* Teo throws a challenge at the establishment of the Western cultural context: To accept Asian film critics as equal but different. Or else – what? Teo is certainly aware that change here can only be unilateral, that the Western critical establishment has to share the power it still holds of its own free will.

Which is what *Movie Mutations* would like to advocate but doesn't know how, and how could it as its implicit – in the case of Rosenbaum even explicit – ideology of a common, shared humanity, a universalist 'abstract humanism' prevents everybody from having to accept the very concrete necessity of changing themselves. Tolerance is noble but in the face of the need for changes in cinephilia's global power structure it looks just complacent – and whose tolerance is it anyway?

Rosenbaum claims that the belief "that all the important discoveries in film history have already been made" is "presumptuous and somewhat arrogant", and I certainly agree on that although I wouldn't express it in such comparatively polite terms. That said: There's not a single piece on a 'discovery' to be found in *Movie Mutations* – Jones on the Ghengis Khan'ian greatness of Ali Khamraev or Eric Cazdyn on the revolutionary gentleness of Hane-da Sumiko or Christoph Huber on the intricacies of Giorgio Ferroni would have certainly been more enlightening as well as enchanting ...; there's nothing like, e.g., the end of Helmut Färber's exquisite *Trafic*-piece "Le paysage est plus vieux que l'etre humain. Meme si c'est une fleur." in which he deplores the way that contemporary German masters like Wolfgang Schmidt, Manfred Wilhelms, or Stafen Hayn are ignored, that their films remain – in the capital of cinephilia! (which is?) – unseen, invisible, not even forgotten as they couldn't penetrate the state of things that far, cresting in a lament for all the unrealized dreams exemplified by Gerhard Theuring's Bruegel-project – and in between this role-call, in a gesture of discrete brilliance so totally his, Färber asks by whom and how the thousands of videofilms produced each year in Nigeria are seen. Instead, cinephilia's dominant discourse reinforced its cultural-historical-political position by again praising the likes of Tsai, Hou, and Kiarostami – the book just isn't interested in new paths and roads: It's a state-of-the-union-address posing as a call to arms.

Well, there's Rosenbaum on Masumura – but what kind of discovery is an *auteur* who's mentioned in just about every – even Western! – study that only so much as touches on the Japanese New Wave, not to mention the fact that even the somewhat conservative Japan Foundation has over the years quite regularly, here and there, presented Masumura-retrospectives. And, yes, there's Nicole Benez's second letter which is a kind of report on a 'discovery': That of the French avant-garde where a wave of new *auteurs* brought on a 're/discovery' of earlier practitioners and films – against which I can't even say anything except that Benez's enthusiasm is certainly inspiring but ... let's say: maybe a bit too much ...

What's important here is that an occurrence in our days leads to a reconsideration of the past. That said: Up till now only a few comparable efforts were made to get deeper into the history of Iranian, Hong Kongian, and PRChinese cinema, and even less in the case of Taiwan, the same way that there were only a few scattered attempts made at looking anew at the history of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe – by the dominant discourse, that is (pace Eisenschitz and Grmek Germani). People 'there' usually know the measures and glories of their respective cinematographies quite well, are more

than willing to share them with anybody who asks (and doesn't look like a total idiot), and are even prepared to discuss differences of opinions – which just leaves the problem of actually wanting to integrate these film cultures in full, and not only from the point of their 'discovery' on – and thereby risking that the canon will change in such a way that suddenly some of 'our' fixtures will get lost in the process?! Film cultures like the Iranian or Taiwanese – after having been chopped down to a size controllable by the dominant discourse – were just added, for a bit more colour, so to speak – for all of this is not about them, but about us. This is still not their world. Global cinephilia ends there. It would be better for cinephilia to end if that's all it's capable of: The losses to be expected seem to be much bigger than the gains.

### fragements of an aborted attempt

Personally speaking, I find it somewhat awkward to talk about world cinephilia and then ignore most of the world. The problem with the book as with the kind of cinephilia suggested in it is exemplified by Adrian Martin's piece "Musical Mutations: Before, Beyond and Against Hollywood": In the beginning he contemplates the fact that there're lots of different cultures of music-cinema to be found all around the world but then ends up with ... *Dancer in the Dark* by way of Jacques Demy?! When you hope for something like an extrapolation of the dialectics between, let's say, Tamil-*auteur* Mani Ratnam's Bollywood-masterpiece *From the Heart* (Dil se, 2000), Mauretanian maverick Med Hondo's *West Indies* (West Indies, ou le peuple marront de la liberte, 1979), and Potter-Haggard's TV – *Pennies from Heaven* (1978), then von Trier *via* Demy is a major let-down. Or is this just too much to ask? – too much of exactly what? Just put up a construction like that and people go, Woah!!!!!!waitasecond – because suddenly the world is a fucking big place. One of the problems of *Movie Mutations* is that it wants – I don't want to say: pretends – to talk about the world but seems to be scared to death by its hugeness and vastness – and I dare say: by its greatness. Like The Industry with its twin-head of multiplex and arthouse market, cinephilia has a compulsive need for hierarchies, order, and control, to make cinema arguable and saleable. Which tends to bring out the realities of the world. One of my pet theories is that there's a kind of unspoken quota that allots each region of the world a certain amount of relevance; e.g.: How many canon-*auteurs* are available for Japan? – three or four, and this hasn't changed for something like half a century although by now we should know that Japan's film culture is in its magnitude equal to that of France. Don't get me started on the racism of it all.

Which is why I'm not as excited and I'm even less optimistic about video/DVDs as Rosenbaum. For him, video/DVD, connected with the internet's possibility (more of an illusion, I say ...) of getting access to films from all over the world, are tools to empower cinephiles equally all over the world. I think that's overtly optimistic, for three reasons: 1. I don't want to even think about how expensive this'd get (okay, there's the internet with its bounty of pirated goods ...); 2. there's still the problem of languages, i.e., subtitles, which doesn't bother Rosenbaum who in *Cinema Scope* no. 19 actually wonders why younger cinephiles have a problem with watching subtitled films in languages they don't understand – I don't have that problem but I'm painfully aware of what's lost –, but then, judging by a piece on Alexandr Dovshenko reprinted in *Essential Cinema*, he also doesn't seem to be too embarrassed about finding out that a favourite film of his, Yuliya Solntseva's *The Enchanted Desna* (Zacharovannaya Desna, 1964), has a narration that is, a Russian-



speaking companion told him, “full of Stalinist claptrap” – I find that attitude a tad ... questionable; 3. I don’t know of any case yet in which an *auteur* got to the higher levels of recognition and appreciation without having had at least one retrospective in a major venue – my generation might have discovered John Woo / Ng Yu-sum through tapes but it all got culturally real only the moment his films got the blessing of major festivals and film museums, i.e., by being shown in cinemas. Now, I wouldn’t mind if Rosenbaum was right as this would deliver film museum directors all over the world from the pressures of the *superego* called canon: They wouldn’t have to constantly extrapolate between the known and established and the unknown and neglected worthy of their days under the projector lights; they could say, e.g., Let’s have a complete Giuseppe de Santis retrospective as Antonioni is out there on disc anyway and so is de Santis and right now I just feel more like the latter – just that de Santis would be ignored by the press as he isn’t canonised and Antonioni is, not to mention the big wigs in power who also like to feel informed and in control. Actually, I don’t mind the judgement of the movie theatre: I’m quite willing to fight my way into it and change the canon if necessary. Also, there’s a (deeply conservative, some say) streak in me that cannot and doesn’t want to accept that it doesn’t matter whether one watches a film on video/DVD or in the theatre, and that it’s okay to project a film – as in: film – from video/DVD – isn’t this attitude one of reducing a work of art to its mere content?, the difference between experiencing a colour and recognising a colour. It’s an interesting question: Is that what is gained by video/ DVD/internet worth the price of what is lost?, and doesn’t the promise/illusion of every film’s availability in an agreeable approximation of its original state weaken the resistance that’s necessary for a meaningful politic of cultural affairs? So, as much as I love initiatives like Bulgarian-in-Paris Maria Koleva’s Cinoche Video, *cinema en apartment* (her own actually) where she presents her work as well as that of like-minded film-/videomakers, this can’t be an end in itself – an option, maybe, a challenge, certainly, but not an end.

It seems advisable to think that this “common global experience” is a manifestation of power: Someone strongly suggests something, probably because he (or some player) has some vetted interests in the subject, and is skilful enough to launch it, and, Trara!; this probably sounds blunt and ultra-schematic but, well, if you do a lot of work for film festivals you lose quite a lot of those illusions and hopes that inform Rosenbaum’s poetic “global synchronicity”-notion. Mark Peranson certainly has a point when he suggests that “*the hands-on experience of programming should be mandatory for all critics, as it helps one to understand the many factors that are involved in what films are even available for local viewers to see, and how programmers’ tastes are one (often the least crucial) factor*”... actually it would already help if one would have the common sense of not blindly believing film festivals etc.: What do I not get to see, and why?, and what does that which I get to see mean in relation to what I don’t get to see, meaning, What kind of an image of the state of things is created and presented here?

#### **p.s.**

Letter to the editor, 23th of June, 2005

i’m simply not made for writing stuff like this, i still deeply dislike the piece, i still think it sucks, and having written by now something like a whole book worth of aborted attempts didn’t change anything.....  
..... i just prefer to set a good example by writing about what i like and not by taking the piss at people and their attitudes.....•

### PODOŽIVLJANJE JUGOSLOVANSKE FILMSKE IZKUŠNJE

*“Dragocena odlika jugoslovanskega novega filma je, da s svojimi filozofskimi, ideološkimi in stilističnimi razsežnostmi zagotavlja možnosti – in njihovo vsakodnevno realizacijo v praksi – zamenjave kolektivne mitologije z brezštevijem osebnih mitologij ... Jugoslovanski novi film potemtakem ni nikakršna ‘stilistika’, ki je nastopila, da bi odigrala svojo vlogo in nato pomiknila v brezno zgodovine, ampak je revolucija, ki odpira vrata svobodi. Svoboda pa ni nič drugega kot uzakonitev stalnosti sprememb.”*

Dušan Stojanović

Nedoumljiva drama krvi in plamenov, v kateri se je pred očmi sveta razblinila nekdanja SFRJ, je bila od samega začetka deležna poglobljenih intelektualnih zavzemanj, ki so skušala opredeliti genezo razpada, raziskati njegove vzroke, najti vzvode in predvideti daljnosežne posledice, predvsem pa razrešiti vprašanje odgovornosti zanj. Kritičnemu jedru domače javnosti, ki je s pozicij neposredne vpletenosti nastopala z ažurno zavzetostjo, so, sprva obotavljaje, potem pa vse odločneje, pritegnili zgroženi mednarodni odmevi. Plejadi družboslovnih in humanističnih raziskav iz druge polovice devetdesetih let se je po letu 2000 pridružil tudi niz aktualnih študij, ki k travmatičnim vprašanjem pristopajo skozi analizo filmskih podob. Čeprav je najpogostejši predmet tovrstnih obravnav filmska ustvarjalnost na območju nekdanje SFRJ po njenem razpadu, pa je njihov daljši ali krajši “zdrs” po zgodovinskem loku v čas, ko se je na teritoriju sedanjih samostojnih držav še bohotila federacija, tako rekoč neizbežen. Kajti celovito razumevanje filmskega dogajanja v petih nacionalnih kinematografijah, ki so se po bridkih izkušnjah uničenja skupne države konsolidirale na njenih ruševinah, je pogosto pogojeno tudi z opredeljevanjem do kompleksnega fenomena jugoslovanskega filma. Zadnja leta pred milenijskim prelomom – predvsem pa obdobje po njem – so namreč prinesla novo upanje za filmsko umetnost, ki je v večini osamosvajajočih se republik po usodnem letu 1991 padla v globoko institucionalno, industrijsko in tudi ustvarjalno krizo. A predpostavka določene stopnje preporoda, katerega intenzivnost je (bila) odvisna predvsem od stopnje razrušenosti in krvavega davka, ki ga je posamezna skupnost utrpela v vojni, je globoko prežeta tudi z odsevi nedavnih skupnih podob. Vanj je namreč neizbrisno upečateno “... *izkustvo jugoslovanskega filma – vgrajeno je skozi spomin, skozi tehnično bazo, skozi režiserski, igralski in strokovni kader, pa tudi skozi poetična določila ...*”, kot poudarja Jurica Pavičić v predgovoru k hrvaškemu prevodu monografije *Liberated Cinema: The Yugoslav Experience, 1945–2001* (2002) Daniela J. Gouldinga.<sup>1</sup> Prav knjiga ameriškega profesorja filmologije (Oberlin College v Indiani) o zgodovinskem razvoju jugoslovanskega filma, ki je v svoji drugi, razširjeni izdaji dopolnjena predvsem z obravnavo obdobja neposredno pred in po razpadu SFRJ, sodi med osrednje vzpodbude našega razmišljanja. A če je Gouldingov podvig ob izidu leta 1985 predstavljal pionirsko delo socio-historične analize jugoslovanske kinematografije skozi “zahodni pogled”, je druga izdaja izšla v času, ko se je v svetu izrazito povečalo zanimanje za jugoslovanski film. Ta je bil v svojem zgodovinskem razvoju sicer vseskozi bolj ali manj prisoten v svetovni filmski orbiti, nikdar pa mu ni uspelo pridobiti domovinske pravice v njenih akademskih sferah. Nekaj dobrodošlih prebliskov iz preteklosti, ki so bili pogosto programsko vezani na retrospektive jugoslovanskega filma v pomembnih svetovnih centrih in imajo zato predvsem pregledni značaj, ter peščica analiz nekaterih zanesenjakov (Daniel J. Goulding, Ronald Holloway, David W. Paul, Andrew Horton, Paolo Vecchi, Giorgio Bertellini idr.), ki so velik del svoje ustvarjalnosti posvetili raziskovanju vzhodnoevropskih kinematografij, tako nikakor ne odraža dejanskega vrednostnega položaja jugoslovanskega filma. Dejstvo je namreč, da je bil skozi ves socialistični historiat izborna zastopan v internacionalnem festivalskem krogotoku, deležen številnih mednarodnih priznanj, obravnavan v najvidnejših filmskih revijah in trdno vpet v distribucijske tokove zahodne hemisfere.



Ključni razlogi obujenega interesa za filmsko ustvarjalnost na območju bivše SFRJ v devetdesetih letih so bili seveda tesno povezani z njenim tragičnim razpadom in medijskim hlastanjem za senzacionalnostmi, v katerem so se za kratek utrip njegovi najmočnejši reflektorji uprli v krvavo genocidno dramo. A prve (na)valu – pogosto tudi interesno ali simpatizersko vpelih – poročil o prebujenem filmu na območjih kriznih žarišč je zlagoma sledil niz poglobljenih premišljanj, ki so kulminirala v pronicljivih teoretskih analizah; z njimi pa se je zbudilo upanje, da bo “eno najbolj prezrtih območij na zemljevidu filmskih študij” (Iordanova) vendarle deležno obravnave, kakršno si nedvomno zasluži. Med najvidnejšimi deli mednarodne filmske misli, ki se odločno spogleduje z “odročno” jugovzhodno Evropo, želimo tako še posebej izpostaviti zbornik *The Celuloid Tinderbox: Yugoslav screen reflections of a turbulent decade* (2000), ki ga je uredil Andrew James Horton, monografijo *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media* (2001) Dine Iordanove ter razpravo “Thoughts on Balkan Cinema” Fredrica Jamesona iz izbora vznemirljivih tekstov na temo tuj(sk)osti: *Subtitles: On the Foreignness of Film* (2004), ki sta ga zasnovala Atom Egoyan in Ian Balfour.<sup>2</sup> Njihovo ohlapno povezavo predstavlja dejstvo, da se, v prizadevanjih za celovitejšo podobo predmeta svojega raziskovanja, pogosto podajajo tudi na teritorije družbenopolitičnih sprememb, ki so v devetdesetih pretresale evropski kontinent. Iščejo namreč možnosti pojmovnih uskladijev filmskega dogajanja s procesi strateških premikov, ki so pripeljali do razkroja večine totalitarnih režimov na območju vzhodne in jugovzhodne Evrope ter političnih pregrupiranj, v katerih je nastala množica novih držav in političnih formacij. Seveda je tudi nekdanja Jugoslavija oziroma peterica njenih naslednic v (z)družbi nekaterih sosednjih držav kmalu dobila nov skupni – pogosto prepreden s stereotipi – geo-strateško-družbeno-politično-ekonomsko-kulturni imenovalec: Balkan. In razumljivo je, da se je zavest o nujnosti “pregrupacij” in “dekonceptualizacij” razmahnila tudi v obravnavi filmskega dogajanja. V poskusih, da bi razvoj najnovejših filmskih trendov, vzniklih na pogorišču jugoslovanskega filma, umestili v širši regijski, pa tudi globalni kontekst, je bila inavguracija novega koncepta v polje filmske misli seveda samo vprašanje časa. In ni bilo potrebno dolgo čakati na premišljeno izpeljavo zahtevnega podviga v obliki ambiciozne raziskave Dine Iordanove – *Cinema of Flames*. Avtorica, ki je svoja videnja deloma razgrnila že v nekaterih predhodnih objavah, je njihovo nadgradnjo suvereno združila v celoto, kjer izhodiščno poudarja, da “... zaradi dezintegracije tistega, kar se je imenovalo Vzhodni blok, v nova geopolitična območja Centralne Evrope in Balkana nadaljnje raziskovanje filma Vzhodne Evrope kot entitete izgublja svoj pravi smisel; koncept ‘vzhodnoevropskega filma’, kakršnega so zasnovali avtorji, kot so Mira in Antoin Liehm (1977), David Paul (1983), Daniel Goulding (1989) in Thomas Slater (1992), pa postopoma postaja stvar preteklosti.” (Iordanova 2001: 19)<sup>3</sup> Seveda pa je v tako radikalnem obratu paradigme predpostavljen docela logičen, če ne celo neizbežen naslednji korak: zahteva po takšnem “pregrupiranju regijskih kinematografij” (Iordanova), ki bo omogočalo odražanje nove geopolitične realnosti in podporo spremembam “konceptualnega fokusa” posameznih pojmovnih določil – v našem primeru pojma “balkanski film”. Poglavitna značilnost izpostavljenih del je, da v zasnovi prenovitvenega pogleda pomemben analitični delež namenjajo tudi samim procesom “razpada predhodnih sistemov”. V mislih imamo, denimo, koncizno analizo Iordanove, ki na temelju Apadurajeve kategorije “izdajstva skupinske identitete”, kot jo vzpostavljajo ideološki mehanizmi države s svojimi lokalnimi izpostavami, podaja prepričljivo interpretacijo vloge medijev in državne propagande v razkrajanju SFRJ. Ali pa Jamesonovo predpostavko, ki – v dvogovoru s Susan Woodard – o jugoslovanski tragediji razpravlja kot o neposredni posledici brutalne globalizacije, ne pa morda med-etničnih trenj v barbarških plemenskih skupnostih eksotičnega “tretjega sveta”. In četudi v pričujoči situaciji sam pojem Balkana ostaja “lebdeči označevalec”, ki ga je, kot poudarja Aleš Debeljak, mogoče “poljubno premeščati”, se zdi, da mu omenjene filmske analize pogosto prihajajo mnogo bliže kot nekatere splošnejše družbeno-kulturne študije. Vendar ključni problem ni vprašanje nove pojmovnosti, temveč predvsem vidiki njenega izvora in verodostojnosti. Ob širokopotezni zasnovi in lucidni obravnavi zapletene po-jugoslovanske situacije namreč samo izhodišče, v katerem, denimo, Iordanova zagotovo opravlja pionirsko delo uveljavitve novih – četudi morda zgolj konceptualnih – filmskih teritorijev, odpira niz perečih vprašanj o usodi obravnave filmske dediščine, ki jo takšna prenova prinaša s seboj. Dejstvo je namreč, da brez poglobljene analize poglavitnih

prvin kinematografij posameznih držav nove interesne sestave tudi samemu fenomenu “balkanski film” umanjka pomemben genetični vezni člen. Najznačilnejši primer med enakovrednimi tako zagotovo predstavlja filmska ustvarjalnost SFRJ, ki je imela – ne samo v regiji, temveč mnogo širše – svojevrsten status edinstvene večnacionalne kinematografije, v novih okoliščinah pa je soočena z resno nevarnostjo, da obtiči na konceptualnem nikogaršnjem ozemlju med zasnavljaljočo se pojmovnostjo balkanskega filma in nedovrš(e)nostjo obravnave kompleksne problematike z imenom: jugoslovanski film. Tudi če pustimo ob strani dejstvo, da Iordanova zaradi neuskajenosti z zasnovno teorema balkanskega filma iz svoje obravnave izloči hrvaško in slovensko kinematografijo, ki naj bi po novih razporeditvah sodili v kulturno formacijo “srednje (vzhodne) Evrope”, namreč ne moremo mimo – že izpostavljenega – vidika prežetosti sedanjega s preteklim ... In tukaj nikakor ne gre samo za vprašanje umetnostne zapuščine, ki lahko edina zagotavlja legitimnost narodne tradicije, temveč predvsem za načela ustvarjalne kontinuitete, v kateri je preteklo elementarna sestavina zdajšnjosti.<sup>4</sup> Kajti za celovito podobo sedanjega stanja stvari v po-jugoslovanskem filmu ni dovolj zgolj upoštevanje “dediščine” ter učnih let akterjev, ki so nastopili z novim poglavjem, temveč je odločilnega pomena tudi vidik njihove neizbežne sinhronizacije s sočasjem. V njem pa je še kako živa neposredna (so)udeležba ustvarjalcev, ki so bili sami protagonisti tistega, kar, z delno zadolžitvijo pri Danielu Gouldingu, imenujemo “jugoslovanska filmska izkušnja”, torej najvitalnejše ustvarjalne pobude in osvoboditvene težnje v filmski dejavnosti nekdanje SFRJ. Pripadniki najmlajših filmskih generacij iz posameznih novih držav, ki so – bodisi zavoljo odločno izkazane ustvarjalne zaveze, predstavljajoče poglavitni dejavnik nacionalnega filmskega preporoda, bodisi zaradi izkoriščanja aktualne politične situacije in njenih ideoloških mehanizmov, pretkano vkalkuliranih v pripovednih strategijah – svoji domači kinematografiji zagotovili prepoznavnost ter vpis oziroma vrnitev na svetovni filmski zemljevid v devetdesetih letih, so si namreč ustvarjalni prostor delili z avtorskimi imeni, nespregledljivo povezanimi s ključnimi poglavji kreativnih vrhuncev filma v SFRJ. Ob mladih, ki so svoje celovečerne prvence podpisali po letu 1991 ter na preoblikovani evropski kinematografski karti zavzeli privilegirana mesta “predstavnikov” novih filmskih teritorijev (Danis Tanović, Srđan Vuletić, Dino Mustafić, Pjer Žalica ... Bosne in Hercegovine; Goran Rusinović, Vinko Brešan, Dalibor Matanić, Lukas Nola ... Hrvaške; Milčo Mančevski, Teona Strugar Mitevska ... Makedonije; Igor Šterk, Janez Burger, Jan Cvitković, Maja Weiss, Hanna A.W. Slak ... Slovenije; Srđan Dragojević, Radivoj Andrić, Srđan Golubović ... Srbije in Črne gore), tako ne moremo mimo delovanja niza režiserjev, ki, ob zastopanju komaj nastalih držav, svoj dejanski sloves dolgujejo uglašenosti s sintagmo (novi) jugoslovanski film. Želimir Žilnik, Živojin Pavlović, Goran Paskaljević, Goran Marković, Lordan Zafranović, Ademir Kenović, Srđan Karanović, Bata Čengić, Stole Popov, Emir Kusturica so ustvarjalci, ki predstavljajo neposredno vez z nedavnostjo, hkrati pa izpričujejo, da je dvogovor z njo nujen, če hočemo utemeljeno obravnavati fenomen iz ruševin izhajajočega filma ... Pa najsi se ta istoveti z imeni novonastalih držav oziroma novih geostrateških formacij ali pa se prekršča v pomensko zvezo post-jugoslovanski film.

Povojni pogled na “jugoslovansko filmsko izkušnjo” je v pričujoči situaciji pogled, v katerem še živo utripajo tako neposredno doživljane podobne njenega poslednjega ducata let kot tudi odsevi pogostih potapljanj v njene pretekle globine. Te je omogočal predvsem izboren spored Slovenske kinoteke, ki je v prvem desetletju svojega delovanja (1994–2004) največji delež programa – ob odkrivanju Slovencem malo znanih filmskih teritorijev Azije, Afrike in Latinske Amerike – namenjala retrospektivam kinematografij, filmskih gibanj in avtorjev vzhodne Evrope s posebnim poudarkom na ustvarjalnosti nedavne skupne domovine. Jugoslovanski film v tem pogledu predstavlja umetnost prežetosti, ki je nastajala in se oplajala skozi vidike kulturnega so-učinkovanja, v katerem meje jezika niso predstavljale mej sveta, temveč občutje svojstvene brezmejnosti, v kateri se je zasnajljala “kozmpolitska” identiteta kulturnega in emocionalnega pretapljanja.<sup>5</sup> Takšna vzajemnost, ki se je v praksi odražala predvsem v neposredni “kadrovski” izmenjavi ustvarjalcev, seveda ni bila ekskluzivna lastnost zgolj filmskega področja, temveč je predstavljala občjo kulturno klimo najvitalnejših ustvarjalnih energij v njenem celotnem spektru.<sup>6</sup> In četudi se je – zaradi značilne univerzalne narave njunega umetnostnega izraza – vzdušje takšne prežetosti morda najbolj občutilo v polju filma in gledališča, se je vseskozi odražala



lo v dejavnem sodelovanju, skupnem nastopanju, sprotnem prevajanju in nenehnih gostovanjih literatov, likovnih ustvarjalcev ter izvajalcev popularne glasbe, ki je v svojih vrhuncih pogojevalo tudi svojevrstno "kulturno migracijo" zainteresiranega občinstva na ključne popularno-glasbene dogodke ali, denimo, festival jugoslovanskega igranega filma v Puli. Povedanemu navkljub bi bilo vendarle pretirano zagovarjati trditev o obstoju univerzalnega nadnacionalnega, z določili jugoslovanstva opredeljenega "filmskega izraza".<sup>7</sup> Po drugi plati pa tudi okorel pragmatizem, ki bi v tako pestrem sodelovanju na vseh ravneh filmske infrastrukture prepoznaval zgolj strategije pretkanega izogibanja cenzorskim pogromom in iskanja trenutne (naj)demokracičnejše mikro-klime v posameznih produkcijskih enotah ali določeni republiški kulturnopolitični nomenklaturi, ne more zanemariti kreativnega pretoka energij. Njegovo kulminacijo tako najizraziteje predstavlja primer "slovenskega opusa" Živojina Pavlovića, ob njem pa komaj pregleden niz izmenjav kot, denimo, "med-narodno" (so)delovanje Karpa Godine, Srđana Karanovića itn., da o nenehnih gostovanjih snemalcev ter igralcev niti ne izgubljam besed. Podobna slika se nam pokaže v luči filmološke razmejivne raziskovalnega polja na filmska in kinematografska dejstva; torej razlikovanje med tistim, kar je filmu "notranje", in tistim, kar predstavlja njegove "zunanje okoliščine", kjer se v obravnavani situaciji prevladujoči delež interakcije odločno preveša na stran slednjih.<sup>8</sup> Vendar pa je v sami delitvi – ki nikakor ni izključujoča, marveč predpostavlja tudi možnosti določenega sovpadanja – strukturo filmskih dejstev mogoče pojmovati kot kompleksen ustroj "notranjega" součinkovanja, kjer potemtakem ne gre zgolj za "okoliščine", ko, recimo, srbski avtor snema po slovenski literarni predlogi ali Slovenec upodablja srbsko avantgardistično gibanje, temveč tudi za preplet estetskih, idejnih, poetskih in pomenskih silnic ter njihovo medsebojno vplivanje. V takšni konstelaciji ne moremo pristajati na sklep, da predstavlja pojem jugoslovanskega filma zgolj "skupno oznako za v marsičem zelo različne nacionalne kinematografije" na območju SFRJ, ki se je "... dejansko uveljavila predvsem pri prikazovanju teh kinematografij v tujini, sicer pa je bila urejena z nekaterimi centralističnimi administrativnimi akti in institucijami zvezne države ...", kot sugerira geslo v slovenskem *Filmskem leksikonu* (Kavčič 1999: 289). Nasprotno jugoslovanski film pojmuje kot fenomen svojevrstne večnacionalne filmske ustvarjalnosti, ki je, ob neizbežni globoki zakoreninjenosti v kulturni tradiciji izvornega naroda, nekatere svoje vrhunce doživljala tudi kot oblika specifičnega jugo-kozmopolitizma. V njem je ob notranjem pretoku ustvarjalnih energij pomembno odsevala izkušnja vpetosti v sočasni evropski filmski in kulturni kontekst. Relativna "odprtost" jugoslovanskega sistema – vsaj do politične "zamrznitve" in prestrukturiranja v začetku sedemdesetih – je namreč dopuščala, da je bilo v rednem kinoprogramu mogoče videti aktualna filmska dela z vseh koncev Evrope ter celo ameriški neodvisni film; zanesenjaki v kino-klubih, kino-gledališčih in sorodnih načinih pretoka "informacij" pa so lahko v teoriji in "praksi" spremljali najvitalnejše sodobne filmske tendence. Po drugi plati pa se je vedno več mladih, tako ustvarjalcev kot kritikov in teoretikov, izobraževalo v tujini, od koder so seveda prihajali "okuženi" z virusi sočasnih idej ter ustvarjalnih pobud. Italijanski neorealizem, francoski novi val, češki "novi val", britanski socialni realizem, poljska "črna serija", prenovitvena dokumentaristična gibanja petdesetih let na čelu s *cinéma vérité* ... so, ob neobhodnem deležu sovjetskega revolucionarnega filma, predstavljali pogloblitvene stvaritvene vzpodbude v razvoju mlade kinematografije, ki se je svojim "vzornikom" uspela kmalu postaviti ob bok. O tem, ne nazadnje, pričajo njeni številni opazni nastopi in priznanja na prvokategornih mednarodnih filmskih festivalih, ki so pogosto predstavljala tudi dodatno zaslombo za "politično nekorektna" dela, katerih usoda bi bila brez zunanjega "alibija" najverjetneje zapečateni še hitreje, kot se je dogajalo v tej ali oni obliki cenzorske nemilosti.

V pogledu na bistvene poudarke razvoja kinematografije SFRJ skozi očiče jugoslovanske filmske izkušnje je seveda predstavljen drugačen pristop, kot ga je pričakovati v izhodiščih obravnave – posameznih – nacionalnih kinematografij. Vidik svojevrstne večnacionalne "univerzalizacije" se namreč prekriva z razvejenim, vsesplošnim procesom samozavedanja jugoslovanskega človeka in njegovo težnjo osvobajanja izpod jarma kolektivne mitologije. S stališča nacionalne kinematografije pa so ob določenih občosti najpogosteje odločujočega pomena dejavniki, ki predstavljajo prvine "nacionalne substancialnosti", kjer je delež kolektivnega izkustva vselej prisoten v pojavnih oblikah primarne identifi-

kacije. O tem, denimo, izborna razpravlja eden ključnih akterjev naše obravnave – Živojin Pavlović: "*Prikljanjanje individualnemu ali kolektivnemu konceptu življenja v bistvu odpira vprašanje opredelitve mnogo manj za določeno ideologijo, a mnogo bolj za določeno civilizacijo. Glede na to, da vsaka oblika življenja vzpostavlja, primerno svojemu mehanizmu (tehniki obstajanja), določene neizbežne prepovedi, je tudi morebitna kolizija z določenimi prepovedmi odvisna od manjšega ali večjega vključevanja posameznika v vladajočo obliko življenja. In s tem tudi pojmovanja življenja. Individualni koncept svobode se, naravno, upira prepuščanju kolektivnim, ritualnim obredom (ki so, kakor vemo, lahko zelo nevarni za individualizem in za vse, kar pod tem razumemo – svobodo mišljenja govora, združevanja in tako dalje), zato je skok v kolektivno, mitsko, označen kot beg od svobode (po E. Frommu)! Nasprotno pa je prepuščanje hudourniku, ki nas osvobaja individualne odgovornosti in blaži bolečino pritiska zavesti in vesti (kategorija izključno individualističnega značaja), za pripadnike kolektivizma beg v svobodo (iz individualističnega razdiralnega in za mit rušilnega tveganja).*" (Pavlović 1980: 17) Zato v jedru obravnave izpostavljene izkušnje na eni strani delimo osredotočenost na nekatere elemente "osvobojenosti", ki so prispevali levji delež tudi k formulaciji naslova kronskega dela Gouldingovega dolgoletnega ukvarjanja z jugoslovanskim filmom; z opombo, da ne moremo povsem brez zadržkov sprejeti njegove evolucionistične metodologije, po kateri je družbena vloga filma pogloblitveni nosilec njegovega razvoja. Proces osvobajanja, ki je imel v specifičnih družbenopolitičnih okoliščinah SFRJ značilno drugačen potek kot, denimo, v nekaterih filmsko mnogo bolj "ozaveščenih" vzhodnoevropskih državah – Sovjetski zvezi, Poljski, Češkoslovaški –, je namreč uspel vzpostaviti svojo identiteto ter zmožgel vzdrževati njeno legitimnost predvsem zavoljo suverenosti filmskega izraza.<sup>9</sup> Kajti brez poudarjenega estetskega angažmaja v filmskih podvigih iz prve polovice šestdesetih let – Hladnikov *Ples v dežju* (1961), Petrovićeva *Dnevi* (1963) in *Trije* (1965), Đorđevićeva *Dekleta* (1965) ali Pavlovićev *Sovražnik* (1965) –, ki so odločno stopili na pot spodkopavanja dominantnega pojmovanja filma in umetnosti nasploh, bi bila daljnosežno brezploдна vsa javna družbena zavzemanja, ki so se na "strateškem nivoju" povezala v ohlapno gibanjsko strukturo jugoslovanskega novega filma.<sup>10</sup> Programska usmeritev takšnega "novovalovstva" je po evropskem zgledu dobila svoj "manifest" v odprtem pismu, naslovljenem "Za drugačno kinematografijo", ki ga je zasnovalo sedem režiserjev, kritikov in piscev, na puljskem festivalu leta 1966 pa ga je so-podpisala še petdeseterica cineastov. A bolj kot njegova deklarativna retorika zavzemanja za "apriorno konkretnost", v kateri je obravnava človekovega obstoja nemogoča "zunaj zgodovinsko-geografskega in socialno-psihološkega konteksta", je pomembno seme odporništv, ki je vzkliklo v zavesti filmskih ustvarjalcev ... Takšno revolucionarno stanje stvari, ki ga natančno definira spoznanje o "odpiranju vrat svobodi", izbrano za uvodni navedek pričujočega razmišljanja (izpod peresa enega prvopodpisnikov "manifesta", Dušana Stojanovića, ki je novi film dosledno opredeljeval s sintagma "film s sodobnimi estetskimi težnjami"), je predstavljal mnogo več kot zgolj zasnovano "umetnostno-družbenega gibanja". Šlo je za genozo daljnosežnega procesa, ki je v svoji opozicionalni razvojni liniji postopnega prenicanja zavesti o možnosti in nujnosti sprememb z območja umetniškega ustvarjanja v splošno dojetje življenja in sveta privedel do končne "zmage poetike nad ideologijo", kot poudarja Ranko Munitić, ko retroaktivno "ovrednoti" subverzivnost takšne filmske brezkompromisnosti: "*Proces notranjih sprememb in modernizacije kinematografije iz začetka in sredine šestdesetih se izkazuje za dolgoročen, učinkovit virus, za peklenski stroj z odloženim delovanjem, podstavljen v temelje tukajšnjega filma, torej umetnosti oziroma družbe.*" (Munitić 1997: 24) Vendar pa najbolj zločestih učinkov in tega "virusa", ki so ob ugodnih pogojih aktivirale odporniške vzgibe, usklajene z znamenitim historičnim načelom Walterja Benjamina, da je "*v vsaki dobi treba na novo poskusiti iztrgati tradicijo konformizmu, ki se je hoče polastiti*", ni predstavljal družbeni, temveč poetični oziroma estetski angažma. Z drugimi besedami bi bilo mogoče reči, da je zavest, ki jo lahko pojmuje za vodilo izpostavljenih postopkov, spoznanje o neizbežnosti "*svobodne ustvarjalne dejavnosti*" (Deleuze, Guattari), ki v svoji odporniški drži do prevladujočih vrednostnih sistemov in temeljnem dvomu v mnenjske klišeje dobiva avtopoetične lastnosti.<sup>11</sup> V luči pričujočih predpostavk se tako jugoslovanska filmska izkušnja, bolj kot skozi gibanjske zasnove in povzemanja v pragmatična istopomenja, izraža skozi prvine niza avtopoetik, ki jim je skupen vzajemni proces osvobajanja v tistem dragoce-



nem filmskem pričevanju sveta, v katerem je zaobsežena nujnost prepleta umetnostne in etične zaveze oziroma, rečeno z besedami Maye Deren, zavest o formalnih določilih kot "fizični manifestaciji moralne strukture" umetniškega dela. V njem svoboda vsekakor zavzema položaj temeljnega pojma, ki pa dobiva neobhodni korelat v pojmu odgovornosti. Tisto, kar dandanes ostaja na površju zavesti zainteresiranega gledalca, namreč ni toliko pester zbir socio-historičnih opredelitev razvojnih poudarkov jugoslovanskega filma: moderni film, novi film, avtorski film, družbeno kritični film, črni film, črni val, odprti film, novi jugoslovanski film, praška šola<sup>12</sup> ... in njihovih ključnih prvin, temveč spoznanje heterogene in hkrati kompleksne filmske dejavnosti, ki v svojem krhkem jedru varuje neprecenljivi kalejdoskop odrazov svobodne ustvarjalnosti. Med nizom njenih dragocenosti postavljamo na prvo mesto brezkompromisni humanizem, ki odseva iz globokega spoštovanja tako do osrednjega predmeta svoje obravnave, jugoslovanskega človeka, kakor do civilizacijskih pridobitev samega medija, v katerem se izraža: filmske umetnosti.

V razsežen proces samozavedanja, ki mu je bil jugoslovanski film podvržen, pa je, kot že rečeno, vselej prenicala tudi sočasna izkušnja evropskega kulturnega konteksta, ki je njegov izraz določala v podobni meri kot trenutne domače družbenopolitične razmere. Notranje okoliščine so res prispevale neposredno "gradivo" ter pogojevale stopnjo in način konkretne (re)akcije; generalno "občutenje sveta" pa je vendarle odzvanjalo v sozvočju s sodobnostjo. Zato je bil, denimo, jugoslovanski novi film šestdesetih let formalno izrazito radikalnejši in vsebinsko mnogo neizprosnejši v svojem "mračnjaštvu" kot novi jugoslovanski film poznih sedemdesetih in osemdesetih let. V njem so – ob notranji težnji po spodkopavanju prevlade povojne kolektivne identifikacije, ki pa je ni pričakovala "nadomestna", iz(po)polnjena struktura novega, temveč globoki dvomi, strah in negotovost ... – odsevali tako radikalni estetski izbruhi evropskih novovalovskih gibanj kakor temeljno stanje duha takratnega človeka. Človeštva, ki je bilo še pod globokim vtisom srhljivih dejstev nedavnosti. Opredeljeno s kulturno paradigmo eksistencializma, književnosti absurda itn. si niti ni zares prizadevalo pretrgati travmatičnih spon razosebljenja in eksistencialne izpraznjenosti, v katerih je boleče odzvanjala nedoumljivost opustošenja po kataklizmi druge svetovne vojne, ki je kulminirala v, rečeno z Deleuzom, izgubi "vere v svet".<sup>13</sup> Predpostavka iskanja "meje življenja", upečatena v opus Aleksandra Petrovića in v "praksi" izmojstrena v estetskih prebliskih popolne odtujenosti brezupnega spoznanja, da je "... svoboda iluzija, ki za svojo uresničitve ne zahteva samo življenja, temveč tudi smrt" (Volk 1972: 22), ali pa prevladujoči toni sivin, obsesivno ustvarjanje prehodnih, nikogaršnjih ozemelj in zatekanje v "estetiko" do odvratnosti priganega vulgarnega naturalizma Živojina Pavlovića, so tako značilnosti, ki bi jih bilo mogoče ob koncu petdesetih in v šestdesetih letih najti na prenekateri izpostavljeni točki evropskega filmskega zemljevida. Razsežnemu spektru običajnih določil pa so svojevrstni, jugoslovanski ton dodajale raziskave individualnosti na vseh tistih ravneh, ki so v priseganju na "uzakonjeno" kolektivno mitologijo permanentne revolucije ostajale zatrte, potisnjene ali celo prepovedane. Težnje osvobajanja je bilo v ključnih usmeritvah estetizma, intimizma in eksistencialnega vitalizma mogoče zaznati v obsedenem prizadevanju za takšen izraz, ki bi znal in zmozel odslikati vzdušje vsesplošnega brezupa, ki ni predstavljal samo degradacije "dosežkov" vojne in revolucije, temveč tudi odraz izgube vezi med človekom in svetom – kot prizoriščem smisla. Bistvene značilnosti vizualizacije takšnih teženj je poleg surovega naturalizma predstavljalo "... dogajanje na družbenem robu, v umazanih predmestjih in zanikrnih okoljih, z junaki, ki so marginalci, prepuščeni naključjem, impulzom, nagonom, ekscesom in obsesijam ter daleč od tega, da bi bili nosilci akcije v imenu kakšne ideologije – ta je navzoča samo še v sprjeni in 'razvrednoteni' obliki ..." (Vrdlovec 1999: 124) Vprašanja temeljnih dejavnikov posameznikove istovetnosti so postajala osrednje ustvarjalno gibalno, predstavljajoče hkrati radikalno kritiko obstoječega ter – skozi (samo)iskateljstvo in (samo)spraševanje – vzpostavljane artikulacije bazičnega dvoma, nezaupanja in relativizacije uveljavljenih "vrednot", ki je lahko prihajala do polnega izraza edino kot proces. V njem so, ob že izpostavljenem Petroviću in Pavloviću, najvidnejši pečat pustili *auteurji* kot: Dušan Makavejev, Želimir Žilnik, Bata Čengić, Matjaž Klopčič, Vatroslav Mimica, Krsto Papić, Boštjan Hladnik, Puriša Đorđević, Mića Popović, Jože Pogačnik, Ante Babaja ... Prav omenjeno splošno stanje "evropskega" duha je bilo poglavitni razlog, da so bila

občutja ujetosti, brezizhodja, izpraznjenosti ipd. mnogo intenzivnejša v jugoslovanskem novem filmu kakor v delih generacije, nastopajoče ob koncu sedemdesetih let, pa četudi je bila stopnja režimske opresivnosti v relativno "liberalnejših" šestdesetih let manj izrazita kot v prelomnih sedemdesetih letih. V silovitem izbruhu tedanjega ortodoksnega revizionizma, v katerem so se na Vzhodu razblinila hrepenjenja "pomladnih vrenj", ki so razviharila Evropo, je bila namreč tudi v SFRJ filmska "svobodomiselnost" radikalno zatrta, ustvarjalci pa tako ali drugače odstavljani na stranski tir. Zaradi zatiralske politične situacije je imela tako generacija, ki je ob koncu sedemdesetih zapolnila globoko ustvarjalno vrzel, bistveno manj neposrednega stika s sočasjem zunaj svojih zahodnih meja. Tam pa je takrat že vladala povsem drugačna klima "novega upanja" in prosperitete, ki je proti koncu dekade s svojim toplim vetrom vse pogosteje zavela tudi v zaledenele pokrajine za železno zaveso. Kljub tolikšni zamrznjenosti pa se je filmska dediščina šestdesetih v SFRJ izkazala s svojo daljnosežnostjo. Prav po zaslugi novega filma je bila namreč konstantnost sprememb in opozicionalna drža – ne samo filmske – umetnosti vendarle že "uzakonjena", tako da je tudi posameznik predstavljal do neke mere "osvobojeno entiteto", odcepljeno od kolektivne zavesti. Njegovi strahovi so bili sedaj mnogo konkretnjši, njegovo samozavedanje pa pogojeno z zahtevo po resnici o travmatični pol-preteklosti in utemeljeno na (samo)zavesti o legitimnosti in nujnosti izpričevanja lastnega pogleda na svet. A ta kritična prepričanja so bila v konkretnosti ustvarjalnih strategij sedaj pogosto podvržena izražanju skozi ravni prenesenih pomenskosti – tako simbolnih form kakor, še posebej, alegoričnih vzgibov – ter značilnega, pogosto črnega humorja. Z novimi prijemi se je izoblikoval živopisen spekter podajanja "*konfrontacije med uradno ideologijo in vsakdanjo resničnostjo*" (Kreft), ki je s svojimi ustvarjalnimi vrhunci predstavljal dobrodošlo nadgradnjo obstoječega, tako da je tudi v "lahkotnejših" formalnih pristopih prihajala do izraza suverena avtorska artikulacija. Nove prvine so dopolnjevale registre stilističnih bravur, ki so pomembno obogatili estetske razsežnosti jugoslovanske filmske izkušnje. Poglavitne zasluge njenega (pre)življenja in prenove pripisujemo ustvarjalcem, kot so Slobodan Šijan, Goran Paskaljević, Goran Marković, Lordan Zafranović, Srđan Karanović, Rajko Grlić, Zoran Tadić, Karpo Godina, Miloš Radivojević, Stole Popov, Ademir Kenović, z zgodnjimi deli pa tudi Živko Nikolić in Emir Kusturica. Z njimi je celostna podoba jugoslovanskega filma zaokrožena v dejanskost kompleksne kinematografije, ki je prispevala dragocen delež verodostojne ustvarjalnosti v svetovno filmsko zakladnico. Zato je težko doumeti usodo vsesplošne prezrtosti, kakršne so deležni njeni najvidnejši *auteurji* in dela, ki so v zgodovino filmske umetnosti najpogosteje vpisana z mnogo manjšimi črkami, kot jih namenjajo njeni sodobnosti.

Ob tolikšni ustvarjalni razvejenosti ene najvitalnejših vzhodnoevropskih kinematografij tako ni zgolj paradoksalno, marveč na neki način celo tragično dejstvo, da se dandanes do fenomena jugoslovanskega filma večina opredeljuje prek enega samega – zloglasnega – imena: Emirja Kusturice. Pri tem seveda ne gre za vprašanje režiserjeve osebnostne kompromitiranosti, ki je dosegla vrhunec v njegovem javnem nastopanju skozi devetdeseta, ko je povsem odkrito razpihoval mednarodno mržnjo in sodeloval pri politikantskem hujskaštvu.<sup>14</sup> Gre za preprosto dejstvo, da je kinematografija, ki se je vzpostavljala skozi najgloblje spoštovanje človeka in njegove težnje po svobodi na eni ter v spoštljivem odnosu do filma kot nosilca lastnih umetniških zavzemanj na drugi strani, obsojena na istovetenje s filmskim udejstvovanjem, ki predstavlja sinonim za "enciklopedijo različnih manipulativnih tehnik". In to ne samo s filmskim medijem, ki je za to seveda več kot prikladen, temveč tudi s "človeškim faktorjem", ki v Kusturicih "vizijah" pomeni zgolj sredstvo za lažje doseganje končnega učinka. Pretkani manipulator je tako postal edino v zahodni filmski hemisferi kanonizirano – v pravem pomenu pojma filmskega kanona – ime jugoslovanskega filma. Na mednarodni sceni briljira s svojim pompoznim eklekticizmom, s katerim je, vse od velikega festivalskega triumfa *Očeta na službenem potovanju* (1985), ko mu je postalo kristalno jasno, kaj od avtorja z "območja nasilnih plemenskih skupnosti" dejansko pričakuje prevladujoči interes "zahodnega pogleda", hvaležno zadovoljeval njegova pričakovanja. Kusturicihni filmi tako, podobno kakor pojem Balkana sam, predstavljajo "trpežno deponijo za zahodnoevropske fantazije", kot vidike mentalnega gospodstva Zahoda nad jugovzhodno Evropo slikovito opredeljuje misel Aleša Debeljaka.<sup>15</sup> V pričujoči situaciji seveda ne gre zgolj za pro-



blem obravnave fenomena "dominantnega režiserja", kot ga, denimo, v svoji teoriji "nacionalnega filma" razvija Fredric Jameson. Eden vodilnih nosilcev ameriške kritične teorije izhaja iz predpostavke, da v vsakem socio-historičnem obdobju pester izbor talentiranih ustvarjalcev določene nacionalne kinematografije "proizvede" figuro "velikega režiserja", ki se (po)vzdigne nad svojo sočasnost: denimo Jean Renoir v Franciji tridesetih let, Wajda na Poljskem v šestdesetih, Hou Hsiao-hsein v sodobnem Tajvanu itn. Takšna dominantna figura naj ne bi degradirala svojih sodobnikov, marveč, nasprotno, "dvigovala ugled" celotni nacionalni filmski dejavnosti in tako predstavljala dobrodošlo dopolnilo – ali celo *spiritus agens* – njenega razvoja. A predvsem sodobni čas, ko je "aktualni okus" prvenstveno odraz – rečeno z Rosenbaumovim polemičnim izrazom – "globalne sinhronosti", relativizira dejansko vrednost dominirajočih figur, saj so dandanes poglavitna gibala njihove pozicije zunanje, pogosto skrbno načrtovane okoliščine in prevladujoče interesne sfere, ki, tudi če pristanemo na sam, več kot vprašljiv Jamesonov teorem, vzbujajo dvom v njegovo dejansko "vrednost". Predpostavka politike filmskih festivalov in predvsem želja po ugajanju "stereotipom in predsodkom" tujega občinstva so tako ključni pomisleki, ki se ob imenu Emirja Kusturice in fenomenu "balkanskega filma" postavljajo tudi Jamesonu: "*Zaradi tega bi imel v Kusturičinem primeru sam velike pomisleke ob zagovarjanju takšnega statusa, četudi je v tujini zagotovito najbolj poznan. Dejansko je mogoče reči, da je ugled posameznega velikega auteurja, v enaki meri kot rezultat lastnih zaslug, vselej tudi stvar zgodovinske sreče, mednarodne konjunkturo, svetovnega okusa, festivalske kulture in tako naprej. Iz te perspektive bi bilo potemtakem fenomen Kusturice zagotovo vredno analizirati, kajti ne glede na njegovo lastno ustvarjalno moč (ki ni nujno superiorna ostalim, v tujini manj razvpitim režiserjem) je njegova slava resnično medijsko in zgodovinsko dejstvo.*" (Jameson 2004: 250) Takšno dejstvo je zagotovo nesporno; tisto kar bi moralo biti sporno, pa je paradoks, da delo Emirja Kusturice predstavlja svojevrsten "globalni kriterij". In to celo dvojni. V luči njegovih filmov se namreč vrednoti tako zgodovina SFRJ kakor tudi jugoslovanski film sam. Potemtakem smo soočeni s podvojenim paradoksom, saj je, kot smo videli, prav zgodovina jugoslovanskega filma tista, ki predstavlja radikalno zanikanje popreproščene, stereotipiziranega, stigmatizirajočega pojmovanja jugoslovanske povojne dejanskosti, kakršno ponujajo Kusturica in njegovi apoletiki ter nekritični interpreti. Dejstvo, da je bila takšna "vizija" že podvržena radikalni kritiki, ki, denimo, v zavzemanjih Slavuja Žižka pomeni tudi neizprosno kritiko koncepta "balkanizma", priča o razsežnosti problema, ki v svojem jedru predstavlja predvsem problem dominantnega diskurza.<sup>16</sup> Poglavitna hiša njegovega "objektivnega glasu vednosti" je pomanjkanje pripravljenosti soočanja z dejanskim stanjem obravnavanega fenomena, navkljub širokemu spektru mehanizmov, ki so dandanes na voljo za preverjanje informacij iz še tako oddaljenih "zakotij" sveta. Tako je v pričujoči konstelaciji izjemnega pomena študija Leva Krefta "Nikogaršnja zemlja in svet za nič", ki se sooča z identično tematiko kot *The Celuloid Tinderbox*, *Cinema of Flames* ali "Thoughts on Balkan Cinema". Kreftov pogled na filmsko izkušnjo razpada SFRJ sooblikujeta predpostavka "transformacije vojne" Martina van Crevelda ter teorija "novih vojn" Mary Kaldor. V njuni presvetlavi vzpostavlja model "eks-jugoslovanskega" filma kot specifične "nove variante" žanra vojnega filma, ki pa ga v enaki meri kot dogajanje v procesu razpadanja SFRJ in globalne razmere v svetu opredeljuje tudi dejstvo jugoslovanske filmske izkušnje: "*Kar mednarodnemu občinstvu manjka pri ustvarjanju atmosfere za drugačno gledanje filmov, ni le neposredna izkušnja vojne, ki je skupna vsem bivšim jugoslovanskim okoljem. Manjka jim izkušnja jugoslovanske filmske govorice, ki se v post-jugoslovanskem žanru filmov o balkanskih vojnab v precejšnji meri ohranja, ponavlja, posnema in nani tudi postmodernistično aludira.*" (Kreft 2002: 186)<sup>17</sup> Tu seveda ne gre za vprašanje "doživljanja avtentične izkušnje", ekskluzivno dostopne zgolj avtohtonemu prebivalstvu, oziroma za razmerje med outsiderskim in insiderskim stališčem, marveč za kompleksen problem "procesa zavestnega prizadevanja" za iskanje načinov "opisovanja resničnosti drugačnosti", kot ga, denimo, izpostavlja Maria Todorova v predgovoru k svojemu delu *Imaginarij Balkana* (2001), enem vrhuncev sodobnih balkanoloških raziskav.<sup>18</sup> Kreftova interpretacija, naglaševana s ključnimi poudarki historiata jugoslovanskega filma, se namreč – za razliko od večine zgoraj obravnavanih del – osredotoča na predpostavko, da je moč estetske funkcije umetnosti tista, ki lahko odločilno prispeva k razumevanju aktualne strukture sveta. V njegovi kritiki "globalne medijske po-

dobe sveta", ki se najizraziteje odraža prav v protislovni obravnavi zla in nasilja na globalni ter lokalni ravni – kjer sta na prvi praviloma prikazovana kot "izjema in eksczes", medtem ko na drugi predstavljata "univerzalno življenjsko okolje" –, je poglavitni očitek, namenjen nevdržni situaciji zanikanja lokalnega kot dejavne sestavine splošnosti. Kajti v procesu prehoda na globalno raven je pomen lokalnega podvržen preoblikovanju z njegovimi določili, katerim se ravnodušno predaja celo "*filmsko kvalificirana mednarodna elita*" (Kreft). V prizadevanjih za način(e) dostopa do drugačnosti tako nikakor ne gre za podoživljanje avtentične izkušnje, temveč za njeno upoštevanje; za iskanje tistih "prevodnikov", ki razpirajo pogled na morebitne skupne – četudi zgolj posredne – dejavnike, med katerimi lahko univerzalne prvine filmske estetike predstavljajo dobrodošlo dopolnilo. Še posebej v primeru jugoslovanskega filma, ki se je, kot rečeno, konstituiral skozi neposredni dialog s svetovnim sočasjem. Upoštevanje celovite izkušnje v obravnavi filmske ustvarjalnosti na območju nekdanje Jugoslavije se tako izkazuje za neobhodni vidik njene interpretacije, ki v "povratni vezi" seveda predstavlja tudi dobrodošlo možnost (p)reinterpretacije kriterijev vrednotenja same kinematografije oziroma njenih določenih segmentov. Četudi je namreč ta "fantomska filmska izkušnja" nekaj, kar v svoji pragmatičnosti definitivno pripada preteklosti, je njena "civilizacijska popotnica" (Pavičič) še kako aktualna. In to ne zgolj za prebivalce Države mrtvih, kot bi rekel resignirani Živojin Pavlović, temveč za celovitejše razumevanje trenutnega ustroja sveta, ki ga je – najsi to prizna ali ne – genocidna drama bivše Jugoslavije neizbrisno zaznamovala.<sup>19</sup> V luči svojevrstne de-konceptualizacije, ki ji je podvržena filmska ustvarjalnost naslednic SFRJ kot tudi njena nekdanja kinematografija, je pravzaprav vseeno, kakšen bo prihodnji konsenzualni skupni imenovalec, dokler film kot tak ostaja na površju; dokler ne ponikne in se razblini v tem ali onem konceptualnem vakuumu ... Trenutne konceptualne "prerazporeditve", ki jim je v sodobni zahodni filmski misli podvržena ustvarjalnost južnoslovanskega dela Balkana, so tako zaenkrat predstavile predvsem hvalevredna dopolnila k boljšem razumevanju jugoslovanske politične in družbene tragedije, izmuznila pa se jim je priložnost za nadgradnjo razumevanja jugoslovanske filmske izkušnje, ki je dobila dobrodošlo temelje v Gouldingovi zasnovi "osvobojenega filma". •

#### Opombe:

1. Hrvaški prevod popravljen in razširjen izdaje Gouldingovega dela iz leta 1985 je izšel v Zagrebu leta 2004 pod naslovom: *Jugoslavensko filmsko iskustvo, 1945.–2001. – oslobodeni film*. Ob tem je zanimivo paradoksalno dejstvo, da predstavlja Gouldingova knjiga edino integralno zgodovino filma bivše SFRJ, torej čas od l. 1945 do l. 1991. Najkompleksnejši avtohtoni pregled jugoslovanske kinematografije pa je bržkone delo *Istorija jugoslovenskog filma: 1896.–2001.*, ki ga je podpisal Petar Volk, izdal pa beograjski Institut za film leta 1986, medtem ko so bile posamezne nacionalne kinematografije bolj ali manj temeljito obravnavane v celoti oziroma po posameznih obdobjih.
2. Za popolnejšo bibliografsko podobo knjižnih objav je smiselno opozoriti še vsaj na dve monografiji o Emirju Kusturici – Gocić, Goran. *The Cinema of Emir Kusturica* (2001), Iordanova, Dina. *Emir Kusturica* (2002) – ter na primerno zastopnost jugoslovanske filmske ustvarjalnosti v novejših enciklopedijah oziroma pregledih evropskih kinematografij, npr. *BFI's Companion to Eastern European and Russian Cinema* (2000).
3. Dina Iordanova govori o naslednjih delih: Liehm Mira and Antonin J. Liehm. 1977. *The Most Important Art: Eastern European film after 1945*. Univ. of California Press, Berkeley; Paul, David. W. (ur.). 1983. *Politics, Art and Communication in the East European Cinema*. St. Martin's Press, New York; Goulding, Daniel J. (ur.). 1989. *Post New-Wave Cinema in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*. Indiana Univ. Press, Bloomington and Indiana; Slater, Thomas J. (ur.). 1992. *Handbook of Soviet and East European Films and Filmmakers*. Greenwood Press, New York and London.
4. "*Umetnostna dediščina je postala sporen teritorij; na področju filma so si nove države tradicijo lahko zagotovile edino s porazdelitvijo koherentne skupne jugoslovanske zgodovine med nove enote z določenimi prilagoditvami, nujnimi za uskladitev z novimi političnimi entitetami.*" (Iordanova 2000: 5) Na problem "pripadnosti" opozarja Iordanova tudi v kontekstu uredniškega dela pri *BFI's Companion to Eastern European and Russian Cinema*, kjer se težave pri odločitvi o pripadnosti odražajo povsem konkretno: večina ustvarjalcev je tako obravnavana kot jugoslovanski režiserji (igralci, scenaristi itn.) z dodanim "republiškim izvorom". Gesla, ki obravnavajo jugoslovansko kinematografijo, sta pripela Stojan Pelko in sama Iordanova.



5. O tem, denimo, izborna priča avtentična pesniška izkušnja: "Države izginjajo in propadajo, po vsaki vojni se zemljevidi spreminjajo in popravljajo, notranja geografija piščega pa ostaja nespremenjena: njegova emocionalna in kulturna izkušnja z določeno življenjsko sredino ostaja izvor njegovega navdiha. Identitete ne zagotavljajo politične proklamacije, temveč kulturni in čustveni spomin. Pokrajine in mesta, jeziki in ljudje, ki se na geopolitičnih kartah nenadoma nabajajo na drugi strani meje in tako pripadajo tujini, ostajajo prestolnice našega srca." (Novak 2003: 34)

6. Seveda bi bilo ignorantsko trditi, da polje umetnosti in kulture v svojih rigidnih, tradicionalističnih, nacionalističnih oblikah ni bilo tudi gojišče revanšizma, nacionalizma, šovinizma, ksenofobije, hujskaštva in odkritega sovraštva ...

7. Razprava ob vprašanju, ali obstajajo oziroma ali v večnacionalni državi sploh smejo obstajati nacionalne kinematografije, se je razplamtelo že zelo zgodaj; najintenzivneje prav v času enega najplodnejših ustvarjalnih obdobij jugoslovanskega filma – ob koncu šestdesetih let. V mislih imamo znamenito polemiko na straneh revije *Filmska kultura* v letu 1968 (od št. 57–58 do št. 61–62) med Slobodanom Novakovičem na eni in Rankom Munitičem, Rudolfom Sremcem ter Božidarjem Zečevićem na drugi strani. Ponovno se je vprašanje o smiselnosti in upravičenosti priseganja na matrico nadnacionalne kinematografije zaostriilo v poznih osemdesetih letih, ko je v luči družbenopolitičnih vrenj tudi film "zgrabil za politične teme" ter postal živ odraz s filmsko pojavnostjo sinhronizirajoče se realnosti, kot je slikovito poudaril Silvan Furlan: "Jugoslovanska realnost je tako že kar sama po sebi filmska realnost, saj v njej zavzemajo odločilna mesta dvom, napetost, manipulacije, prevare, montažne konstrukcije, preiskave ..." (Furlan 1988: 1)

8. "Izhodišče filmologije je bilo delo Gilberta Cohen-Séata *Eseji o načelih filozofije filma (Essais sur les principes d'une philosophie du cinéma, 1946)*, po katerem ima filmologija kot 'sistematična znanost' dvojni 'predmet: filmska dejstva in kinematografska dejstva' (faits filmiques, faits cinématographiques). Prva 'izražajo zunanje in notranje življenje, tj. predmetni in domišljjski svet, s pomočjo kombiniranih vizualnih in akustičnih podob'; druga pa obsegajo vse tisto, kar je okoli filma, se pravi pred filmom (tehnologija, produkcija, financiranje, zakonodaja ipd.), po njem (družbeni, politični in ideološki vpliv filma, mitologija zvezd ipd.) in poleg njega (družbeni obred obiskovanja kina, oprema dvorane ipd.)." (Vrdlovec 1999: 211)

9. O tem med drugim priča tudi zaključni poudarek iz razmišljanja Simona Popka o "zapuščini" jugoslovanskega "črnega vala" ob njegovi veliki retrospektivi na festivalu Alpe-Adria Cinema v Trstu leta 1998: "Ostalo je ime, ki si ga avtorji niso sami izbrali, ter filmi, med katerimi so nekateri oslabili, drugi 'ojačali'. Kar pa se tiče 'legendarnosti', 'mučeništva' ali 'prizadetosti' udeležencev, je morda najbolj ilustrativna izjava Lazarja Stojanovića, ki pravi, da '... ljudi spreminja v heroje prav represija, ne pa kvaliteta njihovih del – to pa je žalostno dejstvo in mislim, da se je 'črnemu' filmu zgodilo prav to.'" (Popke 1998: 30)

10. Gre za oznako, sorodno modernističnim smerem v evropskih kinematografijah s konca petdesetih in predvsem šestdesetih let, ki se je "... v kritiki prijela zlasti po puljskem festivalu 1967, na katerem so bili prikazani filmi Zbiralci perja A. Petrovića, Prebujanje podgan Ž. Pavlovića, Ljubezenski primer ali tragedija uradnice PTT D. Makavejeva, Praznik Đ. Kadijevića, Mali vojaki B. Čengića, Grajski biki J. Pogačnika in Na papirnatih avionih M. Klopčiča, ki sodijo v klasiko jugoslovanske filmske renesanse." (Vrdlovec 1999: 124)

11. Čeprav se pričujoča opredelitev Gillesa Deleuza in Felixa Guattarija izvorno nanaša na naravo pojma, pa so v njem zajeta določila vsega tistega, kar je "zares ustvarjeno", tako kot tudi pojem sam: "... pojem ni dan, ustvarjen je, treba ga je ustvariti; niti ni formiran, postavlja se sam na sebi, samopostavlja se. Oboje se implicira, saj tisto, kar je zares ustvarjeno, od živega do umetniškega dela, prav zaradi tega dobi moč samopostavitve oziroma avtopoetični značaj, po katerem ga prepoznavamo. Bolj ko je pojem ustvarjen, bolj se postavlja. Tisto, kar je odvisno samo od svobodne ustvarjalne dejavnosti, je hkrati tudi tisto, kar se postavlja samo na sebi, neodvisno in nujno: najbolj subjektivno bo tu najbolj objektivno." (Deleuze, Guattari 1999: 17)

12. V tej plejadi oznak sta se še najbolj uveljavila pojma jugoslovanski novi film in novi jugoslovanski film, ki ju v njuni najširši pomenskosti uporabljamo tudi v tem zapisu. Prvi tako obsega najinventivnejše oblike filmske ustvarjalnosti šest-

desetih in začetka sedemdesetih let (gl. op. 10), drugi pa zajema ustvarjalne vrhunce jugoslovanske kinematografije koncem sedemdesetih in v osemdesetih letih.

13. Prav Gilles Deleuze sodi med tiste predstavnike sodobne filmske misli, ki so se podrobno posvetili prelomnosti obravnavanega časa. Tako je v svoji taksonomiji filmskih podob obdobje "pretrganja vezi med človekom in svetom" opredelil kot dejstvo krize podobe-gibanja oziroma njene najprezentativnejše oblike podobe-akcije, ki jo je povzročila druga svetovna vojna in je po njej prevevala splošno družbeno-kulturno ozračje: "... kriza, ki je pretresla podobo-akcijo, je bila odvisna od številnih vzrokov, ki so se polno izkazali šele po vojni in od katerih so bili eni družbeni, ekonomski, politični in moralni, drugi pa bolj notranji sami umetnosti, še zlasti literaturi in filmu." (Deleuze 1991: 264)

14. Naj spomnim samo na prosluli zapis "Nisam znao, a sada znam", izvorno objavljen leta 1991 v pariškem *Libérationu*, ki je (ne)nazadnje dobil tudi mesto uvodnika v beograjskem "časopisu za jugoslovanski film" *JuFilm danas*.

15. "Pri premeščanju balkanske 'stigme' uporablja sodobni zahodnoevropski pogled dve poglavni obliki mentalnega gospostva. V prvi imamo opravka s pokroviteljsko držo modernega eksotizma, ki gre vstric z dehistoriziranim ugodjem v dražljivih slikovitostih neznanih dežel /.../ Drugo obliko mentalnega gospostva predstavlja romantični antikapitalizem." (Debeljak 2004: 97)

16. Podrobneje gl.: Žižek 1997 in 1997a, kjer avtor, med drugim, na primerih filmov *Pred dežjem* (M. Mančevski, 1994) in – predvsem – *Podzemlje* (E. Kusturica, 1995) odločno razkrinkava "postmoderno cinično ideologijo": "Tako ima v intervjuju za *Cahiers du Cinéma* po svoje Kusturica prav: na nek način res 'pojasni stanje stvari v tem kaotičnem delu sveta' s tem, ko prižene na dan njegovo 'podzemno' fantazmatsko oporo. Na ta način nevede poda libidinalno ekonomijo etničnega klanja v Bosni: psevdo batailleovski trans ekscitivnega trošenja, nenehnega norega ritma prehranjevanja-pitja-petja-nejčistovanja. Prav v tem pa so 'sanje' etničnih čistilcev, v tem tiči odgovor na vprašanje 'Kako so lahko to počeli?'. Če je standardna definicija vojne ta, da gre za nadaljevanje 'politike z drugimi sredstvi', potem je dejstvo, da je vodja bosanskih Srbov Radovan Karadžić pesnik, več kot le golo naključje: etnično čiščenje v Bosni je bilo nadaljevanje (tovrstne) poezije z drugimi sredstvi." (Žižek 1997a: 109)

17. Lev Kreft kot predstavnik tega specifičnega žanra obravnava filme *Pred dežjem*, *Podzemlje*, *Lepo vasi lepo gorijo* (S. Dragojević, 1996), *Dobrodošli v Sarajevu* (M. Winterbottom, 1997), *Rane* (S. Dragojević, 1998), *Vojna v živo* (D. Bajić, 2001), *Chico* (I. Fekete, 2001) in *Nikogaršnja zemlja* (D. Tanović, 2001).

18. Pričujoče "programsko načelo" Marie Todorove se dozdeva ključnega pomena za verodostojnost vsakršne obravnave "drugačnosti": "S svojim odporom do stereotipa, ki je nastal na Zahodu, ne želim ustvariti nasprotnega stereotipa o Zahodu in zabresti v zmoto 'okcidentalizma'. Prvič: ne verjamem v homogeni Zahod; znotraj posameznih 'zahodnih' razprav o Balkanu in med njimi so znatne razlike. Drugič: prepričana sem, da je večji del zahodne znanosti pomembno, celo odločilno prispeval k balkanskim študijam. Predsodki in vnaprej ustvarjena mnenja so celo med tistimi, ki se jih skušajo otresti, skoraj neizogibni, to pa velja tako za outsiderje kot za insiderje. V resnici stališče outsiderja ni nujno manj vredno od stališča insiderja in insider ni maziljenec resnice zaradi bivanjske povezanosti s predmetom preučevanja. Na koncu vendarle šteje le sam proces zavestnega prizadevanja, da bi se otresli predsodkov in poiskali načine opisovanja resničnosti drugačnosti, tudi spričo hromečega epistemološkega skepticizma." (Todorova 2001: 20)

19. Takšno možnost razumevanja razpira Lev Kreft v lucidni analizi "bosanskega primera" skozi navidezni paradoks *Nikogaršnje zemlje*: "Na bošnjaški strani, po poti ironije in krohot, se dogaja nekaj, kar bi se lahko zdelo tistim, ki niso bili vpleteni, še bolj grozljivo. Saj ne gre za to, da bi puščavo Realnega prekrili z belo rjuho lahkotnih šal. Iz samega jedra groze naj bi izbruhnil razlog za krohot, ki je obenem neposredno zanikanje kakršnegakoli humanizma in skrajna točka, s katere je morda še mogoče ohraniti vsaj čisto malo vere v človeško bodočnost. To ni krohot, ki bi se razlegel, ko je travmatični dogodek proč in mimo, ko je zapadel ukročeni preteklosti, ujeti v zgodovinsko pripoved. Telo ostaja tukaj, na aktivirani mimi leži in bo ležalo za zmeraj za nič. Razlog za nadrealistični krohot pa je, da drugi še vedno ne vedo, da ves svet leži tako, ne le Bosna in Hercegovina." (Kreft 2002: 192)



## HEAVEN AND HELL. ON THE REISSUES OF THE SHAW BROTHERS FILMS

### part 1: the dream of the silver disc

At some point in the late spring of 2002 the announcement arrived that the media conglomerate Celestial Pictures had finally acquired the rights to one of the legendary lost treasures of cinema and would start to release it piecemeal on DVD: the library of what was once Asia's biggest studio, Shaw Brothers, long kept hidden in the company's vaults by its head, the cunning businessman Run Run Shaw. (Reportedly, his perseverance paid off in the range of 84 Million Dollars.) Given the fact that Celestial's reasons for the deal were probably less motivated by painstaking cine-historical considerations than simply market-oriented – they were about to start a worldwide Asian satellite TV channel with prime time slots like “Drama Monday”, “Action Tuesday” or “Fantasy Friday”, and the SB library was definitely a much-needed major selling boost –, it came as no surprise that the first releases followed quickly: As early as December 2002, the first batch of DVDs arrived, presenting the first 10 out of 760 to-be-released films made during the company's heyday from the late Fifties to the mid-Eighties, including what is probably the company's most revered production, King Hu's *Come Drink With Me* (1965). The project was scheduled to run for five years, but already there have been some delays, so it might take a little longer: At the time of writing (April 2005), around 300 films have been released. But whatever the final time span, this will stand as the biggest film retrospective ever attempted so far.

Or rather, a media retrospective – and not just for the simple fact that a film on DVD isn't the same thing in many ways –, a fact that Celestial's reissues, as explained below, hammer home painfully. Around the Shaw re-release project two important strands of current film culture intersect. On the one hand, this is a crucial moment of the much-touted DVD boom, which is supposedly making available more films – and especially: previously hard-to-get ones – than ever. On the other, this is a test case for cinephilia in the age of the DVD: Given that most of the Shaw output was truly only available, if at all, on dubious, often cropped and crappy bootleg tapes, this is the first chance to assess a huge chunk of the hitherto mostly neglected film history, a task that should be particularly attractive as Asian cinema has been the biggest (critical) hype of the past decade or two – an important jumpstart for which, by the way, was Hong Kong's blooming genre cinema. So this is the time to discover what must have been undoubtedly one of the biggest influences and reference points<sup>1</sup> not just for Hong Kong, but for Asian cinema in general, as the Shaws were the market's major player. (Just to give an idea of the hugeness of the operation: Between the late 50s and the mid-80s, Shaw produced around 1000 films, almost twice the output even the most potent Hollywood studios managed in the same time.) But I'm sceptical on both counts.

Let's begin with the DVD boom, which will bring us to the second issue soon enough: It's true that the silver disc presents a quality improvement over the VHS (or at least, it can: there's still enough material released in astonishingly bad quality, as is always the case with the cheaper sections of a new market opportunity), and it may even have instilled a welcome sense of quality control in previously less discerning viewers, plus it has paved the way for the release of quite a number of hitherto unavailable films, but it is certainly not the all-encompassing paradise pundits and over-eager enthusiasts want us to believe. (Also, the shadow of the mere collector – who is in almost all cinephiles, who like to take pride in the number of movies they've seen – lurks more dangerously than ever: You can feel safe by having many cherished titles at home, but you don't have to watch them. Even worse: that elusive spell that's an essential part of the cinema experience vanishes.) Many titles previously available on VHS – some of them heading for incomprehensibly stocked sales bins as I type – await a proper (or even not-so-proper) release, many aren't available in either format. In the case of the Shaw library 760 films will

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be released – but 1000 were made. Which ones get the short shrift? Nobody knows exactly – Celestial only announces the schedule for the upcoming year, and of course the company prides itself on releasing only “the very best”. But who’s to judge? Also, some classics – including *Tiger Boy*, the first important martial arts film by Chang Cheh (Zhang Che)<sup>2</sup> – are allegedly lost; and as this year’s release schedule has uncovered, Celestial is also including some of the co-productions the Shaws dabbled in after they officially closed their doors in the Eighties (like the 1990 Stephen Chiau vehicle *Look Out Officer*, easily available otherwise), so the actual number won’t even amount to 760. You might want to see it benignly: as a thriller, enhanced by the completely random order in which the films are released, leaving room for speculation to the very end.

Of course, we can still be grateful for as much as that: For one thing, the DVDs adhere to the original aspect ratio – that legendary widescreen “Shawscope”, often cruelly scanned on the bootlegs, missing subtitle areas be damned –, and they are digitally restored, so the films are likely to be looking better than they ever did. Some of the usual tinkering may be going on: How exact is the color coordination? Has there been reframing (e.g. to get burnt-in subtitles out of the picture)? How careful is the post-production? (A few transfers seem awfully soft.) The lack of opportunities for comparison makes most of these questions hypothetical, yet nothing of this seems egregious so far, the problems hardly noticeable, if at all. But already we’ve opened another can of worms: First of all, the Celestial people don’t seem to care which cut they are releasing. As customary in Hong Kong, in case of doubt – usually meaning: censorship problems – three different versions were made: The longest one for overseas markets (US, Europe, etc.), a “medium” one for the home market and a more severe cut for (mainly) Asian countries with more restrictive censorship policies (Malaysia, Singapore, etc.). Again, often there is no opportunity to check, and in most cases the restored films don’t seem to be missing anything (it seems that mostly Hong Kong cuts are used, and mostly they seem to be identical with the overseas versions). But kung fu fans and gorehounds<sup>3</sup> have already pointed out a few glitches, e.g. Sun Chung’s (Suen Chung) remarkable, weird martial arts-horror crossover *Human Lanterns* (1982) is visibly missing a few scenes, as is, for instance, Hua Shan’s (Wa Saan) less remarkable exploitation actioner *To Kill a Jaguar* (1977), but in both cases the damage isn’t shattering (except maybe for gorehounds): *Human Lanterns* is still clearly an amazingly deranged exploration of the beauty of terror (and vice versa), and *To Kill a Jaguar* is still a piece of eminently watchable, but unflinchingly nasty trash with a bigger-than-usual budget that fails to redeem itself except with an unexpected late turn towards more ambivalent (e)motions. In the case of Chang Cheh’s *Chinatown Kid* (1977) however, the Celestial release clocks in under 90 minutes, whereas previously circulating cuts were closer to two hours – the atypical moralistic ending with its glaring continuity errors is visibly something tacked on for approval in more severely censoring countries. (After all, if the logical outcome – the hero’s self-sacrifice – hadn’t been allowed in Hong Kong, the larger part of Chang Cheh’s *oeuvre* would not exist as we know it.)

Yet even that is nothing compared to the audio tortures Celestial inflicts regularly, preferably in martial arts films: Giving the audiences the full Dolby 5.1 treatment, they’ve seen it fit to lavish annoying chirping cricket sounds and comparable effects on every other outdoor sequence (the originally silent showdown scenes of Chang Cheh’s fabulous *Have Sword, Will Travel* are practically ruined), the tendency to add audibly different crowd noises in tavern scenes and comparable sins is only slightly less hideous. And although the Shaw filmmakers certainly can’t claim to have been scrupulous in their use of music cues from audio libraries<sup>4</sup>, their films certainly haven’t deserved the occasional mortifying decision to have new music dissonantly laid over the still-audible older cues. In case of a new soundtrack (a bunch of films has thankfully been left untouched), the old one is not made available alongside, even though it wouldn’t take up much disc space. Nothing new, of course – the same has happened to cemented cinema classics upon their DVD release (for instance *The Godfather* trilogy) –, but it points to one of the problems with the so-called DVD revolution: While visual demands have justifiably been raised, the audio demands have been unjustifiably so, only according to the unwritten rules of the market. Why

should you buy those Dolby Surround speakers, after all, if those old mono (or stereo) films won’t use them? A friend of mine, who regularly lends Shaw DVDs to his work colleagues (from a home centre-type hardware store), tells me they love the cruel added sounds, because “finally something comes out of the rear speakers”.

Similarly, what looked like a project undertaken at least with a certain sense of historical responsibility, has since degraded significantly. On the first batch of DVDs, obviously a prestige gesture, you had audio commentaries (debatable as they may have been – they were obviously rushed in production), background documentaries (also often quite dubious, but again there was at least a certain amount of substantial information to be gleaned) and interviews (of a baffling variety: welcome talks with actors, directors, crew people, somewhat unfulfilling ones with critics – the subtitling often didn’t help –, and finally completely inscrutable ones with younger actors or would-be-celebrities who might as well be the bonus material producer’s nephew or niece). A variety of less interesting material – trailers, short biographies, those unnecessary photo galleries<sup>5</sup> – was also included. Soon these *minor boni* was all that remained. These days, if the occasional original trailer – always entertaining with its hyperbolic announcements – remains, you can count yourself lucky. (Mostly it’s new, unengaging one-minute-spots serving as trailers, though.) Some of the occasional other extras do have a certain unhinged fascination, like the short doc on scaffolding (interspersed with a few comments by Gordon Liu (Lau Kar-fai) that graces the *Return to the 36th Chamber* DVD. It’s one of those crazy incidents that are not uncommon in the DVD world. (A koan to be contemplated: How did Godard’s staggering trailer for *À bout de souffle* end up on my disc of *Touch of Zen*?)

All this certainly doesn’t help with the appreciation of the films, not that it’s been that overwhelming so far: Internet bloggers and web forums have provided most of the commentary on the Shaw project up to now. As usual with these sources, you have to wade through tons of nothingness to find the occasional serious thought. Even the handful of articles published in more or less respected sources – from *Film Comment* to *Time Asia* – seemed lip service at best, counterproductive at worst. Often a tone was exhibited that suggested: Look, there’s this far-out bunch of movies rolling in, my aren’t they colorful, amusing and foreign? Foreign may be the key-word here: It may be hard to compartmentalize the Shaw production because of the lack of context created both by Celestial’s haphazard release policy and a serious dearth of scholarship.<sup>6</sup> Yet so much of current criticism seems based on the need to move within “safe” categories (even most discoveries have to be incorporated into the framework by using easy analogies, no matter how inappropriate), so as long as there is no standard work on the Shaws, there may be no bigger discussion – a vicious circle emblematic of the problems of today’s film culture.

Actually, that brings me back to the DVD boom, which doesn’t seem to bring on much of a change, it just perpetuates – in a digitally upgraded version – what’s been going on since the advent of TV. If you didn’t have access to a cinematheque, repertoire cinemas or the festival circuit, you had to depend on the mysterious rules of TV programming for your access to film history (the mysterious selection choices of videotheques expanded the possibilities a bit). The rules of DVD release policies are no less mysterious – and, as before, for every sane person in charge there seems to be at least a dozen with no sensible rationale at all – yet although nothing has changed, for the first time there seems to be consensus that DVDs are almost as good as the real thing, if not better. I’ve had frightening discussions with people whom I considered devoted film-lovers assuring me after their ultramodern DVD-TV-sets had been installed by a technical expert “that you haven’t really seen how good a film can look until you’ve seen them undisturbed on a properly tuned set”... Now, I’m all for decrying bad projection conditions and irresponsible audiences, but this seems like betraying the utopian ideal of cinema for comfort. (The VHS – which you had to rewind etc. – probably just wasn’t comfortable enough.) And while I agree on some of the quasi-“democratic” opportunities that DVDs and related developments have made possible<sup>7</sup>, it seems the new viewing conditions (home alone), once generally accepted as equal, are the death blow to the collective cinema experience that – for better and worse – is essential to any con-



ception of cinema as something that can effect actual change. Otherwise it's in serious danger of becoming a commodity.

## part 2: strange tales from a chinese studio

This first attempt at a Shaw overview is based on the slightly over 200 Shaw films I've managed to see so far, all – except a handful, which very occasionally surfaced in cinemas as a side effect of the Celestial project – on DVD, with all of the drawbacks this entails. I've tried not to be influenced by obvious technical or other shortcomings, some of them detailed above, on certain releases.

### 2.1. family light affair

Long before Run Run Shaw founded Shaw Movie Town, Asia's biggest film studio in 1957 next to the picturesque Clearwater Bay, and Shaw Brothers officially became Shaw Brothers, the family had been in charge of a huge business empire. Their success story started in 1923 when Runje Shaw, the oldest of seven sons, bought a run-down opera stage. (Previously the family was running a textiles business, quite fitting, considering this trade served as one of Hong Kong's economical mainstays.) His quick success led to expansion and with the two brothers later immortalized by many Shaw credit sequences, Run Run (born 1907) and Runme (1901–1985), he founded "Unique Film Productions", whose first film, *The Man from Shensi* (1924) was based on a play by Runje. Soon Runme was dispatched to Singapore to take over "Hai Seng Company", with Run Run following soon. They started distributing films (also from other companies), sending touring cinemas around and soon expanding into Malaysia, setting up their own cinema chain. With the advent of US sound pictures, which proved a box office draw, the Shaws decided to follow suit: They produced the first Chinese sound film *The Nightclub Colors* (1931), reportedly a rather crude affair, in 1933 the first and allegedly more refined Canton Musical followed: *White Dragon*. This genre was a shoo-in for the domestic market, as the competing cinema-city Shanghai wasn't allowed to produce in Cantonese (the Kuomintang government insisted on Mandarin), whereas in Singapore the Proto-Shaws – their empire was called "Malayan Theatres" at that time – churned out films for their foreign markets: family dramas, love stories and horror movies. Long before Disney they built their own big theme parks in Malaysia (with names like "Great World"), by the end of the 30s they owned 139 cinemas in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Indochina.

After the Japanese took Hong Kong on the 25th of December, 1942, the Shaws made an arrangement with the invaders, allowing them to operate their cinema chains during the occupation, under the obligation that they show Indian and propaganda films. Soon after Hong Kong was reclaimed on September 16th, 1945, Shaws reopened production, while expanding their chains in Malaysia, Singapore and Borneo. (Rumor has it they used assets safely stacked away during the war.) They also founded "Malay Film Production Limited", heralding the so-called "Golden Age of Malayan Cinema", which lasted till 1967 and during which 3000 films were made, many of them by Indian directors. Like many things in this first overview, this is clearly a subject for further research.

While many of Hong Kong's left-wing studios turned towards engaged (and often didactic) social dramas, the Shaws successfully settled on entertainment; like their biggest competitor for the next decades, MP & GI (better known under its later label Cathay), theirs was considered an "apolitical" studio. The Shaws couldn't be blamed for neglecting the policies of economics, however: In an early example of synergy, they founded their own film monthly (in English) called *Movie News* (and naturally featuring a lot of Shaw News). It remained one of the most successful film magazines in Asia until the end of the 80s. Later a daily entertainment gazette and the glossy, voluminous magazine *Southern Screen* followed. In 1954 Run Run – together with the Japanese studio Daiei – instigated the Asian Film Festival, held for the first time in Tokyo. Its prizes helped to establish reputation, soon many of them would be lavished on Shaw Brothers films.

### 2.2. inside the movie town

1957 is a watershed year: Run Run starts building Shaw Movie Town, quality assurance being the key word. Greater budgets and production values to surpass the competition. When Shaw Movie Town is finished in 1961, it is 15 acres in size, in 1964 it will be enlarged by a third. 1500 people work there, it contains 12 sound stages and 16 outdoor stages

(30 after the expansion), including palaces, a big pagoda, a lake and a piece of the Chinese Wall. The Shaws have their own editing rooms and a processing lab (they will introduce Scope and color to Hong Kong cinema), a sound studio for dubbing into various dialects (direct sound is yet faraway future music), schools for acting, ballet and martial arts, dormitories for the workers and apartment housing blocks for their directors and actors. They invent a star system, and while they don't pay well, they can guarantee safety. Certainly, lack of work was never a problem: there are three 8-hour-shifts, so the studios are used around the clock, up to 12 films are made at the same time, a new production commences every 9 days, the maximum time for a shoot is 40 days. In the first 12 years the Shaws make 300 films.

In 1958 the name Shaw Brothers is established; although the attendance rates in Hong Kong are high, the home turf's box office alone doesn't justify the huge investment. The goal is to conquer the whole Asian market (the Shaw-owned cinema chains help). In order to do so, the Shaws – like Cathay – opt for more expensive, but also potentially more profitable Mandarin productions: On average a Mandarin film costs twice the amount of a Cantonese film. (The Shaws also dabble a bit in Cantonese cinema, but none of these productions has surfaced yet, and it seems doubtful any will.) With their strict regime and huge resources the Shaws soon secure their place as the most important Asian studio.

### 2.3. the first women of shaw

In the first decade most Shaw films are *wenyi* melodramas, *huangmei* operas and musicals, appealing mostly, but not exclusively to a female audience.<sup>8</sup> Many of their most important filmmakers at that time are established stalwarts of Mandarin cinema lured into the Shaw stable: Yueh Feng (Yue Feng), Yen Chun (Yan Jun) and especially Doe Chin (Tao Qin). But the key figure and probably, for better or worse, the key Shaw *auteur* is the younger Li Han-hsiang (Li Hanxiang). Like many colleagues, he starts out as an actor and comes to directing *via* script-writing, and realizes the studio's first mega-hits, the *huangmei* operas *Diao Charn* (1958, not released yet) and especially *The Kingdom and the Beauty* (1959). The latter, a beautiful, if occasionally stilted film<sup>9</sup>, typifies the qualities of Li's early oeuvre, as well as much of the Shaw's early output: A literary sensibility, a penchant for painstaking visual compositions and opulent decor and a tragic part for a glamorous female star. In this case the Shaw's first Asian Movie Queen, Lin Dai aka Linda Lin Dai. Li is particularly fond of historical subjects, having obsessed over the Forbidden City and especially the last imperial dynasty already as a child. On the downside, his exacting obsession with accurate set design can occasionally lead to a neglect of certain other aspects; as a plus, it gives his films rich, pleasant textures and a sense of historical reverie.

*The Enchanting Shadow* (1960), for instance, is a dreamy, moody horror film, its slightly eerie atmosphere conjured up mostly with meticulous color design, elegant gestures and camera movements and outstanding lighting work – closer in spirit to Italian and British genre pieces<sup>10</sup>, but almost free of shocks in any conventional sense. If it wasn't for the relatively similar plot, you almost wouldn't notice that it's based on the same story<sup>11</sup> as the 80s Hong Kong fantasy landmark *A Chinese Ghost Story* (1987). Li soon establishes himself as the Shaw's first star director, regularly harvesting Asia Awards, his films also being presented on festivals in the West. His most famous early work – and definitely one of his best – is *The Love Eterne* (1962), a breakthrough *huangmei* opera with an especially rich orchestration and delirious sexual politics: The *huangmei* convention of a woman playing a man is taken to charadical extremes with a gender-bending assemblage of sex-change disguises, while its tragic story of star-crossed lovers is played absolutely straight despite the ostensible sophistication. It culminates in an astounding, hand-painted whirlwind fantasy finale, allegedly directed by King Hu (who also appears in it). Like King Hu, Li was an ambitious director, and soon parted from the Shaws to pursue his own goals by founding an independent studio in Taiwan. Despite some remarkable films there, Li failed commercially and went bankrupt in the 1970s (his obsession with expensive historical accuracy characteristically playing a key role). Unlike Hu, he returned to the Shaws again afterwards, we'll encounter him again as one of the most influential Shaw directors of that decade.

The films of Doe Chin are almost as luxurious as Li's, although they're mostly contemporary, and his dialogues are even more literary – no



wonder, considering he studied literature before embarking on script-writing, which led to a directorial career. (He debuted in 1952 for the Proto-Shaws, went to MP & GI in 1956, but returned to the Shaws in 1959, directing 19 films until his death in 1969.) Whereas Li seems a genuine Asian original, with Doe there's at least a *modicum* of sense to comparing him to Western *auteurs* despite his pronounced *wenyi* sensibilities, both for his classical treatment of melodramatic and musical subjects as well as for his distinctive *mise en scene*: Stephen Teo compares him to Preminger (probably because of his ostensible theatrical-yet-filmic gracenotes), but his preferred genres and his tasteful use of the scope frame and color palette also point towards Vincente Minnelli. He can transform a comparably slight musical like *Les Belles* (1960) into a pulsating amalgam of vibrant colors – trippier here than in even the most hallucinogenic Shaw works during the late 60s.

According to the dogma of the times, his male “heroes” are total wimps, playing second fiddle to the heroine (in these cases: again Lin Dai). More suave and exuding an air of slightly boring respectability in the case of Peter Chen Ho (Chen Kexin), the major star of musicals and comedies like *Les Belles*, pure brooding self-pity and -disgust in the case of Kwan Shan (Guan Shan), top choice for Doe's precious melodramas like *Love Without End* (1962) and the two-parter *The Blue and The Black* (1966), an epic set against the backdrop of the Sino-Japanese war (in patented Shaw-style remaining only a backdrop for the fabulously tearjerking plot turns). *Love Without End* is also the only black-and-white Shaw production released so far, its immaculate photography hinting at the superb craftsmanship that's also a touchstone of much of the Shaw output – indeed a history of all the great technicians, scriptwriters and other more behind-the-scenes collaborators of Shaw Brothers cries out to be written, although for now it remains an abstract idea.<sup>12</sup> That *Love Without End* has been remade twice – under the same title by Pan Lei (Poon Lui) for the Shaws in a more modish version in 1970 and, more freely and successfully by Derek Yee as *C'est la vie, mon cheri* in 1994 – is only one indicator that the early Shaw output is an important reference for later Hong Kong cinema, but it's also the phase that has been least accounted for so far by Celestial's re-releases. When Doe Chin dies of stomach cancer in 1969, aged 54, the era of women's pictures is already history. It's no coincidence that his last film is his only attempt in the martial arts genre: *Twin Blades of Doom* (1968).

## 2.4. the finger of doom

By the middle of the sixties the face of Shaw production would change radically, with King Hu and Chang Cheh as major forces in establishing a new *wuxia* action cinema (and, in case of Chang, a pronouncedly “male” one). King Hu is of course the Shaw director already amply covered, and he only directed three films for the studio, but a few words on the earlier stages of his career seem helpful, although his two relatively unknown directorial works before the classic *Come Drink With Me* – the *huangmei* opera *The Story of Sue San* (a collaboration with Li Han-hsiang) and the war film *Sons of the Good Earth* (both from 1964) – still await release. Hu – also first an actor and scriptwriter – was working mostly on *huangmei* operas which would prove one of the key influences on the new style of martial arts films. Not just for Li, but also for Yen Chun, the other leading director in the genre (his *The Grand Substitution* from 1965 is one of the grand *huangmei* masterpieces). For instance, in Yen's *The Bride Napping* (1962), a comedic variation which Hu not only appears in (wearing what seems to be a smurf hat), but which he also co-scripted, there are a few fight scenes near the end that still adhere to the stage-bound tradition – people are “stabbed” into their armpits – but hint at what's to come: The stylization of movement and the characteristic percussion sounds are also present in *Come Drink with Me*, but by then Hu has his fights actually choreographed in a somewhat realistic manner and is honing his inimitable, masterful elliptical cutting technique. Hu's box office success with that film (his artistic success certainly wasn't what counted for the Shaws) paved the way for the new wave of martial arts (and for the director's immediate departure towards independence), it also established one of the few major female stars of the second half of the decade, the beloved Cheng Pei-pei (Zheng Peipei).

For the time of Asian Movie Queens was coming to an end: When Linda Dai killed herself in 1964 aged 30<sup>13</sup>, it served as a harbinger for a huge, macabre wave of suicides among female Shaw stars, who were replaced

by younger actresses in ever more rapid succession near the end of the decade. (One even hanged herself in the Shaw dormitory.) The fate of Chin Chien, like that of Chun Kim one of the great directors of the Cantonese cinema of the 50s, is also emblematic: Switching to Mandarin films in 1964, he joined Shaws one year later and directed a series of elegant, sad and heartfelt *wenyi* melodramas, the best known of which is the glossy *Till the End of Time* (1965) – although *Rose, Be My Love*, made the same year, seems a more complex and thoughtful swan song to the genre, emotionally, socially and historically resonant. (The war, although only briefly touched upon, for once doesn't just remain a backdrop here.) The painful relationships onscreen are obviously invested with personal feelings (he divorced his wife, actress Lin Cui, after her much-publicized affair with budding new style martial arts star Wang Yu aka Jimmy Wang Yu), in 1969 he committed suicide at the age of 43. The same year *A Cause to Kill*, based on a script by the late Doe Chin, was released: an interesting, visually careful, if way too talky spin on Hitchcock's *Dial M for Murder*, its central figure is a star actress who has receded from the limelight, played by Ivy Ling Po (Bo Ling), a big *huangmei* opera star after her debut in *The Love Eterne*, whose appearances had become visibly scarcer at the point in time as well.

According to the Celestial info *A Cause to Kill* was directed by a certain Mu Shih-chieh, which is the Chinese *nom de plume* of Japanese director Sanro Murakami (I failed to find any information on either); both this and the Hitchcock-derived plot are signs of a trend at Shaw Brothers: They screened a lot of foreign movies for their directors and their crews to give them new ideas. In the early sixties this included many Japanese swordplay films, quite a few Kurosawa Akira samurai classics and the *Zatoichi* series among them, both visibly influences on Chang Cheh's groundbreaking mid-60s *wuxia* martial arts films. The Shaws even imported a handful of Japanese directors and craftsmen to exchange ideas, some of them stayed with the Shaws for a while: The only one with a bigger body of work is Umetsugu Inoue (Umeji Inoue), but along with Lo Wei (Luo Wei) he is of the studio's least interesting directors, coating all of his films with the same plastic veneer, mostly veering somewhere between psychedelic musical extravaganzas and synthetic beach party movie plots. His most acceptable work is probably *Hong Kong Nocturne*, made in 1967, which at least gives its three heroines – Cheng Pei-pei, Lily Ho (Her Li-li) and Chin Ping – some leeway, but his output also represents a typical bridge from the more earnest 60s women's pictures to the more youth-oriented dramas, romances and musicals of the 70s. Of the other Japanese directors, the only big name having shown up so far is Ko Nakahira (directing as Yang Shu-hsi [Yeung Shu Hei]), famously cited along with *Masumura Yasuzo* by Oshima Nagisa as an early reference point on the Japanese new wave, but of the three of his four Shaw films released up to now – all of them remakes of earlier Japanese films he directed – only the weird and perverse love triangle *Summer Heat* (1968, based on his 1956 signature film *Crazed Fruit*) is truly remarkable, both *Interpol* (1967) and *Diary of a Lady-Killer* (1969) are impersonal genre works in which only occasional flashes of inspired style hint at something bigger. Other than that, only Matsuo Akinori's (credited as Mai Chi-ho [Mak Chi Woh]) *The Lady Professional* (1971) has surfaced, a swift, competent thriller vehicle for Lily Ho, which has the additional interest of directly showing the conflict between different cinema styles. One extended fight scene was obviously made by assistant director Kuei Chih-hung (Gui Zhihong), then on the verge of becoming one of Shaw's most interesting genre directors of the era, whereas much else shows some formal similarities to Japanese *yakuza* films.<sup>14</sup>

The Japanese swordplay films proved to be the more lasting influence, with Chang Cheh certainly paying a more extensive homage than the few flourishes noticeable in King Hu's *Come Drink with Me*. Like Hu, Chang, a critic and scriptwriter before he turned director, left his stamp as an author on a few opera films before he tried his hands at martial arts: The expressionistic torture scenes in Kao Li's (Gao Li) fine *Inside the Forbidden City* (1965) clearly foreshadow many violent sequences in his work, and in *The Amorous Lotus Pan* (1963), a Mandarin *huangmei* swan song by Cantonese filmmaking veteran Chow Sze-loke (Chow See Luk), the tight, classically executed (yet strikingly modernist tinged) narrative is suddenly punctured by a foreboding excess of revenge: At some point near the finale there's an unexpected close-up of a butcher knife stuck in the middle of a face.



## 2.5. the new one-armed swordsmen

The male body and its endless potential for suffering was an inexhaustible subject for Chang Cheh, who had repeatedly attacked the absence of acceptable male figures in Hong Kong cinema as a critic, and demanded a *yang* to complement the dominating *yin*. Like Hu, he was to replace the theatrical opera fights with more realistic battles, but his are ruthless rather than musical. His first important martial arts film for the Shaws, *Tiger Boy* (1965), is considered lost, but *Temple of the Red Lotus*, released earlier that year and directed by Xu Zenghong (Chui Chang-wang), is clearly a transitional work, steeped as much in theatrics as it tries to break away towards something more fresh (Chang, very likely considering this a test run, only produced). Even Chang's own, similarly stylized *The Trail of the Broken Blade*, realized two years later, doesn't overcome its theatrical antecedents, although in 1966 he had already accomplished a more successful *wuxia* production, *The Magnificent Trio*, which shows discernible influences by Kurosawa. With his follow-up, *The One-Armed Swordsman* (1967) Chang not only broke box-office records and made Wang Yu – his preferred lead at that point – a superstar, he also for the first time achieved a definitive vision of his cinema of stoic male suffering, both artistically as thematically.

During the following years he would repeat and refine this subject. First in a series of films with Wang Yu, including *The Assassin* (1967), unusual for its preference of drama (until the showdown, which is outrageously bloody and a masochistic highlight even within Chang's oeuvre) and its acknowledgement of class (which makes it a rare precursor of the proletarian impulses of the *kung fu* craze a few years later), *The Golden Swallow* (1968), an excellent, elegant follow-up of sorts to *Come Drink With Me*, in which Cheng Pei-pei characteristically is sidelined in favor of the male star, and *Return of the One-Armed Swordsman* (1969), which – there definitely are some *chambara* stances in-between the Chinese martial arts – already shows signs of the mixture of styles that would characterize many works to come, sometimes to the point of neglect. *The Invisible Fist*, made the same year, feels like a transitional work in even more ways, and not just because it stars Lo Lieh (Luo Lie): Quite a bit of it is slapdash, whereas other parts – notably the scene between the antagonists and a blind woman they both love, which ostensibly served as a model for similar sequences in John Woo's *The Killer* – are executed with notable care. And unaccounted for are the shots in Chang's oeuvre from the 70s onward, in which he didn't care for a smooth transition from the studio set to outdoor scenes.

After Jimmy Wang Yu pursued a solo career (also as a director), Chang settled for the Duo of Ti Lung (Di Long) and David Chiang (Chiang Wei-nien), crafting the superb *Have Sword, Will Travel* (1969), *The New One-Armed Swordsman* and *Vengeance* (both 1970). The latter lives up to its primal title: It is one of Chang's greatest films, an unrelenting dark, almost noirish city revenge story set in the 1920s, abstracted to a degree worthy of Melville, and boasting outstanding, energetic fight scenes, that are given a singularly rhythmic edge by a brilliant use of slow motion and intercut Chinese Opera footage.

Chang's films have been analyzed to the point of exhaustion for their homoerotic undertones and symbols (the oft-quoted signature shot: the hero pulls a blade from his body, ejaculating his guts before embarking on the extended final bout, usually with no survivors). And indeed most of his incredibly huge body of work is devoted to combat, be it *wuxia* martial arts or *kung fu* pugilism, but the re-releases have allowed for a discovery of his work in other genres, like the not really good, but really spaced out musical/crime-camp-crossovers *The Singing Thief* (1969) and *The Singing Killer* (1970), both with Chiang in the title role. They are among the first films to show a desire to break away from the martyr complex central to Chang's earlier work.<sup>15</sup> Unlikely combinations obviously never bothered Chang: *The Anonymous Heroes* (1971) starts off as a happy-go-lucky adventure comedy, with Chiang, Ti and Ching Li (Cheng Lee)<sup>16</sup> embarking merrily on a voluntary war mission – to end in a slaughter straight out of *The Wild Bunch*. (They die laughing.) And my only explanation for the bizarre genre-bending in *Heaven and Hell* (1978) which mixes *West Side Story*, Hieronymus Bosch and whatnot, is that the shooting schedule only allowed for using whatever set was free at the moment.

But most interesting are a trio of contemporary youth dramas with Chiang: *Young People* (1972), *The Generation Gap* (1973) and *Friends* (1974). The first, with its comedic portrayal of carefree well-to-do college kids who have nothing but leisure and (occasionally competitive)

amusement on their minds, seems like the horrifying negation of a driving force of Chang's oeuvre, the social protest underlying the rebellious sacrifices of the young heroes in his famous period pictures like *The Boxer from Shantung* (1972). The energy Chang invests in the beginning is soon defeated by the insipid, formulaic plotting. (Also, girlish Pan-Asian pop star Agnes Chan gets to strum her acoustic guitar and wail "You've got a Friend" and the likes.) But the second film seems like an apology for this (maybe again Chang wanted to prove the box office prospects the first time around), and has the alienated (and poor) Chiang driven to crime and a tragic fate by society. The third film is like an impossible reconciliation of the two predecessors, with friendship and loyalty helping to overcome economic (or, in case of poor rich kid Fu Sheng aka Alexander Fu Sheng) social needs. With its larger cast it also points towards a tendency for more protagonists characteristic of Chang's later oeuvre, epitomized by his films with *The Five Venoms* (1978).

But that underrated, because not as easily classifiable part of his body of work already belongs to the 70s history of the Shaws, when Chang occasionally would not shy away from trying to imitate other success formulas – but in the late 60s most are trying to emulate his. The martial arts boom, when melodramas recede and the opera films basically die out. More up-beat escapism is provided by the musicals, uninspired spy thrillers modeled on the Bond series (definitely not the Shaw's forte, Lo Wei even manages to fuck up the one with the beheading hair dryer) and fantasies like the series of *Monkey King* films, directed by Shaw superhack Ho Meng-hua (He Mengua), a filmmaker who certainly never wasted a single thought on something like an artistic decision<sup>17</sup>, but was ostensibly willing to accept anything and always eager to please the best he could. Accordingly, his triumphs include such diverse items as the martial arts gimmick classic *The Flying Guillotine* (1974), the racy rape-revenge exploitation thriller *The Kiss of Death* (1973) and the immortal midnight cult trash item *The Mighty Peking Man* (1976). In the monkey films – *The Monkey Goes West* (1965), *Princess Iron Fan* (1966), *Cave of Silken Web* (1967) and *The Land of Many Perfumes* (1968) – he intermediately gives free reign to silly comedy, singing pigs, drug-aded color schemes and scantily-clad sexy starlets. (Most successful, especially on the last two counts, is *Cave of Silken Web*, plus it has reflexive throwaways bits – even the title seems like a sticky sexual metaphor – and an outrageous, fable-like sadistic streak.)

Obviously less jocular are his martial arts films like *Killer Darts* (1968), one of many productions trying to follow the trend, none of those released remotely on the level of Chang or Hu. Some directors have tried original additions: Yue Feng, starting to adapt to the changing genres, tried to include Italo Western elements in *The Bells of Deaths* (1968), Lo Wei set *The Shadow Whip* (1970) in a snowy landscape (probably the best he could come up with). Cheng Gang (Ching Kong, father of Ching Siu-tung) took the hero's masochism to new heights when he had Wang Yu suffer practically motionless for the larger part of *The Sword of Swords* (1968), then made him lose not one arm, but both eyes, allowing for choice *Zatoichi* moments as well as some even crueler tricks played on him in the showdown. Cheng, an uneven, but interesting director – he also came from writing, but as an autodidact his sensibility certainly wasn't literary, his compositions however occasionally betray the fact that he studied production design – had also started out in Cantonese cinema in the 50s, spent the greater part of the 60s doing second unit work for the Shaws, before directing again from 1967 onwards. His films range from the uninspired (the adventure *Gun Brothers*, co-directed in 1968 by Wu Jianxiang [Wu Chia-hsiang], doesn't offer much more than doing *Zorro* with twins) to the choppy (*Killers Five*, 1969) to the very good (*The Twelve Gold Medallions*, 1970). After the martial arts boom was over he followed other trends, like the gambling film boom, inspired by the *fengyue* films of Li Han-hsiang upon his return to the Shaws in 1971.

## 2.6. sex for sale

By the beginning of the 70s, the advent of Cantonese TV in 1967 had already changed Hong Kong's film landscape considerably, with Cantonese production radically diminishing and a dramatic decrease in attendance. Cathay, lacking a strong personality since the death of its head Loke Wan-tho in a plane crash in 1964, closes its doors, its facilities bought by two Ex-Shaw managers, Raymond Chow and Leonard Ho,



whose new company Golden Harvest would dethrone the Shaws in a few years, surpassing it in flexibility and offering more freedom and money to its stars. But the imminent end of the studio era is not to be foreseen at the time, as the *kung fu* craze arrives, with the Shaw's *King Boxer* (aka *Five Fingers of Death*, 1972), directed (as Cheng Chan-ho [Jeng Cheong Woh]) in an unusual, clipped style by Korean-born Jeong Chang-hwa, the first worldwide success, the Bruce Lee breakthrough *The Big Boss* following on its heels. A bit earlier, Wang Yu's coarse and gritty *The Chinese Boxer* (1970) was already a landmark for the imminent segue from *wuxia* weapons to hand-to-hand *kung fu* combat, as well as an anti-Japanese streak seized by many Hong Kong films, most famously the nationalist Bruce Lee classic *Fist of Fury* (1972). In these years Shaw compensates for the domestic box office declines by rapidly rising international sales, realizing too late that its overblown production system is doomed to break down with the end of the *kung fu* boom. (Also, box office draws like Wang Yu, Bruce Lee and – in the second half of the decade – Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung prefer Golden Harvest.) At the same time the Shaws are starting to work in television, founding TVB, soon to become one of the world's biggest TV stations, in 1973. (Its studios, TV City, are built next to Movie Town.) Ironically, they “save” Cantonese cinema with the comedy smash *The House of 72 Tenants* (1973, directed by the fascinating Chor Yuen [Chu Yuan], whom we'll attend to soon) and the first films of TV comedy star Michael Hui (who will also depart for Golden Harvest after four productions).

Hui's first big hit is *The Warlord* (1972), a biting black period comedy, whose titular hero is as ignorant and powerful as he is cynical and ridiculous. The fine direction is by Li Han-hsiang, who has returned after his own studio went bankrupt, and whose other films with Hui – *The Happiest Moment* (1973), *Sinful Confession* and *Scandal* (both 1974) – are even more typical of his output in the 70s: he invents the so-called *fengyue* films, sarcastic, erotic comedies about con men, whores, gamblers and other shady people, usually conceived in an episodic style. Li quotes Boccaccio's *Decamerone* as the main inspiration, yet the sketchy nature also shows heavy similarities to television. Li's films still show his painterly eye, even if he makes extensive, sometimes damaging use of those 70s mainstays of Shaw production, the zoom lens and the fish-eye. Generally, his work during that period is hit-or-miss, which – along with a new vulgarity and pronounced cynicism – seems characteristic of the era, just like the titles of his films: *Legends of Cheating* (1971), *That's Adultery* (1975) or *Crazy Sex* (1976). Li is still able to pull off outstanding works: *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (1977) with Brigitte Lin (playing the male lead) and Sylvia Chang is a fine, classicist remake of the eponymous 1963 Shaw *huangmei* opera, with a pop-oriented soundtrack replacing the original tunes. And his magnificent double feature on his favorite subject, *The Empress Dowager* (1975) and *The Last Tempest* (1976), combines the gravity of his early work with the anecdotal structure of his seventies output, while for once the devious acts of the characters are not just a sign of a general belief in man's wickedness and corruption, but are caused by conflicted, difficult motivations. Yet these are exceptions, and for the remainder of his career – he stays with the Shaws till the end, then makes historical films for other studios and dies in 1996, aged 70, preparing a TV series on the *Empress Dowager* – Li steers unpredictably between likeable, unusually soft historical comedies (the Emperor Chien Lung cycle from the mid-70s to the early 80s), typical *fengyue* films (including a not very illuminating 1982 work about sexual anecdotes from his time at the Shaw's, *Passing Flickers*) and other period pieces (like *The Tiger and the Widow*, an emotional smuggler drama released in 1980, crying out for the intricacies and heaviness of his early style, but marred by his – by then ingrained, it seems – preference for choppy structure and a cynical left-field punch-line).

Still, Li's success leaves a deep mark on the 70s output of the Shaws: there's an abundance of more lowbrow *fengyue* variations like *Sexy Girls of Denmark* (1973, a formulaic sex tourism farce, but an inversion of comparable western fare by default), even a respected director like Cheng Gang turns towards ripped-from-the-headline exploitation and ignites a gambling film boom with his enjoyable epic *King Gambler* (1976). Quite amusing is his tendency to settle on notorious cases loosely connected to the Shaw studios: *The Call Girls* (1977), where aspiring actresses are forced into prostitution, plays out like – to allow myself one cheap western-comparison shot – George Stevens trying to make

*The Immoral Mr. Teas*, but *Kidnap* (1974), based on the infamous “Three Wolves” murder case<sup>18</sup>, is a remarkable, if sprawling and sometimes moralizing gangster drama. It also belongs to an unusual cycle of 70s Shaw productions that – although clearly more profit-oriented than consciousness-raising – deal with contemporary social problems in genre form.

Some of the best of these films were made by Kuei Chih-hung<sup>19</sup>, a rare example among the many who served as Chang Cheh's co-directors, as he managed to leave a stamp on the film: *The Delinquent* (1973) has the classic Chang story of a penniless young loner driven to self-sacrificing, bloody revenge, but the anti-hero's unbridled anger and the gritty scenery bear the signature of Kuei, closely related to his extraordinary horror film *The Killer Snakes* (1975), a remake of Phil Karlson's three years older Hollywood rat shocker Ben that convinces with sliminess in sex as well as reptilian cruelty, but especially with its dirty, disillusioned portrayal of the lower strata of Hong Kong society. (Remakes were big at Shaws: Sun Chung's entertaining 1976 exploitation flick *The Sexy Killer* carefully removes any social significance one might ascribe to Jack Hill's 1973 blaxpolution landmark *Coffy* and replaces it with an impressive array of flashy stylistic choices.) Kuei's best known films are his box office smash *The Teahouse* (1974) and the weaker, even more episodic follow-up *Big Brother Cheng* (1975), but that's probably because of their strong Category III rating, justified less by the films themselves as by their ambivalently treated subject of youth crime, a taboo topic. (In Chang Cheh's forerunner *The Generation Gap* the director feels obliged to open with a disclaimer of sorts.) More challenging, if inconsistent is Kuei's *Hex trilogy* – *Hex* (1980), *Hex Vs. Witchcraft* (1980) and *Hex after Hex* (1982) – which oscillates wildly between psychedelic scares, sharp social satire and low comedy. Kuei's martial arts film *The Killer Constable* (1981), often cited as his masterpiece, still awaits release. Another subject for further research.

## 2.7. the last tempest

*The Killer Constable* reportedly bears some relation to the late works of Chor Yuen, who also contributed an amazingly self-reflexive work to the crime cycle: *The Big Holdup* (1975), which is reminiscent in some ephemeral respects of Peckinpah's *Bring Me The Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1973) features budding martial arts star Chen Kuan-tai (Chen Guandai, his status just cemented by *The Teahouse*), as a burnt-out martial arts star, who takes part in the titular hold-up after being fired. When he is surrounded by the police and losing it for good, he jumps to his death from the roof of his villa. The scene is presented in a breathtaking montage, which can be seen as the logical conclusion of his many fight-scene leaps.

It's a highlight typical of Chor's experimental flourishes, in many ways he exemplifies the modernist tendencies embedded in the last decade of Shaw's production. He joins the studio relatively late, in the early 70s; at this point, just about 35 years old, he has already made around 60 films, in just about every genre imaginable. He studied filmmaking under Chun Kim, and followed in his footsteps as an outstanding director of socially oriented and elegantly stylized melodramas. His popular thriller parodies of the 60s like *The Black Rose* (1964) were the basis for a recent cycle of postmodern films inaugurated by Jeff Lau's masterpiece *92 Legendary La Rose Noir* (1992)<sup>20</sup>. And Chor's *The Joys and Sorrows of Youth* (1969) about a group of students is singled out by Stephen Teo as an astonishing social-realist drama. With Cantonese production dying out, he turned towards Mandarin filmmaking (and away from social realism) at the Shaws, and although his star-studded, sympathetic and a bit theatrical housing-estate comedy *The House of 72 Tenants* tops the year's box office and reinstalls Cantonese cinema, Chor never returns. (The popular hallmark status of this film has been confirmed as recently as last year by Stephen Chiau's grand and grandiose comedy *Kung Fu Hustle*, in which wonderful homages to Shaw films proliferate.)

Instead Chor spearheads the last great wave of Mandarin martial arts films, in a style he has already delineated in his superbly stylized period piece, the lesbian exploitation rape-revenge cult film *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan* (1972). But it is the groundbreaking and gargantuan *Killer Clans* (1975) that really inaugurates his 20-odd film series of adaptations of novels by famed martial arts author Gu Long (Ku Lung). (Before that, Chor was hopping genres like in his pre-Shaw days, although the auteurist touches are unmistakable: the 1975 period tragedy *Lover's Destiny* already features one of the great topics of the



Gu Long cycle, corruption by power, incarnated in a generalissimo whose behavior is very reminiscent of the Queen of Hearts in Lewis Carroll's Alice books.) Steeped in exquisite, ornamental decor, beautiful framing and inscrutable double- and triple- and quadruple-crossing allegiances, these films conjure up the labyrinths of Borges, their alluring atmosphere, although decidedly artificial in the best studio-bound way, more otherworldly mysterious than plain synthetic.

Among the earliest works of the cycle are a few more masterpieces, like the brilliantly abstracted *The Magic Blade* (1976, the *mise en scene* managing to conceptually soak up faint Italo Western echoes) or the connected *trompe l'oeil*-double feature *Clans of Intrigue* (1977) and *Legend of the Bat* (1978).<sup>21</sup>

Later entries in the Gu Long cycle are still rewarding (the 1980 martial arts film *Duel of the Century* – based on the same material as Andrew Lau's 2000 special effects extravaganza *The Duel* – is a fine essay on duality, while *Bat Without Wings*, made the same year, enjoyably features a villain in KISS make up), but a certain sense of exhaustion is notable. When the Shaws ask Chor to remake *Intimate Confessions ... as Lust for Love of a Chinese Courtesan* (1984) near the end, he blithely allows what previously were dashes of tasteful nudity to cross over into *zeitgeist* soft-core aesthetics and sarcastically replaces the nihilistic ending of the original with a triumph of the new, reckless capital. Whether this is cynicism or resignation, is hard to tell.

Chor's modernist martial arts films are not the only Shaw productions that are clear antecedents to the works of the Hong Kong New Wave directors, whose arrival in the late 70s/early 80s – along with the successful commercial bonanzas of Cinema City – served as a counterpoint to the last phase of the studio's decline. And while the realist tendencies of the New Wave are a clear break from all things Shaw (although even that would soften soon), their keynote martial arts films like Patrick Tam's *The Sword* (1980) or Tsui Hark's *Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain* (1983) certainly don't look as groundbreaking with the late Shaw output now available for comparison. While not as formally daring, Hua Shan's *Soul of the Sword* (1978), for instance, is already a full-fledged deconstruction of the genre on the narrative level. And the no-holds-barred special effects fantasy martial arts mayhem – certainly less slick than *Zu*, but also certainly more wacky – abounds in the unclassifiable last five years of Shaw, with Taylor Wong's over-the-top *Buddha's Palm* (1982) the most frenetic of the bunch.<sup>22</sup>

There's a sense of chaos, but also a positive vibration of anything goes prevailing in this era, as the Shaws' production becomes more fragmented (some films feel as if telegraphed over from the adjacent TV station, just when the studio invests in *Blade Runner*, ironically a huge flop back then). But it also points towards the future: Quite a few New Wave directors try their hand at the big studio, with Eddie Fong's intelligent, subversive and truly modern erotic period drama *An Amorous Woman of Tang Dynasty* (1984) being the supreme masterpiece, while Alex Cheung's much-maligned madcap farce *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* (1983) seems overripe for re-evaluation as a necessarily incontinent milestone of thorough going filmic anarchism. Ann Hui's (maybe too) careful Eileen Chang adaptation *Love in a Fallen City* (1984) is not without its flaws, but its male star Chow Yun-fat is only one of many young Shaw actors who will rise to superstardom after the studio closes down: You can see Maggie Cheung, Leslie Cheung and Anita Mui, for instance, in Taylor Wong's solid 1984 romance *Behind the Yellow Line* (scripted by Gordon Chan), and Danny Lee (Li Hsiu-hsien) is a Shaw fixture since the 70s, his botched, but ambitious 1981 directorial debut *One Way Only* belonging to the cycle of youth dramas that belatedly strain for a modicum of realism. Most likeable among them is probably Clifford Choi's (Tsai Kai-kwong) teen comedy *Teenage Dreamers* (1982, also with Leslie Cheung), although a case could be made for *On the Wrong Track* (1983, starring Andy Lau), where the stylish, sensationalist *mise en scene* of future *Naked Killer*<sup>23</sup> director Clarence Fok (Fok Yiu Leung) tends to cut the issues short, but gives a powerful sense of youthful rage. Among the Wongs starting at Shaws are character actor Anthony, debuting as Anthony Perry in Angela Chan's *My Name Ain't Suzie* (1985) and the inexhaustible Wong Jing, first writing, then directing a series of gambling and, uhm, romantic comedies that feel restrained and cohesive, but only in comparison to his later work.

## 2. 8. the master

1985 is the year in which the Shaw studios close their doors, but the arguably greatest Shaw *auteur* has yet to be considered: Lau Kar Leung (Liu Chia-liang), who fittingly also directed the studio's comeback movie, whose release practically coincided with the Celestial project. *Drunken Monkey* (2002) is a minor work, but an admirably no-nonsense old-school *kung fu* comedy, certainly not the worst way to revive after 17 years of occasional coproductions, including Alex Law's respected *Painted Faces* (1988) and Jeff Lau's overwhelming film *maudit* *Out of the Dark* (1995). It also serves as a useful reminder of two things: Firstly, that most Shaw directors, even Lau Kar Leung himself, didn't live up to their work during the studio's halcyon days – or even its declining years<sup>24</sup>. Secondly, that Lau was the biggest proponent of the martial arts tradition in Hong Kong cinema as well as its chief modernizing force.

A martial arts master himself and a descendant of the school of legendary folk hero Wong Fei-hung – immortalized in Hong Kong's longest running movies serial (in which the very young Lau cameoed) as well as in Tsui Hark's *Once Upon a Time in China* series and countless others – he became the preeminent fight choreographer for the Shaws from 1965 onward, often teaming up with Tang Chia (Tong Gai), who would direct three movies in the last days of Shaw, of which only his explosive 1982 *kung fu* debut *Shaolin Prince* has been released so far – hugely entertaining, but nowhere near Lau's work, which hides sublime layers beneath ultra-robust exterior appearance. The choreographer was usually in charge of directing the fight scenes, so Lau gathered experience early on, mostly working as the preferred choreographer of Chang Cheh, first on the *wuxia* pictures, then on the *kung fu* films. Indeed, much of Chang's 70s output shows Lau's influence in one way or another, most notably in the stylized credit sequences, in which the performers demonstrate the styles featured in the film in front of the monochrome studio backdrops. Nobody else has found as transparent a film form to express *kung fu* to compare with Lau, although sometimes it can be sensed in Chang's 70s films, which are wildly uneven, yet even at their most sloppy feature great combat scenes. For instance the highlight of Chang's rather diverse, non-chronological Shaolin cycle, starting with the crude, almost documentary-like *kung fu* of *Heroes Two* (1974), is the magnificent *Shaolin Temple* (1976), which in many ways seems like a test run for Lau's justly celebrated, pitch-perfect genre cornerstone and ultimate training film, *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin* (1978).

Chang made some outstanding works in the last phase of his career – as late as 1981 he could be counted on to deliver a rousing martial arts adventure like *The Sword Stained With Royal Blood* (1981), his epic consideration of the doomed upheaval *Boxer Rebellion* (1976, just reissued in a cut considerably longer than ever seen before) deserves to be better known<sup>25</sup> and some of the *Five Venom* films of the late 70s are excellent, most notably the periodically near-experimental *The Crippled Avengers* (1978) – but the apparent lack of consistency in his work by then might be attributed to Lau's departure, since Lau's *oeuvre* is the most consistent of all Shaw directors. There are only two or three minor films, like *The Lady is the Boss* (1983), a contemporary remake of Lau's own grand gender politics period *kung fu* comedy *My Young Auntie* (1980), and the lightweight post-postscript *Disciples of the 36th Chamber* (1985).

With his debut *The Spiritual Boxer* (1975) Lau inaugurates the age of the *kung fu* comedy (his charming, flawlessly paced 1979 sequel *The Shadow Boxing* presages the *Mr. Vampire* films of the mid-80s), with his next film *Challenge of the Masters* (1976) he inaugurates a series of masterpieces that dialectically scrutinize the *kung fu* tradition – the semi-autobiographical nature of his project spelled out by his decision to undertake a revision of the Wong Fei-hung legend. Systematically Lau achieves completion of broken traditions by modernizing them: *In Executioners of Shaolin* (1977) and other works he adds the yin again to Chang's now-dominating yang; amongst other things he brilliantly stages a wedding night as a duel of the competing fighting styles of husband and wife: Her crane technique allows her to clamp her legs together so that no one can pull them apart. Only when their son is able to synthesize the styles of both parents, can he defeat the nefarious white browed monk Pai Mei, played by Lo Lieh. (In 1980 Lo, also reappearing as a kind of an evil twin villain, directed the splendidly entertaining sequel *Clan of the White Lotus*, choreographed by Lau, which however proves, that it took Lau himself in the director's chair to achieve profundity.) *Heroes of the East* (1979) similarly starts out as a comedy of marriage,



then turns into a rebuttal of prevailing anti-Japanese clichés: Gordon Liu, Lau's adopted brother and his stalwart lead, plays a Chinese man marrying a Japanese woman, after extensive, hilarious fights, she leaves for home, and a note he sends after her is considered insulting by Japanese martial arts masters. In the last part of the film Liu faces off against their techniques, one by one, which in the hands of Lau becomes a celebration of the different authentic styles, ending on a reconciliatory note, as the unifying idea of martial arts triumphs over petty nationalism. Similarly, the finale of *Legendary Weapons of China* (1982), which revisits some themes of *Boxer Rebellion*, is a breathless, yet precise manual in the use of the 18 legendary weapons (and clearly the superior inspiration for Michelle Yeoh's weapon roundelay in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*), whereas in *Martial Club* (1981) – again with Gordon Liu as Wong Fei-hung – and *Mad Monkey Kung Fu* (1979), Lau comically revisits the master-disciple theme central to his *oeuvre* (he gives the latter an additional edge by playing the *Mad Monkey Kung Fu* teacher) and in *Return to the 36th Chamber* (1980) Lau manages to pull off a wholly original, more comedy-oriented spin-off. Rather neglected is the unusual and impressive *Shaolin Mantis* (1978), whose final twist seems like an announcement for Lau's final Shaw and – along with *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin* – his supreme masterpiece (many also cite his soon-to-be-released opulent 1979 work *Dirty Ho*), *The Eight Diagram Pole Fighter* (1983), which can be considered as the Requiem for the Shaws, a devastating blow to the central motivation of martial arts films: revenge. Drawing unprecedented mythic intensity from a dark, operatic *mise en scene* – Lau makes expert use of those abstractly stylized, stripped-bare studio sets he was fond of using for Chang Cheh's credits sequences – and a powerfully rhythmic choreography of extended, but concisely executed body collisions and weapon movements, Lau tells a story of the futility of vengeance. Of the two surviving brothers of a clan, one (a supporting part for Alexander Fu Sheng, who was supposed to play the lead and whose tragic death in a car accident during shooting undoubtedly influenced the production) drifts into madness, while for the other (Gordon Liu) in the end there is no choice but to turn his back on society and walk away, like Ethan Edwards does at the end of *The Searchers*. •

To be continued ...

#### Notes:

1. Quite a few famous Hong Kong films are remakes and/or variations of Shaw films, not to mention the incomprehensibly vast amount of references, the few instances mentioned in the text are only the tip of the iceberg.
2. In an attempt to approximate part of the confusion accompanying Celestial's release policy, I'm using the same names for the Shaw employees as they do, regardless of whether the filmmaker is better known under his Mandarin or Cantonese name. In some cases, they change back and forth, but I will resist hyperbole and stick to my first choice. Also, I'm trying to give the alternative in brackets upon first mention, whenever possible. Let's not get into the thing with the different Romanization for now, please.
3. And these people deserve some respect, after all they did the most to keep the Shaw legacy alive in the Western World while the films were locked away, however badly in many cases.
4. The more obvious examples are James Bond soundtrack excerpts in spy thrillers, Italo-Western riffs in martial arts films and classic Hollywood themes in melodramas, but even children's TV series were welcome for inappropriate plundering, and the most positively delirious choice must be the synthic riffs of Pink Floyd's "One of These Days" over an extended fight scene in Chor Yuen's masked-gangster period martial arts film *The Lizard* (1972).
5. But often there's also a more rewarding, if usually a tiny second "Behind the Scenes" gallery with rare set photos and accompanying texts ranging from the informative to the demented.
6. Stephen Teo's *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimension* is the only English-language book that amounts to a serious attempt of the nation's cinema history, David Bordwell's *Planet Hong Kong*, which avowedly doesn't want to make that attempt, provides quite a few interesting observations. From there it's mostly scattered articles and the invaluable retrospective catalogues of the Hong Kong Film Archive – and all of those cover only selected areas, partly by default, as many Shaw films were literally lost in the vaults.
7. See also Gabe Klinger's piece in this issue, and I'm further reminded of the enthusiasm with which Lav Diaz pointed out that DVD piracy has made it possible to get a sense of cinema history on the Philippines for the first time, men-

tioning that now everyone can buy, say, a Fellini or a Kurosawa disc from every second street vendor, while it was previously impossible to see their films.

8. The *huangmei* opera is a regional equivalent of Peking opera, simpler and thus easier to adapt for the screen. The films were especially popular in Taiwan.
9. Jeff Lau's *Chinese Odyssey 2002* (2002) is a clever inversion, and not just because of its neglected *auteur's* trademark frenetic touch.
10. Coincidentally, the Shaws would team up with Hammer Productions one-and-a-half decades later when they started to dabble in international co-productions, including *The Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires* (1974), the disaster film *Meteor* (1979) and *Blade Runner* (1982).
11. From Pu Songling's famous, voluminous ghost story anthology *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, which also served as a basis for King Hu's epic *A Touch of Zen* (1969).
12. Not just because of the lack of information on Celestial's releases and elsewhere, but also the film credits remain untranslated in many cases. They remain, to quote a Chang Cheh title, *The Anonymous Heroes*, explaining also the more auteurist approach used in this text.
13. In the posthumously released *The Black and the Blue*, especially in part 2, noticeably a stand-in is used.
14. There was also a smaller number of co-productions with actors as well as directors from Korea.
15. Admittedly, at some point in *The Singing Killer*, Chang seems to change his mind and suddenly wants to remake *Vengeance* all over again, before changing his mind once more, and returning to a kitschy happy end.
16. Maybe the only actress Chang ever considered for worthy roles, most notably in the fascinating, superbly acted and very zoom-happy martial arts melodrama *The Blood Brothers* (1973), another huge influence on Woo, who served as assistant on it.
17. Also, not many people would make a film about a guy who turns into a monster every time he pours himself with gasoline at the next filling station, cf. the indescribable *Oily Maniac* (1976), unfortunately paced like slow molasses in overeager adherence to its title.
18. One of the unlucky "Three Wolves" kidnapping gang is a Shaw makeup employee, played by portly Fan Mei Shang, in the film he has the indelible nickname "Hair-sticking Chen". Incidentally, the incident is also alluded to briefly in Li's *Passing Flickers*.
19. Kuei was nevertheless always game for a production like the female prison camp exploitation actioner *Bamboo House of Dolls* (1974) or the *Mr. Q hijinks of Mr. Funnybone* (1967) inbetween.
20. Lau's later film in the cycle, the even more delirious *Black Rose II* (1997), remains one of his most underrated works.
21. The stylistically similar, but straightly connected two-parter *Heaven Sword and Dragon Sabre*, also released in 1978 seems a counterpoint, with Chor for once attending to material by Jin Yong aka Louis Cha, the other preeminent martial arts writer. A preceding instalment of this series of novels was used by Chang Cheh for his three-part film cycle *The Brave Archer* (1977, 1978 and 1981), probably his most successful attempt at a fantasy *wuxia* setting similar to Chor's. Some 25 years later, that same novel – radically reconfigured – also served as the basis for Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time* and its significant other, Jeff Lau's *The Eagle Shooting Heroes*.
22. Lu Chin-Ku (Tony Liu) gives Wong a run for the money, especially with *Holy Flame of the Martial World* (1983) and his violent *Secret Service of the Imperial Court* (1984), an aggressive, somber non-fantasy variation of the style.
23. Which is clearly inspired by *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan ...*
24. To cite the examples of a few craftsman, who were obviously even worse off than a visionary like Lau: Sun Chung's 1988 thriller *City War* shows little of his stylistic brio, it's hard to imagine that this is from the same man who crafted the deranged masterpiece *Human Lanterns* five years earlier. And even Taylor Wong, so reliable during his Shaw phase, stumbles beyond recognition in his 1989 crime drama *Sentenced to Hang*, a vastly inferior treatment, of the true crime *Kidnap* was based on.
25. Better known than Nicholas Ray's flawed *55 Days at Peking*, for instance, although these two would make a magnificent dialectic double bill.



# NEKAJ MALEGA O NJIH: KAKO JE BIL OSVOJEN ZAHOD – O TEŽAVAH GLEDANJA IN RAZUMEVANJA VZHODNOAZIJSKIH FILMOV

claudia siefen

*“Verjamem, da je geografska dostopnost odločilni faktor človeških razmerij. Svojih prijateljev zares ne izbiramo, ljudje okrog nas postanejo naši prijatelji.”*

Wong Kar-wai

Vzemimo za primer Japonsko, ki spočetka na Zahodu ni uživala statusa “eksotične” dežele, s kakršnim se “ponaša” danes. Dokazi se razprostirajo od najzgodnejših poročil popotnikov (obdobje Meiji) do novic izpred stotih let. Redki Evropejci, ki so takoj po “odkritju” odpotovali na Japonsko – zlasti nizozemski zdravniki in poslovneži v službi svoje države –, so bili osupli nad visoko stopnjo tamkajšnje civilizacije. Seveda so bili osupli tudi nad navidezno tako drugačnim načinom obnašanja, vendar je bilo njihovo primarno občudovanje namenjeno razvitemu kmetijstvu, obrti in umetnosti. Japonska se je tem popotnikom zdela nenavadno podobna Evropi. Dežela je šele ob koncu 19. stoletja začela postajati “eksotična”, za kar so med drugim zaslužni tudi Puccini, Kellermann, Loti in Helwig. Od takrat naprej je Japonska v očeh Zahoda obravnavana zlasti kot oddaljena nenavadnost. Ta mentaliteta se je še posebej zrcalila v razmisleku o japonski umetnosti in danes na podoben način, žal, motri tudi filme. Ter obenem pozablja (oziroma se tega ni nikoli naučila), da se je odprtosti, ki bo edina lahko sodila nenavadno in posamezno, treba priučiti.

Nadaljujmo z zelo preprostim vprašanjem: zakaj potreba po klasifikaciji filmov na nacionalne kategorije? Morda zato, ker se igralci in igralka izražajo prek skupne valute: govornje besede? Tistega, čemur pravimo jezik. Jezik nam omogoča, da drugemu posredujemo svoje misli. In jezik nam še vedno omogoča, da čutimo pripadnost določeni narodnosti. Toda: ali je razumevanje jezika obenem tudi jamstvo za razumevanje filma? Dejstvo je, da se občinstvo spreminja. Nove generacije sprejemajo podnapise, so navajene potovati in na oddaljene dežele ne gledajo kot na oddaljene planete. Če k temu prištejemo še nove generacije režiserjev in filmskih kritikov, se pogosto slišana izjava o novem azijskem filmu pokaže v novi luči. Vse, kar je povezano s kvaliteto, se organsko spreminja in razvija: zakaj bi bilo torej iz tega procesa izvzeto občinstvo in filmski profesionalci?

Če hočemo govoriti o kvaliteti, se je načeloma zmotno osredotočiti na filmske festivale, saj so nas slednji popolnoma razvadili. Večina festivalskih udeležencev se nahaja v varnem zavetju zahodnega modela percepcije in zlobni jeziki bi lahko rekli, da se del vzhodne produkcije orientira po zahodnem okusu. Festivalске nagrade in omembe zvišujejo tržni potencial filmom in se zmotno berejo kot splošne izjave. Vprašati se moramo, zakaj je nacionalno

poreklo tako pomembno za film. In na kakšen način ga sploh določamo? Je bolj pomemben jezik filma ali finančno ozadje? Morda nacionalni klišeji vplivajo na vnaprejšnja pričakovanja občinstva? Predsodki so pogosto usodni in se rojevajo hitro. Kaj se zgodi, če se takšni pomisleki ugnezdijo v celotno mentaliteto branja posamezne nacionalne produkcije? Koliko vnaprejšnjega znanja potrebujemo za gledanje filmov, ki prihajajo iz druge in povsem drugačne kulture? Jezik črpa iz različnih notranjih plasti in pokrajin, med katerimi so tujcu (beri: podnapisom) mnoge nedostopne. Je mar poskus razumevanja japonskega filma potemtakem nesmiseln, če obenem ne govorimo japonskega jezika? Nerazumevanje jezika na platnu vodi v nadaljnje težave pri dojetanju, ki se skrivajo onkraj govornje besede: zastrti ostajajo številni socialni podtoni, tako na ravni individualnih elementov filma kot na najširšem kulturnem nivoju. Tudi prepoznavanje besed in zaznavanje intonacije ni nič v primerjavi z odtentki materinega jezika.

O ignorantski “belo-zahodni” drži lahko zares govorimo ob vprašanju kvalitete v “azijskih” filmih. Ko govorimo o posameznih evropskih filmih, jih na Zahodu praviloma ne označujemo za evropske, temveč govorimo o filmih posameznih držav, na primer o francoskem ali italijanskem filmu. Kdaj bo tovrstna diferenciacija doletela tudi teritorij Azije? Konstanta filmskega diskurza je spoštovanje do mojstrov preteklosti, ki ne pušča prostora za dvome o kvaliteti. Stvari se zapletejo z mladimi režiserji in uvrstitvami filmov na razne festivale, kar naj bi že samo po sebi jamčilo kvaliteto. Pri čemer ne smemo pozabiti, da je festivalsko občinstvo svet zase v primerjavi z množicami, ki obiskujejo multipleks za vogalom. Vendar nas razmišljanje v tej smeri utegne zapeljati na stranpot. Radovednost je seveda dragocena, vendar je na primer praviloma povezana z nejevero v umetniški razvoj tako imenovanega “tretjega sveta”. Kritika našega evrocenzizma nas ne pripelje nikamor, saj se ga ne bomo znebili tako, da se ga zavedamo. Dejstvo ostaja, da je pot od tod do Japonske težje prehodna, kot pot od tja do sem. Zato japonske filme še vedno gledamo na “evropski” način.

Prva stvar, ki priveže in vpliva na pogled, so igralci. Glavni liki posameznega filma so obenem dragoceni kot prevajalci in označevalci kulture ter življenjskega sloga upodobljene epohe. Dober primer “univerzalnega igranja” najdemo v dvaintridesetletnem igralcu Takeshiju Kane-shiru, potomcu tajvanskih in japonskih staršev, ki je sposoben igrati v japonskem, angleškem, mandarinskem in kantonskem jeziku. Kar je bolj pomembno: v vseh navedenih jezikih je verodostojen. Motivacije njegovih likov so izražene manj kot kompleksen socialni fenomen in bolj



kot ideja povezav različnih socialnih fenomenov. Vprašanje je, kako popolnoma različne ideje in vsebine nato prebavlja zahodno občinstvo. Na Japonskem poznajo besedo "Ma", ki opisuje praznino prostora in časa. "Ma" zaobjema trenutek, očiščen vsakršne akcije, tako v dejanju kot besedi. Ta odsotnost akcije ustvarja vzdušje in se vzpostavi kot integralen del filma. Vendar ne zgolj kot trenutek filma, v katerem se "nič" ne zgodi. Ravno nasprotno: zgodi se kontrast. Delo igralca je, tako kot glasba, sestavljeno iz zvoka in tišine. Seveda ne moremo spregledati, kako v melodijo igre posega delo kamere in montaže. Vzhod in Zahod sta si podobna, ko prispemo do vprašanja lepote. Kako opredeliti lepoto? Jasno je, da ne gre zgolj za površino. Lepoto gre pretežno iskati v vsem, kar je uravnoteženo: navznoter in navzven. V vsem, kar stoji pokončno kot posledica posebne notranje napetosti in moči. Vendar so kulture širom sveta klesale specifične značaje in izraze lepote. K tej diferenciaciji na lepo in nelepo je svoje prispevala tudi umetnost. Filmi so najlažje izmerljivi glede na svoj tržni učinek, čemur se prilagaja večinski diskurz. Filmski festivali dolbejo svojo strugo, vendar nas še vedno puščajo v negotovosti glede vprašanja lepote. Je naše vedenje nemara preveč odvisno od slučajnosti? Kar resnično občudujemo, je določen trenutek, ki ga film posreduje. Vedno popolnoma artikulirana vizija stanja stvari v svetu, tukaj in zdaj. Vedno gre za slog in ne za civilizacijo. Ki ji pripada telo.

Kar nas pripelje do ene občutljivejših točk, na kateri se Vzhod (Japonska) in Zahod bistveno razhajata: ljubezen. Japonske ljubezenske zgodbe se zdijo očiščene stanj vzne-mirjenja. Na Zahodu se v ospredje znova in znova pribli-ja vprašanje: kako najti in nato ne izgubiti ljubljene-ga objekta? Ljubezen v japonskem filmu ni najbolj pomembna, celo v ljubezenski zgodbi ne. Bolj pomembno je vprašanje, kako ljubezen povezati z lastnim življenjem. Ljube-zen osebo spremeni, o tem ni nobenega dvoma. Vendar je naslednje vprašanje v Japonskem filmu nekaj najbolj obi-čajnega in vedno povezano z občutjem spokoja: Ljubezen me je spremenila, kdo sem torej zdaj in kaj sem bil prej? Na podobno miren, skoraj trivialen način japonski filmi obravnavajo tudi spolnost. Kot dejanje, ki ni nič bolj ne-navadno od prehranjevanja, vendar je obenem vedno ne-kaj posebnega, tako kot slasten obrok, po katerem pa bom vseeno jutri spet lačen.

Avtoriteta in prevlada v enainvajsetem stoletju nista več zgolj posledica rožljanja z orožjem in ekonomije, temveč tudi preplet kulture, informiranosti in tradicije; zato bo v prihodnosti Azija odigrala še pomembno vlogo. •  
prevedel jm

The much debated idea of how the filmmaker is analogous to writer in the way how he leaves his highly individual imprint on a film, or better yet, his entire span of work, originates in the Astruc's celebrated conception of the camera as a *camera-stylo* and the act of shooting as a certain mode of cinematographic *écriture*. The theory of written cinema later found its way into the 'politique des auteurs', which the young Turks of *Cahiers* used as an discursive instrument in their critique of the French cinema of the day, via a polemic that aimed to establish the director as author of a work of art, and as such in no way different or inferior to that of a poet or a painter. The origins of this righteous attitude in fact predate both *Cahiers* and Astruc and can be traced to Germaine Dulac, who objected in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1927 that she had not been credited as the author of *La coquille et le clergyman* (1928).

The idea spread together with the merits of its *nouvelle vague*, filmmaker turned critics, soon acquiring further legitimacy with the adoption from the film critic Andrew Sarris, which in 1962 wrote an article called "Notes on the Auteur Theory", thus giving the theory its name: "Over a group of films a director must exhibit certain recurrent characteristics of style, which serve as his signature." Further adoption of the theory by the British film theoretic Peter Wollen updates Sarris's definition along structuralist lines: "The structure [which underlies the film and shapes it] is associated with a single director, an individual, not because he has played the role of artist, expressing himself or his own vision in the film, but because it is through the force of his preoccupations that an unconscious, unintended meaning can be decoded in the film, usually to the surprise of the individual involved. The film is not a communication, but an artefact which is unconsciously structured in a certain way. Auteur analysis does not consist of re-tracing a film to its origins, to its creative source. It consists of tracing a structure (not a message) within the work, which can then post factum be assigned to an individual, the director, on empirical grounds" (Peter Wollen, 'The Auteur Theory', *Signs And Meanings In The Cinema*, 1972). Despite Wollen's acknowledgment of the structuralist rejection of the politics of the subject, his take on authorship is still by and large a translation of the original *Cahiers* politics-of-authors-speak, which not only asserted the existence of the author on the purportedly objective grounds of the thematic, narrative and stylistic devices, that the author puts to use, but also appropriated both author and work as a sort of an *objet trouvé*, or in Wollen's terms as 'artefact'. This strategy clearly involved a gesture of avant-garde irreverence towards dominant culture: "an artist's personality will manifest itself in his works ... [and also that] there was, indeed, an artist at work where many had never believed one existed" (Leo Braudy & Marshall Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 1999) In this way a new kind of 'authorship' was asserted, pit-



ting Hitchcock, Ford, Fuller, Sturges, Tashlin et al. against the mainstream French 'quality film' of the time as part of a theory that was both anchored in cultural critique (thought one must not forget how reactionary – by any standards – it was in its debunking of the powers-that-be) and ready to impose itself upon contemporary film with absolute self-assurance. One must ask – without belittling its importance in the history of cinema – if the far-reaching appeal of the *nouvelle vague* is not in fact partly also a fascination over destroying old worlds to build, what one proclaims, new and better ones.

In stark opposition to Wollen, Barthes declared: "*The Author is dead and contemporary criticism has written the obituary ... [e]very text ... is generated in and by a complex web of cultural, social, political, and formal conventions and expectations ... The old idea that the lone artist-genius is the exclusive source of meaning in a text ... is no longer tenable in light of ... critical theory... To the extent that we cling to the notion of one work/one artist, we become blind to the complexities of how meaning is generated in works of art ...*" (John Caughie, *Theories of authorship*, 1981).

In light of this, one would come to think that the author theory would die together with the author. The post-structuralists dismissed the cult of the artist in favor of a field of multitudinous discourses with no clearly drawn boundaries between them, leaving no room for even the unconscious and unintended trace of the author's intent, much less his clear and purposeful signature. The 'author' as such is being constructed merely through the agency of the recipient, spectator or critic, and is always already embedded in the dominant discourse as a particular function of its taxonomy.

Author theory was further disassembled by divisions of deconstructionist Derrida-driven academics, under whose auspices any possible notion of authorship was dispersed into many different spheres via minute examination of cross-cultural inter-textuality, the politics of representation, and such like.

And yet, despite demise, autopsy and disassembly, the author continues to thrive. Abandoning first the cinephiles and later the academics, the author reemerged in the more unstable ground of mainstream culture, where movies and other entertainment increasingly commodify Author and Artist to the extent of comprehensively assimilating overtly subversive, satirical and politicized statements. Today it seems somewhat ironic that this 'commodified' *politique des auteurs* is not so very different to the one conjured by Truffaut, and yet unabashedly represents the dominant interests of capital in commercial cinema. None of this, per se, is to be viewed as automat-

ically bad as a certain politics of affinity is indispensable, and the film critic cannot do without the illusion that proposing his own private alternative canons against the dominant paradigm somehow stands up as cultural criticism. Yet it seems that even the most sentient of film critics is at best only half-heartedly aware how deeply the notion of authorship is inscribed in his reflections on cinema and how predetermined the practice of film criticism and analysis is.

One of the catalysts for this issue of *Ekran* was the book *Movie Mutations, The Changing Face of World Cinephilia* (Jonathan Rosenbaum & Adrian Martin (Eds.), 2003). Besides the highly abstract universalist appeal of the idea on 'global synchronicity', there are many interesting propositions concerning canonization/codification of certain types of cinema as well as a clear and necessary concern over cultural '(mis)translation' of cinema between its first and 'other' worlds. Most of them are dealt with in full detail elsewhere in this volume, so I shall limit this to merely remark on how pervasive is the critical author-focused approach to viewing cinema, deeply rooted in theories of authorship mentioned above.

It is clear that the author and his redoubtable *politique* today gladly partake in the cultural whitewash of late globalised capitalism, and play out the super-ego of mogul-director and the superhuman-movie star in all their narcissistic apotheosis. Of course, both existed long before the advent of the author theory, but the theory itself has been successfully assimilated into the global entertainment and culture industry. Similarly, the almost painful, inexhaustible obsession with the iconic 'ur-auteurs' such as Hitchcock, Ford and Welles that the contemporary film theory academia seems to be unable to think beyond, is merely the flip-side of the same development. Not that the film critics, programmers and other serious cinema devotees are any less to blame, supporting as they do a certain neo-liberal cultural pact, where they are allowed to govern and interpret the 'Art of cinema', while mass media and industry minions administer the commerce. In this way, cinema has today become condemned to a false antagonism of industry vs. art, and to the false alternatives of the so called 'independent' productions which in most cases serve to merely diversify the offerings of the market.

One underlying factor within this development must be the unwillingness of the film critic to discard the notion of the author, and his wholesale interpretative addiction to the 'wholesomeness' of artist and art, and in this way to subscribe to a mechanism that reduces otherwise difficult cultural produce to the level of the commodity and sanitizes any radical political, social, or personal statements.



Barthes encapsulates the complacency of this relation: Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases: society, history, psyche, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is 'explained' – victory to the critic. Hence there is no surprise in the fact that, historically, the reign of the Author has also been that of the Critic, nor again in the fact that criticism (be it new) is today undermined along with the Author. (Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image/Music/Text*, 1977).

Personally, I can understand us cinephiles in our need for acquiring an author and deciphering the ultimate meaning of his text, thus giving his work a face with which one can relate. Often, when arguing that some filmmaker deserves to be called an author, this is a noble and righteous gesture of correcting past blunders of myopic cultural politics, and even more importantly, opposing existing canons and commercial reasoning. However, I wish we would remain cautious in elevating filmmakers to authors, because there is no single meaning or message in their work, but a multitude of realized and unrealized possibilities, which should really be investigated, in lieu of searching for the illusory consistence and perfection of the 'auteurism'.

## filip robar dorin

Refleksija filmske refleksije? V prvem snopiču Kinemov (*Ekran* 1–2, 2005) sem zapisal, da na Slovenskem pogrešam celovit razmislek filmske refleksije oziroma kritičen pogled na vrednotenje filma. Filmska kritika se praviloma začne in neha pri oceni posameznih filmov, kar navadno opravijo kulturno široko razgledani posamezniki, ki pridobijo visoko izobrazbo na raznih področjih človeške ustvarjalne prakse. Njihovo pisanje pogosto določajo ali karakterizirajo osebno intelektualno nagnjenje, okus in življenjska izkušnja, manj pa poznavanje metjeja, filmske estetike in produkcijskih postopkov.

*Takšna kritika ali, bolje rečeno, ocenjevanje je prvenstveno namenjeno potrebi po obveščeni, zato se navadno zadovolji z recenziranjem posameznih filmov, redkokdaj pa se loti kompleksnih povezav in vozlišč, ki opredeljujejo in določajo filmsko delo od zamisli do scenarija, od snemanja do obdelave slike in zvoka. Bolj kot z refleksijo in strokovno kritiko imamo torej opraviti z mnenji, preferencami in utilitarnimi podatki. Delo filmskega kritika "za dnevno rabo" tako pri nas kot drugod v svetu informacijske družbe ni rezultat sistematičnega študija in proučevanja medija, zato je pogosto polno poljubnih ekstrapolacij in spekulativnih predpostavk. Refleksija takšne kritike bi samo pomnožila zmedo.*

Videti je, da gledalca, ki hodi v kino zato, da se razvedri, zabava ali se preda pozabi, kritiška ocena za vsakdanjo rabo niti najmanj ne moti, nasprotno, razne domiselne in prepričljive sentence kritikov mu pridejo še kako prav, da lahko o filmu, ki ga je videl, tudi sam kaj pametnega reče. Slabša plat nereflektirane refleksije, ki ne razodeva in ne razčlenjuje posameznih vsebinskih, jezikovnih in estetskih prvin in zvez v filmskem delu, pa se pokaže takrat, kadar postane dominantna postavka v kulturni gledanju, ko istočasno preprečuje razvoj prave refleksije v sklopu kulturne dejavnosti, ki ji pravimo filmska produkcija. Pogoj za boljše filmsko delo je jasen in razumljiv uvid v komponente dobrega dela.

*Nacionalna kultura, ki ne premore poglobljene refleksije svojega vrednotenja, tvega med drugim tudi to, da izgubi organsko povezavo s filmsko prakso oziroma da se produktivna dejavnost vrta v začaranem krogu in pogosto grize svoj lastni rep. Če ni kritične analize in teoretskega premisleka lastnega dela, kontinuirane refleksije kritiškega subjekta, je lahko prizadeta tudi filmska praksa. Menim, da je prav pomanjkanje kritične refleksije razlog, da slovenski film stagnira oziroma le poredko najde svoj avtentični izraz.*

V Franciji, na priliko, se je v raznih obdobjih zrelega filma del kritiško-teoretske srenje prelevil v filmske ustvarjalce in okronal svojo moderno refleksijo z moderno vizijo. Slovenski filmski pismouki se le redkokdaj soočijo s filmsko ustvarjalno prakso. V dvajsetih letih imamo tri ali štiri poskuse, ko so kritiki spopadli s praktičnimi vidiki filmskega dela. Vse predolgo in preveč se tako ena kot druga ustvarjalna dejavnost napajata v lastnih vrlinah in slabostih in ostajata vsaka na svojem bregu. Nauki



## KINEMI 2005 – O NEKATERIH SLABOSTIH REFLEKSIJE FILMA NA SLOVENSKEM

kritika nimajo povezave z vednostjo praktika. Tu je najti vzrok za eno od hib slovenskega filma, nerefektirano zavest.

*Posledica nekultiviranega razmišljanja in pisanja o filmski izkušnji in z njo povezani filmski dejavnosti so pogosto površne, v ničemer zavezujoče in včasih tudi pristranske ocene filmov v dnevnem in revijalnem tisku. Filmski kritiki in publicisti v svojih spisih radi uporabljajo razne cinematske detajle in tehnične izraze, delajo virtuzne miselne tvorbe in analogije z literaturo ali slikarstvom, vendar delujejo prej pretenciozno kot filmsko pertinentno. Le redki med njimi dobro poznajo pravo področje svojega dela. Navadno ne zmorejo pretehtane estetske presoje ali studioznega premisleka, ki sloni na znanju, metodičnem pristopu ter drugih filmoloških parametrih. Mnogi med kritiki še vedno menijo, da je film vendarle le zabava in da ga ne bi smeli podvreči tako strogim kriterijem kot druge umske discipline. Delno imajo prav.*

V zadnjih nekaj desetletjih kritičnega pisanja na Slovenskem ni nastalo niti eno izvorno tehtno filmsko kritičsko ali teoretsko delo, ki bi vplivalo na filmsko dejavnost, se morda postavilo po robu prevladujočim doktrinom, okusu in kriterijem oziroma sugeriralo smernice za drugačno filmsko prakso. Pravzaprav ne premoremo niti temeljnega dela s področja splošne kritične zgodovine filma. Videti je, kot da je slovenska izobraženska struktura očitno še vedno pod vplivom odklonilnega stališča do filma Josipa Vidmarja, saj je najti v SAZU predstavnike vseh (etniš)skih dejavnosti razen filma.

*Mislím, da je odsotnost razumništva oziroma nezainteresiranost intelektualne sfere za vprašanja filmske in filmološke stroke tudi eden od razlogov, zakaj je slovenski film bil in ostal trinajsto prase slovenske kulture, kot sem nekje zapisal, oziroma kulturna sirota – puer aeternus. Filmske scenarije pišejo ljubitelji, realizirajo jih zanesenjaki, o filmu razmišljajo filmoljubi. Moderni intelektualec pri nas ni filmsko pismen, moderna filmska pismenost pa ni organizirana tako, da bi postala integralni del šolske izobrazbe. Film je bil ves predvojni in povojni čas na pol ljubiteljska dejavnost in takšen je ostal tudi po osamosvojitvi. Slovenija se otepa ne filma, ampak lastne filmske razvitosti.*

Slovenski film še toliko bolj tava v negotovosti, ker mu je ves povojni čas vladala struktura, ki je bila predvsem politična, ideološka in komisarska, ne pa tudi strokovna ali vsaj poznavalska (kot na priliko v nekdanji Sovjetski zvezi). Filme so delali in o njih odločali ljudje, ki jim je "najpomembnejšo med umetnostmi" zaupala ideološka komisija vladajoče partije. Posledica je bila poenotenje pogleda na svet in razvrstitev filmske estetske prakse, ki sloni na pluralizmu idej in rešitev, na soočenju različnih pogledov in praks.

*Leta 1948 ugotavlja Béla Balász, da nova (filmska) umetnost skoraj nikjer v Evropi nima svoje stolice, 60 let po njegovi Filmski kulturi pa lahko z gnevom ugotovimo, da je slovenska univerza ena redkih v Evropi, ki nima filmološke katedre in da je filmska dejavnost še vedno*

*manifestacija sekundarnega kulturnega pomena, negovanje filmske misli pa je za humanistične vede nepomembno. Videti je, da takšna drža tudi danes ne moti razumniških krogov v Sloveniji, najbrž sploh nikogar razen nekaterih zahtevnih filmoljubov in nergaških avtorjev. Tudi to je lahko vzrok za idiosinkratičnost domačega filma.*

Filmu tudi v tej državi ni uspelo pridobiti statusa dejavnosti nacionalnega pomena, zato ni sprejet v panteon umskih in umetniških dejavnosti, ampak ždi v predverju ali v kletih te zgradbe, morda skupaj z načrti za prenovo ljubljanske kanalizacije ali pa slovenskega parlamenta po meri evropskega konzumenta. In kaj ima pri tem filmsko kritičsko pisanje, refleksija refleksije? Nekaj bistvenega. V svoji nonšalantni medijski držbi ni bila zmožna registrirati, kakšno je dejansko stanje podkletenja filmske in kulturne stavbe vobče. Svoj reflektivni žar je usmerjala na posledice, na posamezne filme, in ne na vzrok.

*Slovenski film že od samega začetka spremlja neke vrste intelektualni prezir. Po Plesu v dežju, ki je tako po formalni kot vsebinski plati radikalen odklon od takratnega (sorealističnega) pojmovanja filma, se profesionalno delo in prizadevanje znova zlekne v udobno krilo ideologije pravičnosti in lagodne, nevznemirljive ejdetike. Nekateri pogumnejši poskusi Babiča, Klopčiča, Ranfla in še koga so kljub svojim tematskim in estetskim novitetam bolj nadaljevanje konvencionalne filmske prakse kot pa poskus vzpostavitve nečesa novega. Ideološki komisariji se igrajo s filmarji kot mačka z mišjo, kritika pa zavija svoje ugotovitve v celofan ali pa je na eno oko in eno uho slepa in gluha. Refleksija ostane v zrcalu, drugega pogleda ali pogleda drugega ni.*

Madžari, Čehi in Poljaki so kdaj že ustanovili filmološke katedre, odnos slovenskih akademikov in drugih razumnikov do filma pa nas je pustil na ravni združnega opismenjevanja. Moj spor s filmskim oddelkom na AGRFT, o katerem bom pisal na drugem mestu, ni bil toliko spor s filmskimi režiserji in pedagogi, ampak s slovensko akademsko sfero, ki je pustila, da je film ostal v "posebni" šoli. Še v letu 2005 na simpoziju "Slovenska kultura v vojnem času", ki ga organizira Slovenska matica maja 2005, niti z besedo ni omenjena filmska dejavnost, ki je med vojno proizvedla kar precej kolutov avtentičnega in neumišljenega pričevanja. Samoumevno ni nihče niti pomislil na to.

*Pogoj za refleksijo refleksije umetnosti (film je pogojno umetnost) je refleksija subjekta, uzrtje položaja in pogojenosti bivajočega v času in prostoru. Je refleksija celovitosti uvida in trajne observacije biti-v-svetu, ki je obenem danost in vzetost, naslednica in predhodnica misli o biti in zavesti ter vsake druge refleksije, tedaj tudi refleksije o filmu kot virtualnem svetu, ki je del bitnosti stvarnega sveta. Zato je pertinentna in trajna refleksija filmske misli v nekem kulturnem občestvu mogoča šele, če je dejavna refleksija sveta in biti. Kot refleksija političnega, socialnega ali psihološkega subjekta.*



Menim, da je filozofska misel na Slovenskem zelo živa, zato je toliko bolj osupljivo, da je edino filmska od vseh kulturnih dejavnosti predmet zgolj občasnih recenzij in kritičnih ekskurzov, ne pa tudi globlje refleksije in rigoroznega študija. Iz do sedaj povedanega izhaja, da je skrajni čas in neodložljiva nujnost za ustanovitev in delovanje filmske katedre na slovenski univerzi bodisi v Ljubljani ali Mariboru, če naj se slovenski film preobrazi v pomenljivo in ugledno kulturno dejavnost 21. stoletja. S tem bi sčasoma odpravili intelektualni prezir in pomanjkljivosti v filmskem študiju ter vzpostavili ploden interaktivni odnos med teorijo, refleksijo in prakso.

*Nekdaj alternative, danes alternative. Annette Michelson v eseju "Film and the Radical Aspiration" razmišlja o neodvisnem filmu, ki raziskuje Eisensteinov intelektualni film, ki bi lahko reproduciral proces same misli. Harry Watt pravi, da je film edina od umskih dejavnosti, ki se od trenutka, ko je ideja spočeta, nezadržno slabša in izgublja vrednost. Edgar Morin piše, da je dolžnost filma oziroma umišljenega človeka, "l'homme imaginaire", da umišlja svet, v katerem igra vlogo človeka. Brata Rahman govori o nevrobiološki osnovi spomina in vedenja. Susan Langer raziskuje eluzivno naravo umetnosti. Moja ustvarjalna dolžnost je preudaren vdor v zrcalo s pomočjo miselnih refleksov. Ne zanima me tisto, kar bom našel v spoju sedanjega in preteklega, ampak kako bom prenašal tveganje, ki ga mora vzeti nase vsak iskalec – da se pri iskanju sam izgubi.*

Slovenska kritika – stanje brezmejnih poljubnosti in zaphanih vizij. Kadar nastane v domači produkciji nadpovprečno filmsko delo, bodisi umišljene ali neumišljene vsebine, mu kritika sicer prizna določene vsebinske in estetske vrednote, a ga le redkokdaj celostno ovrednoti. Ko se pojavi film tuje proizvodnje, ki ga navadno spremljajo panegiriki naročenih in dobro plačanih filmskih strokovnjakov, domača "poznavalska" srenja (z redkimi izjemami) skoraj omedleva od prevzetosti. Ko se je pred kratkim pojavil duhovit novinarski kolaž Michaela Moora, domači filmski in drugi novinarji sklenejo roke v pobožni adoraciji. Kdaj se bo rodil slovenski Moore, zajoka Boris Jež v *Delu*? Gospod višji novinar seveda ne ve ali noče vedeti nič o neumišljenih filmih, ki so nastali tukaj in so veliko pred Moorovimi razkrivali človeške stranpoti, družbeno laž, zlorabo oblasti, predsodke in krivice. Tudi to je posledica nezadostne refleksiranosti filmske refleksije.

*Filmska kritika za vsakdanjo rabo na Slovenskem, ki bi rada nekega dne postala refleksija o lastnem kritičnem delu? Menim, da bi bilo bolje, če bi se zadovoljila z manj ambicioznim ciljem, ki mu v zdravstvu pravijo refleksologija, saj bi tako morda lahko realno prispevala k oživiljanju somnambulne usnulosti ali bolehnosti komatoznosti domačega filma. Kritiki in poročevalci o filmu se v njem komaj znajdejo, kot je pred desetletjem in pol zapisala pokojna filmska kritičarka Vesna Marinčič, članica strokovne komisije za izbiro projektov na Ministrstvu za kulturo RS. Člani komisije se počutimo kot kastrirani mandeljci, o filmu ne vemo nič, je zapisala v Teleksu. Tisti mandeljci, republiška razpisna komisija, je za nekaj let zasrala domačo filmsko sceno. O virtus sapientiae!*

Filmski kritiki in recenzenti za vsakdanjo rabo tedaj le niso tako neobogljivi. Tudi pišejo dobro in izkazujejo osupljivo znanje o splošnih vidikih filma, poznajo imena igralcev, posebnosti režiserjev, vedo za razne podrobnosti s snemanja, skrivne motive, žgečkljive prizore ali seksološke vzvode zapletenega odnosa, vedo za intimne razloge pri izbiri takšnega ali drugačnega spodnjega perila zvezde, nekateri med njimi vedo nekaj tudi o tematskih vzgibih in vizualni gradnji filma, o dramaturškem loku in mizanscenski gramatiki, nekaj tudi o tem, kako režiserji obvladajo kamero, rakurze, montažo in glasbo. Če to znanje s pridom uporabijo, lahko pomenijo most med refleksijo in prakso, med ustvarjalcem in gledalcem. Naloga kritike je osvetljevanje. Refleksija izmeri svetlobo.

*Vendar pa odnos med recepcijo in refleksijo ne vpliva na odnos med refleksijo in kreativnostjo. Edino sistematični študij filma in filmološke vede lahko da refleksiji krila, edino daljnosežni premislek kritične refleksije lahko poveča kreativni polet snovanja. Filmološka katedra bi bila novum v slovenskem filmu, spoj refleksije in praktične vednosti. Imela bi pozitiven in pomirjujoč vpliv na kakovost strokovnih odločitev pogosto nervoznih programskih odborov in nadzornih svetov in bi z večjo stopnjo objektivnosti omogočala prodor svežih, nekonvencionalnih in*

*ikonoklastičnih idej. Končno bi pomenila tudi soliden referenčni okvir za mnoge mlade cineaste in producente, ki jim okrnjena ljubljanska Akademija za gledališče, radio, film in televizijo ne more zagotoviti zadostnega strokovnega znanja.*

Dolžnost človeka na zemlji je, da se spominja, je zapisal Henry Miller. Vse več je ljudi, ki svoje spominjanje spreminjajo v spomenike. Nismo samo priče vse večjega števila jubilejev, ampak tudi povodni spominov. V bližnji prihodnosti bodo ljudje nemara celo živeli samo od spominov, ne samo duhovno, morda bo neznanke količine spominske robe moč materializirati v kalorične prehranske obroke, kar bi bilo seveda veliko bolje, kot pa da bremenijo zgolj možgane in duha. Ivo Andrič razmišlja drugače. Mediji omogočajo spominjanje ali, bolje, onemogočajo pozabo. Pozaba pa je eden od načinov biti (modaliteta), ki je nujno potreben v razvoju življenja. Tedaj kaj? Biti ali spominjati se? Umeti, razumeti, ljubiti ali imeti in spominjati se? Dilema odpade, ko človek sprejme oboje. Oboje je lahko predznak za ustvarjanje, ljubezen in človeško izpolnitev.

*Filmi, umišljeni in neumišljeni, večinoma odlikavajo dejstva realnosti in dejanskost odnosa, včasih se z njimi malone identificirajo, vselej pa postanejo sami dejstvo, bodisi kot posneta fikcija bodisi kot posnetek dejanskosti. Tehnologija skladičenja je podobna kot pri misli, pesmi, sliki ali stavbi, glasbeni ali gledališki enoti, le da sta raba ali reprodukcija filma – četudi v naj sodobnejši tehnologiji – veliko bolj zamudni in zapleteni kot pri zapisih misli ali pesmi in so zato slednji duhovno in pedagoško bolj neposredni in učinkoviti. Zaradi svoje materialne, tehnološke in biološke (zamuje v sinapsah) obremenjenosti je filmu, takšnemu, kot ga poznamo danes, sojeno, da ga bo v doglednem času morebiti zamenjala razvitejša oblika posredovanja umišljenih in neumišljenih avdivizualnih vsebin.*

Kino s svojimi filmi sodi med dejavnosti, ki terjajo (podobno kot arhitektura in opera) velik in drag izvedbeni in tehnološki aparat, da se (v redkih primerih) lahko izkaže kot tempelj visoke umetniške ali pričevanjske vrednosti, bodisi fiktivne ali neumišljene. Visok začetni vložek v film zahteva spretno tržno strategijo, ki mora povrniti vložena sredstva in prinesiti čim večje prihodke. To je nedvomno tudi razlog, zakaj je velika večina filmov v velikih filmskih industrijah po vsebinski in formalni plati preprostih in učinkovitih – edino tako si lahko utrejo pot do čim večjega števila gledalcev in ne samo povrnejo vložena sredstva, ampak prinesejo velike dobičke. In čeprav filmski esteti in teoretiki v glavnem omalovažujoče obravnavajo t. i. industrijsko filmsko produkcijo, je prav ta – in ne izjemne avtorske stvaritve – prinesla nove vrednote v masovno kulturo in vplivala na preoblikovanje okusa in navad množice. Tudi tu menim, da se pozna odsotnost reflektirane kritike na Slovenskem.

*Prav posebnost razpravljanja o filmu je vzrok, da so številni eseji in drugi publicistični prispevki o naravi filma in o posameznih filmih predmet ekskluzivnih objav v specializiranih revijah in časopisnih rubrikah. Filmska refleksija redko doseže globino poetološke, prozodične ali filozofske refleksije. Je refleksija o zgolj eni izmed človeških ustvarjalnih dejavnosti, ne pa njegove eminentne ali imanentne okupacije. Narobe pri kritiki in recenzijski dejavnosti je tedaj to, da sama sebe od časa do časa radikalno ne premisli in ne poda novih uvidov in kriterijev, po katerih razločuje umetnostno prakso od prakse pridobitniške dejavnosti. Vse tlačni namreč v isti kalup in pusti, da se stvari same izoblikujejo in diferencirajo po kriteriju bodisi tržne bodisi estetske vrednosti oziroma žurnalističnega rangiranja na uspešne, manj uspešne in neuspešne.*

Cinema je najbrž najbolj konzervativen vidik slovenske ustvarjalnosti. Redki so primeri, ko nastane nekaj res novega, svežega, korenitega, odprtega, svobodnega, poštenega. Uspešen ali ne, film, ki ima umetniške aspiracije in je radikalno uperjen v doseganje višjega duhovnega stanja, je praviloma obojen na propad ali životarjenje na televiziji. Julian Huxley pravi, da je bil vsak metulj nekoč gosjenica. Biološka vednost ima tu nedvomno prav, racionalna misel pa nadaljuje, da sploh ni nujno, da bi si vsaka gosjenica domišljala, da bo nekoč metulj. Ista pamet lakonično zarobi misel: Sicer pa na sodni dan boga ne bo.

*Če se znova zatečem k znanosti, lahko preostanek svojega časa, ki ga sicer doživljam kot biološki čas, prebijem v mirnem navajanju znanstve-*



nih dognanj in občudovanju izgotovljenih umetnin. Naključje daje prednost bolje pripravljenim, pravi Louis Pasteur. Kadar lahko naše težave umestimo v primeren obseg, odpade polovica nevšečnosti, trdijo mandžurijski modreci. S tem se znova vrnem k vprašanju filmološke katedre, saj bi pozitivna vednost lahko preprečila marsikatero stupidnost na področju snovanja in realizacije domačega filma. Trdim, da je Slovenija lahko vsaj tako filmska kot nogometna dežela.

Še en pogled nazaj. Potem ko me koncem sedemdesetih let filmska politično-pedagoška in policijska oblast izloči iz svoje sredine – razni filmski velikaši in festivalski mešetarji govorijo moji mladi ženi, naj me pusti, ker imam na policiji dosje in da jo bom zgolj onesrečil –, zabeležim tole misel o metamorfozi: “V človeku je demonska sposobnost, da se dvigne iz dreka in se otrese bolestne zavesti o sebi ter kot preroben zaživi polno, dejavno, ustvarjalno življenje, za začetek je treba samo odkimati.”

*Stanja zavesti, ki so pogojena z negativno energijo, mi v letih suspendirane animacije omogočajo uvid v lastne sposobnosti in do neke stopnje tudi do nezavednega. Napetost osame mi omogoči soočenje s preostali mi deli sebstva, šele v zatišju je mogoče videti, kako zares deluje človeški psihični mehanizem. Vendar se tedaj, ko bi se morda lahko celo prilagodil utesnjujočim razmeram, nimam komu več predati, nikomur kaj dajati – tudi samemu sebi ne. Torej sem v stanju samozadostne nezadostnosti. Kje in kdaj se je začel ta čudni proces, ki je zahteval protinapad? Glej joyceansko misel “no later undoing can undo the first undoing”. Začetek prevrata ali drugačne filmske misli. Geneza filmskih alternativ.*

Predno se poslovim od kinemov iz preteklosti, se mi zdi vredno omeniti, da med slovenskimi filmskimi kritiki edini Silvan Furlan zapiše nekaj relevantnih misli o minimalnem celovečercu *Xenia na gostovanju*, kjer osvetli kompleksno filmsko montažo oziroma pripovedno strukturo. Drugi kritiki in pedagogi, teoretiki in profesorji filma, tudi predsednik žirije na beograjskem festivalu kratkega metra, moj predstojnik Gale, ga omalovažujoče odklonijo. Mnogo let pozneje ga Karpo Godina pogosto kaže študentom, ki se danes čudijo, da se je takšne stvari delalo že v sedemdesetih. Filmček je na neki način vizionarski v smislu Adam Sitneyeve misli o narativni formi, ki napravi iz nezavednega paradigmatški sklop. Notranji dogodek predstavlja matrico, po kateri nastane vzorec ritualnih elementov, kombinacija le-teh pa tvori celostno strukturo. Prevod sanj, pravi Sitney za *Meshes of the Afternoon* Maye Deren. Glej tudi *Vaje v strukturiranju* Rolanda Barthesa. Pertinentna je tudi misel Gastona Bachelarda: Um misli, da misli, ko ustvarja metafore.

*1975. Film ne more biti drugačen, kot je misel o filmu, ta pa zahteva predhodno refleksijo sveta biti in stvari. Videti je, da imajo slovenski filmarji nekakšno zaščito v političnem in kulturnem Olimpu, čeprav so v jedru strašno konzervativni, njihovi filmi ne vsebujejo nikakršne prevratne misli ali uporne biti ali utripanja strasti ali inovativne radoživosti. Komaj da so podobni filmom. Med snemanjem neumišljenega celovečerca Srečanja, ki ga moji akademijski kolegi na koncu izdatno popljujejo, zapišem, da film, ki ni totalen, ki torej ne vključuje tudi tehnike in tehnologije kot svoje lastno protipolje, ne more biti kaj drugega kot bolj ali manj uspešna prevara.*

Naivno razpredam, da je pravo filmsko ali cineastično ustvarjanje lahko le celostno zapopadenje energije dogajanja, odnosa med menoj in drugimi. Ustvarjanje filma je kot stanje zaljubljenosti. Nekdo drugi trdi (R. Lester?), da je kot histerična nosečnost. Svet je zunaj in znotraj, temna, zrcalasta voda v votlini duha, ki v nekem hipu odmeva od kapljice, ki se je utrgala s stropa in se spojila z gladino. Film je čutenje, je ozaveščanje. Film je “feelm”, se šalim pred 30 leti. Letos je obletnica filmskih alternativ. Kaj nisem malo prej govoril o vse večjem številu jubilejev in povodnji spominov. O *virtus sapientiae*.

*Dovolj je bilo opletanja v slogu krises in krinein, presoje in preprirov. Dovolj nekakšnih minimalnih ukrepov in bežnih prilagajanj. Ali pa je refleksija refleksije klesanje v živo? Če se nam dozdeva v mladosti, da se filmi prav primerno vpenjajo v življenje, v bit in bistvo bivajočega, potem se v zrelih letih in starosti ta pomisel reflektira zgolj kot ena izmed človeških slabosti. Vendar nikar obsojanja vredna, kot bi neke v Uliksu*



dejal James Joyce. Spet Joyce. Kinodvor bi morali imenovati Jamesov dvor, saj je tam blizu nekoč neko noč Joyce nočil in skupaj z Noro zrl v zvezde bogvedi kakšnega neba. Radoživ ... Ampak ne! Zdaj, ko se je Silvan, ki ga je gradil, razšel, zdaj mislim, da bi ga morali imenovati Furlanov dvor.

Velika doba humanističnega filma je mimo. Velika iluzija. Bil je nekoč Krištof Kolumb, bila je nekoč Amerika. Občutek imam, da film ni ravno primeren in bister način posredovanja človekovih kompleksnih čustev, misli, namer in potreb. Čutenje, misli, komunikacije, sanje, pričevanje ... Humor ubija zlobo, pravi Irina Ratušinska. "Le cinéma, le proces c'est toujours de la saloperie, mais les résultats, les films, forcement devient de plus en plus bons", pravi ne vem več kdo.

Dobra pripoved in mikavna zgodba še vedno potegnejo, zato se mi zdi, da je važno, da se ohrani filmska dejavnost, četudi kot industrija in trg. Vendar se mi zdi enako ali še bolj pomembno uporabiti filmski ali podoben medij za namene človeškega osvobajanja, bogatenja, sproščanja, plemenitenja, urejanja razmer, izboljšanja socialnega stanja, ohranjanja okolja in vobče sveta. Enako važno kot pred 30 leti se mi zdi delati filme, ki rastejo iz dejanskega, iz realnega dogajanja ali stanja, torej neumišljene in nefiktivne filme, ki jih je treba ohraniti v njihovi izvorni neumišljeni podobi. Kot pričevalca? Kot pričō.

Refleksija refleksije? Če je slovenski kritiki pretežno ostvariti ta zahtevni cilj, pa lahko rečem, da se nekaterim filmarjem to kdaj pa kdaj posreči. Z insertom preteklega? Z nakazano referenco? Z arhivskimi gradivi? Naak! Z navadnim starim zapisom, kinemom, ki ga je morda – patetično rečeno – iztisnila školjka ustvarjalnosti, ko ni mogla več naravno bivati in normalno presnavljati. Zadnja navedba je iz osnutka za manifest Ali so alternative? Revija Ekran pred 30 leti.

Kako posodobiti SF? Organizirati posvet in objaviti manifest. Kakšne filme v okviru slovenske nacionalne kinematografije? Globalno in generalno. Podrobno in precizno. Taktično in prodorno. First things first – takrat sem še uporabljal posrečene angleške jezikovne domislice ... Pridobiti izvirne duhove na Slovenskem, pisatelje in mislece, dramatikere in publiciste, ki mislijo drugače, nekonformistično in netradicionalistično ... Upreti se neformalnim zaprtim krogom, kjer se dogovarjajo samo posvečeni o tem, kdo bo delal in kaj se bo delalo. Upreti se razmeram, ko moralno-politična in ideološka elita odloča o stvareh, ki bi morale biti stvar stroke ... Ustanoviti demokratični filmski forum, kjer bo stroka javno opravljala svoje delo, izbirala scenarije in zamisli za nove projekte, opravila magari dvojno selekcijo, ampak na podlagi strokovnih kriterijev, ne političnih ali pripadnostnih. ZA svoje odločitve odgovarjati spet in samo stroki, to je filmskim ustvarjalcem in kritiški javnosti. Vključiti mlade cineaste in jim omogočiti profesionalno asistenco pri delu ... Uvesti nizkopračunski tip filma kot izhodišče za novo in gospodarno boljšo metodo dela, zlasti za mlade filmarje ... Vsako leto naj gre vsaj ena tretjina sredstev za nove in drzne poskuse prodreti v nekaj, kar še ni, kar je novum slovenicum na filmu. Itn. Pesem stara tri desetletja.

Umetnina, filipan moj, tudi filmska, pač ne nastane kar tako, iz neke dogme ali doktrine, želje ali ideologije, ampak z delom in znojem možganov in čustev, domišljije in znanja, z vztrajnostjo in trmoglavostjo ... Ali pa ima tega mladi rod slovenskih cineastov v zadostni meri? Bojim se, da ne. Morda se bo udejanjilo kdaj v prihodnosti? Bojim se, da še dolgo ne. Preveč plitvin je že na začetku, da bi se sploh naučili plavati ... Kaj zdaj in kakšne bodo posledice? Za začetek nove refleksije filmske refleksije, še slednjic, bi zadoščala katedra za filmologijo in filmsko teorijo. •

The completion of this article was persistently delayed, owing in large part to the very obsession that is its subject. To wit, as I am writing these very words, I have just returned from a double-feature screening of Anthony Mann's *Border Incident*, with its uncommonly brutal death-by tractor climax, and Mann's *Side Street*, an unsettling spiral of big-city corruption that ensnares those two easily corruptible innocents on loan from Nick Ray – Farley Granger and Cathy O'Donnell. Another such welcome diversion materialized one week earlier in the form of Bertrand Tavernier, who had come to Los Angeles to present several screenings of his latest film, *Holy Lola*, and, almost immediately upon his arrival, descended on the nearest Virgin Megastore for a spot of DVD shopping. By the time I caught up with him later that day, he was beaming like a child on Christmas morning, having snagged copies of Edgar G. Ulmer's *Damaged Lives* ("the first film about venereal disease!") and Kurt Neumann's *Rocketship X-M* (with its Dalton Trumbo ghost-written anti-nuclear proliferation message) among many others. Similar incidents filled the next few days, including my complicity in frenzied searches for a VHS copy of Maggie Greenwald's 1989 Jim Thompson adaptation, *The Kill-Off* – Leonard Maltin's *Movie Guide*, which Bertrand reads with the intensity most people reserve for Proust, recommended it highly – and a laserdisc (remember those?) of André De Toth's *Pitfall* (1948).

Once upon a time, there would have been no mystery about where to go in a city like L.A. (apologies to Thom Andersen) to track down those coveted items. But nowadays, the effort required is sufficient to make Indiana Jones seem like a backyard treasure hunter. Laserdiscs, after all, died long ago, while VHS has spent at least the last 5 years in a state of intensive care. Far and wide, shelf space has been cleared to accommodate the DVD revolution, in turn relegating thousands of titles not yet issued on DVD (but previously available on those other, now-arcaic formats) to an inaccessible movie limbo. And that is but the latest chapter in the contentious relationship between the cinephile and the video retailer.

At this point, I feel compelled to note that I will not attempt here to define the term "cinephile" beyond the generalized description offered by Webster's dictionary: "a devotee of motion pictures." As unhelpful as Webster may be for drawing conclusions about the true nature and purpose of cinephilia – queries that consume much space in the rest of this magazine – there's something undeniably canny about its choice of the word "devotee," when "admirer" or "enthusiast" might have sufficed. "Devotee" intones a certain degree of religiosity, and if there's one thing that must separate the cinephile from the common moviegoer – if the word is to have a unique meaning – it's a worshipful attitude towards the cinema, a deep-rooted faith in the possibilities of movies. So I'll leave it at that, and let others tend to the question of "What is cinephilia?" For it is a question that one issue of a magazine may be incapable of answering. Indeed, entire wings of libraries should be devoted to its study.

The development of my own nascent movie-love, during



my youth and adolescence, was inextricably wedded to the emergence of the home-video marketplace as an alternative to the theatrical exhibition of films. And if I may be allowed a moment's digression into the realm of fanatical, Jonathan Rosenbaum/Nick Hornby-esque autobiography, I would point out that my memories of those years are invariably not only of the films/tapes I saw, but of the places I rented them from: Suncoast Home Video, the first such store in my hometown of Tampa, Florida and a perfectly adequate set of training wheels for a burgeoning cinephile's bicycle; Rent-A-Movie, with its eerily mirrored ceiling and what seemed at the time like an extensive allotment of foreign pictures; the first iteration of the Blockbuster Video chain, with its promise (long since abandoned) of offering 10,000 titles in every location; and, best of all, the functionally-named 16,000 Movies – a warehouse of movie memories past and yet to come, so cavernous that you could get lost in its fluorescent-lit recesses, as the dust-covered plastic display boxes filled your peripheral vision and minutes gave way to hours.

It was there, in the midst of one long, hot Florida summer, that I took a chance on a low-budget Australian shocker called *Patrick* (1978) and discovered its maker, Richard Franklin (also *Road Games*, *Psycho II* and *Cloak and Dagger*), to be a master of modern screen terror fully worthy of mention in the same breath as Carpenter, Craven, Lustig and Romero (all of whose work had initially revealed itself to me through similar random acts of video-store exploration). So it is hard for me to overestimate the value of coming-of-age in the video (and, to a lesser extent, cable television) era – at least for those of us who happened to do our growing up in cinemathèque-deprived cities where midnight weekend screenings of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* were what passed for revival cinema. Besides which, as I've already let on, the sort of fare that was piquing my curiosity most in those days wasn't exactly the standard program of an NFT season or a MOMA retrospective. Rather, this was the pulp fare of the 1970s and '80s that represented, in essence, a crude ratcheting-up of the same basic (or sometimes merely base) instincts that had made the movies of Mann, Ray, Fuller, De Toth, et al. manna from heaven to the previous era of film buffs. The only key difference was a technological one: Whereas those earlier cinephiles relied on theatrical reissues, borrowed 16mm prints and/or television broadcasts to uncover these lurid diamonds, the new conscientious objectors to official cinematic canons could find their alternative masters via video, and it is a good bet that all of the above-mentioned directors (plus others like William Lustig, Abel Ferrara and Lucio Fulci) can thank these voracious videohounds for the fact that their work is now regarded with a due level of seriousness.

Today, I have the good fortune of viewing most movies on a theater screen, and yet a visit to the video store stirs in me a Madeleine-like effect – even if, like the elderly Proust, I'm seeing the mirage of an earlier place and time superimposed over an actual landscape I no longer recognize. For to consider the filmmakers mentioned thus

far is to speak about directors who made movies for theatrical exhibition – regardless of how one may have ultimately seen the films, that is how they were intended to be shown. Yet, once it became evident that the video market could serve not merely as an enhancement to a film's theatrical business, but as a self-contained, self-sustaining enterprise, the seeds of a certain kind of cinephilia's demise had effectively been planted. Movies began to be made directly for the video audience – inferior product with little sense of space or composition, or of genre as a subversive avenue for social commentary. Over time, the theatrical market for cheap thrills was cannibalized by video and cable, save for the 1990s renaissance of teen-centric slasher pictures (most of which the world would have done just as well without). And the rise of DVD has helped to hammer the final nail into the coffin. The 42nd Street grindhouses and the sagging, Hollywood Boulevard movie palaces shuttered (or were converted into more traditional places of worship – those with altars in place of screens). Uncompromising talents like Carpenter, Franklin and Romero found it ever harder to keep actively in work, cast aside in favor of younger hacks capable of getting the job done faster, cheaper and with no risk that the end result might actually have something to say. And on those occasions when they did make pictures, the audience, rather calamitously, seemed indifferent to their formal and intellectual superiority. Hence the fact that Carpenter hasn't worked in nearly 5 years, while his *Ghosts of Mars* (2001), along with Romero's *Bruiser* (2000), is virtually unknown to most moviegoers – no matter that they rank among the most enterprising American films of our half-decade.

Ironically, the studio most associated with geriatric art-house pretension, Miramax, has been one of the few upholders of the classical pulp tradition in recent times. They produced and/or distributed Walter Hill's *Undisputed*, Florent Siri's *Hostage* and David Twohy's *Below* – even if, judging from their ultimate handling of said films, it seemed they wished they hadn't. Twohy's case makes for particularly compelling dissection, in that all three of his three Carpenter-influenced features – *The Arrival* (which has strong overtones of *They Live*), *Below* (a companion piece to *The Fog*) and *Pitch Black* (unthinkable without *The Thing*) – received wide theatrical releases, with *Pitch Black* even doing well enough to spawn a sequel. When that film (*The Chronicles of Riddick*) arrived, however, it was so extravagant and soulless that it seemed to have been made by a different director, and it remains to be seen whether or not Twohy can get back to basics. In the meantime, the young director David Jacobson has made two highly impressive direct-to-video thrillers: *Criminal* and *Dahmer*, which is easily the best serial-killer picture since *Seven*. And Tim Hunter (*River's Edge*) recently resurfaced with a sleek quickie called *Control*, in which Ray Liotta's death-row psycho gets a shot at freedom provided he's willing to serve as a guinea pig for Willem Dafoe's Mabuse-like behaviorist. But such pleasures are ever fewer and farther between. And so the cinephile faithful beat on, like boats against the current

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RANDOM NOTES ON NEW TECHNOLOGIES, NEW CINEPHILIA

First of all, to address Olaf Möller – not his words, *per se*, but the people who find him relevant, from Quintín (in the recent issue of *Cinema Scope*), to the editors of *Film Comment*, for wrangling him to do the column “Olaf’s World”. I think it’s useful to analyze how Olaf – or any critic as devoted to the world and cinema – is viewed, or indeed “used”, by American readers. That is, from a highly technological country where cinephilia is now in its digital prime, and where young people are absorbing movies in startlingly different ways than in Europe (more on this later). While we might still be getting used to the name of this critic from Cologne, who in his physique and intensity reminds me of a critic I’ve known for a long time in my home town of Chicago (Peter Sobczynski; do an online search for him), his stance on what Quintín calls “anorexic cinephilia” is nothing new; it is, however, more at stake now than it has ever been. Even a year ago it seemed impossible to me that *Film Comment* would publish anything on Rogério Sganzerla, and yet, *voilà*, we suddenly have a very fine piece by Olaf in the magazine’s pages. I can only take this as a sign that readers are catching on ...

The category “Olaf’s world” has nothing to do with Cologne; it’s the world, or a very rich cinephilic portion of it, that is Olaf’s stomping ground. And when he stomps, you can see the tremors are heard in countries even Olaf hasn’t ventured to. This is the man who fears flying yet is semi-fluent in languages which he’ll never have to practice in any rudimentary or touristic sense. So it makes sense that, like in his use of language, Olaf isn’t looking for any practical or conventional history of cinema, but one that levels the playing field so that everyone is subject to “further inspection”. This is essentially Quintín’s definition. (If you still find the term jumbled, please visit the following link: [http://www.cinema-scope.com/cs22/spo\\_quintin\\_uchida.htm](http://www.cinema-scope.com/cs22/spo_quintin_uchida.htm))

And what is Olaf’s favorite Sganzerla, Brocka, Uchida, etc.? It will never be the typical one, no matter how obscure the director is, because there’s a whole filmography that’s open to be examined. If Olaf had the typical qualities of a programmer/critic looking for a way to promote old (and new), unheralded filmmakers, he would find the most accessible work to try to open the whole body to everyone else, resulting in one or two of the works getting distribution or some kind of cinemathèque revival. But, again, this would be typical, and anyway, isn’t this the mistake of film scholarship, of the public only being able to see the films which are deemed “the good ones” by a small group of experts? Fuck the experts; the notion of experts is the reason so many independent scholars are never invited to conferences or radio or TV discussions: how could they be experts if they aren’t academics? (At

least this is a common American attitude.) Fully and personally, I’m on Olaf’s side – as a member of this gypsy-like clan of scholars –, but I’m also interested in exploring the long-term possibilities of the so-called “anorexic cinephilia”.

Let me bring to light a small portion of DVD culture that the likes of Quintín, the guys at *Film Comment*, and even the DVD enthusiast himself, Jonathan Rosenbaum, are probably only vaguely aware of: that cinephiles around the world, mostly below the age of thirty and who live in places like Seoul and Rio de Janeiro – places where you would expect cinemathèque showings to be a common occurrence – are downloading movies from the internet and burning them to DVD. Not just *Spider-Man 2*, but rare Maurice Pialat and Jean Eustache shorts, to Hong Sang-soo’s entire filmography. Where are these digitally compressed bootlegs coming from you may ask? The question is not as ingenuous as it sounds, but to a tape collector who might spend a few years searching to complete his collection of [insert your favorite director’s name], the sources are familiar: screeners from distributors or sales agents, from the filmmakers themselves, Asian bootlegs, or simply DVDs from legit distributors. Get these tapes into the hands of someone who can convert them to digital files, compress them to the various formats such as MPEG-2, WMV, .DV (there are millions of encodings, and many more for audio), and upload them to the internet using a person-to-person file sharing program (such as Acquisition, eMule, Limewire, etc.) and now you have Jonathan Rosenbaum’s private catalogue of rare films only a mouse click (and a couple hours, depending on your connection speed) away. Isn’t it better than waiting for that complete retrospective of the director’s work? Yeah, well, I guess we’ll find out soon enough.

In the weeks leading up to this article I have put myself through an all-intensive DVD ripping, downloading, encoding, authoring, and burning extravaganza, which has cost me less than \$400 in hardware and zero dollars in software which I downloaded for free (or hacked through less-than-official sources). The tools fit snugly in my home office, and I have created in between fifteen to twenty DVDs of films which my friends in Chicago, New York, L.A., and other U.S. cities much more remote, have never seen, rare films by Pelechian, Pedro Costa, Jerry Lewis, Santiago Alvarez, and plenty of others which I had acquired previously but never shared because the process of VHS dubbing is so wearisome and the quality of nth generation tapes is so often unacceptable. Good riddance to VHS – it’s been a pleasure, but we must move on.

Before getting too optimistic with DVD burning, I was



glad to read Christine Rosen in the March 20th *New York Times Magazine*, who gets it right that the technological world is not without costs, and sometimes a reminder such as hers is appreciated. Rosen chose for her article two personal technologies that most Americans can't, statistically, live without: the cell phone and the TiVo. While we all know how cell phones work, the TiVo's technology is worth reiterating. A TV recording device, utilizing a technology called DVR (digital video recorder), which instead of burning recorded information to a single DVD, stores multiple hours of popular shows and movies onto a massive hard drive, where you can access the information much like you would on a computer (which the TiVo essentially is). It sells for less than a hundred dollars (depending on hard drive size). The emphasis here is that a massive memory bank for movies can cost less than a hundred dollars, which means personal online movie archives are not so far away.

When it comes to the many gadgets and formats available to us in the digital era, hard-core cinephiles are quick to defend the DVR and DVD technologies as ways of democratizing the movie-going experience – but what oppressive system are we breaking away from? It's always been up to cinephiles to seek out films that weren't accessible in the first place. We're still doing it. But now we have an easier way of sharing our finds, one that also enables that we'll never have to see one another in person again.

The convenience of being able to download films is undeniable, in the same way the cell phone has enabled us to stay in touch with the world from virtually anywhere. But ask cinephiles their opinion on cell phones and they will tell you that, while it's near-impossible not to have one these days, they're disrupting social interaction and public space; no coincidence that one of the spaces where this sacrilege occurs frequently is the movie theater. Despite appearances, the quick development of this phobia among cinephiles is usually not the stated reason for why they'd rather stay home to get their movie fix. In this case, it's not having time or being geographically challenged that becomes the dominant factor. The advent of downloading movies means not even having to venture out to the video store, the last of the movie buff standbys. After they have eliminated the movie theater and the video store, where will cinephiles go to interact? If that's not a disruption of social interaction and a selfish neglect of public space, I don't know what is. To be sure, cinephiles are not the only ones who find themselves at odds with the new digital means of communication, but they're the ones who concern me personally. We may be leveling the playing field, but we're eliminating social skills.

Yet as the shift seems bleaker by the minute, a friend in Brazil informs me that he recently downloaded Hong's *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* to show in a class he was teaching. Why not order the DVD from the many Asian web sites where it's available, one might ask? My guess is that he has neither the budget (the Brazilian currency is three times less the US dollar) nor the faith in the Brazilian postal system to deliver it on time. Another recent case from Brazil: for a class I'm teaching, I wanted an English subtitled tape of Sganzerla's *The Red Light Bandit*. Knowing from various sources that this was impossible, I thought to take it upon myself to subtitle the film on my computer using a program called DVD Studio Pro. When I saw the film again I realized this would be quite a hefty task – as *The Red Light Bandit* is almost scene-to-scene narration. In my research I knew the film had been shown at MoMA in New York and that a subtitle list had to exist somewhere. Suffice it to say that within 24 hours the full subtitle list appeared in my email

box after I had talked to the appropriate parties. From there it was seamlessly integrated with the video I had and ready for my class (as a DVD).

After reading Olaf's article, an American cinephile will perhaps want to see what Rogério Sganzerla is all about, and unless they talk to me (or anyone who I've given the DVD to), they will probably not be able to find out. That's why, for the select online group who do not seek to profit from such things, it would be nice to make this subtitled copy available for download. One Sganzerla is still far and away from reaching the full body of work, the "anorexic" load, but it's a step closer. Still, to these cinephiles, and to many who are just starting, traveling to a film festival to see the full filmography would be out of the question. Film festivals would have to travel from town to town – on a train like Medvedkin's. A suitable proverb, in this case: "If you can't walk the plank, don't take the dive." The major change is not that we can see everything, but that it used to be that critics were appreciated for their tenacity to see everything, even if the rest of us couldn't. For better or for worse, the roles have now reversed themselves.

### new technologies sidebar

There are several ways to make DVDs and to encode media from DVDs so that they can be shared online. For novices the learning curve will be steep, but I assure you that once you get the hang of it the experience can become quite pleasurable, especially when you see that you have no more use for your old VHS dupes.

The easiest way to make DVDs is with a DVD Recorder such as the Lite-On All write 5005, the digital sister to the VCR, which costs about \$180 US and writes all DVD formats (including R, RW, +R, +RW). It's an input/output device that lets you record from virtually any other AV appliance, including directly from FireWire (for DV cameras). There are many similar models, but the Lite-On is especially worthy for its PAL/NTSC conversion and changeable region coding. When you buy a recorder, make sure it has both. If it's not advertised as having a changeable region coding (they usually aren't), online user forums are pretty savvy about such things.

Getting DVD media (known as MPEG2) from a DVD to your computer in a file that is compressed/ready for person-to-person sharing is slightly more complicated. There are many programs for both PC and Mac that do this. They are easily found online, some for free, others with small "author fees". On Mac, you can use DVDxDV for converting MPEG2 to .DV files, which can be used for editing in programs such as Final Cut Pro and iMovie. Once they are in these programs, you can output to Quicktime media to share. You can also use programs such as Toast, Popcorn, or DVD Studio Pro to create a disc image of VIDEO\_TS files (which are located in DVDs) so that they can be downloaded from another computer (these are usually 4+gigabytes, but include the full DVD-quality image). For other, lower-quality compressions, Quicktime, ffmpegX, and other programs can reduce films to a manageable size. DVD2oneX can reduce double-layered discs (8+gigabytes) to standard single-layered size (4.7gb) without much loss of quality. To rip DVDs which are either region- or Macrovision-encoded, the best program for Macs is MacTheRipper. Often these programs are so straightforward you don't even need to read the instructions.

To share files you need software such as eMule (for PCs) or Acquisition (for Macs). Files (such as disc images, or compressed Quicktime files) that are located in a desig-



nated "shared" folder are automatically available to other users once one of these programs is initiated.

Many people are now using BitTorrent applications, such as Tomato Torrent (for Macs). Rather than connecting to a huge network, these programs allow you to connect to individual servers. Download times are usually faster and/or more reliable.

For burning DVDs directly from your computer, you need the proper hardware. Newer Macs with Superdrives can do this. For older Macs, you will need an external burner (which you can buy in the US for \$150-500). PC users will find several options for external burners at affordable prices.

The granddaddy of DVD authoring software is DVD Studio Pro (for Macs). This program allows you to create optional audio and subtitle tracks, as well as countless other features, in an easy-to-use interface. For those familiar with Final Cut Pro it should be a breeze.

For additional storage I recommend an external hard-drive.

Maxtor ([www.maxtor.com](http://www.maxtor.com)) and LaCie ([www.lacie.com](http://www.lacie.com)) make ones which are both Mac and PC compatible.

#### Software links:

- eMule – best file-sharing for PC users (free download)  
<http://www.emule-project.net>
- Acquisition – best file-sharing for Mac users (free download)  
<http://www.acquisitionx.com/>
- Windows Media Player – for viewing Windows media  
<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windowsmedia/default.aspx>
- Apple Quicktime Player – also available in PC version  
<http://www.apple.com/quicktime/download/mac.html>
- Real Player – for files in .rm format  
<http://www.real.com/player/>
- MacTheRipper  
<http://www.ripdifferent.com/čmtr/>
- DVDxDV (Mac only)  
<http://www.dvxdv.com/>
- DVD2oneX (Windows and Mac)  
<http://www.dvd2one.com/>
- FfmpegX (Mac only)  
<http://homepage.mac.com/major4/>
- Tomato Torrent (Mac only)  
<http://www.macupdate.com/info.php/id/14258>
- Final Cut Studio (Mac only) – includes DVD Studio Pro  
Quite expensive, as you can imagine, but the people at Mac are generally happy to let filmmakers share it (at the Tribeca Film Festival they were offering it for free at the Apple Store in Soho), so you may be able to find it through your official dealer. If not, try a file-sharing network (Acquisition), though do it cautiously, and don't tell them I sent you!  
<http://www.apple.com>

#### Forums and newssites:

- AfterDawn – includes a helpful glossary, as well as several links for downloadable software (many, many programs for Windows!)  
<http://www.afterdawn.com/>
- DVD Beaver FAQ – everything you need to know about region codes, PAL, Secam and NTSC systems, double and single-layered discs, and one of the most comprehensive indexes of online DVD retailers (as well as info on hardware)  
<http://www.dvdbeaver.com/film/FAQ.htm>
- Lastly, the CyberHome CH-DVD 300 All region PAL/NTSC player (only \$40 US!) is probably the greatest machine anyone looking to just watch DVDs would ever want.  
<http://www.cyberhome.com/products.asp?Product=300A>

## DOPISOVANJE

### stojan pelko

Andrej Šprah: *Osvobajanje pogleda: eseji o sodobnem slovenskem filmu*, Slovenska kinoteka, zbirka Slovenski film, Ljubljana, 2004

Šprah že na samem začetku svoje knjige jasno pove, kaj bo v njej poskušal odkrivati: "predvsem dejstva neposredne korespondence s filmskim sočasjem" (str. 9). In če naj nam razkrije, kako se filmi spogledujejo, soočajo in si dopisujejo s svojim časom, tedaj mora ne le pozorno pregledati in z izbranimi besedami opisati filme, temveč veliko povedati tudi o času, v katerem so nastali. Zadeva ni samoumevna, saj se zdi oboje, filmi in čas, pogosto preblizu, da bi si upali o njih (in njem) reči kaj če že ne dokončnega, pa vsaj historično relevantnega. A prav to slednje je prvi vtis, ki sem ga ob branju Šprahove knjige dobil: da vnaša v aktualni čas nujno distanco, zaradi katere lahko o filmih zatrdi nekaj zares zavezujočih poudarkov. Ker gre praviloma za avtorje, s katerimi sedi v kinotečni dvorani, razpravljajš na sejah redakcije filmske revije ali celo strokovno-programsko razsojaš o njihovi scenaristični ustreznosti, je zadeva še toliko bolj občudovanja vredna. To dolbljenje sedanosti, da bi se našla špranja, v katero se potem zabije klin, da se lahko odrineš in pogledaš reči s "pogledom s strani", je prva kvaliteta Šprahovega pisanja. Po njegovi zaslugi se bodo odslej vodilnih avtorjev novega slovenskega filma morda (in upravičeno) prijele nekatere tehtne oznake: Šterk postaja avtor samotne nostalgije, Burger kompleksnosti, Cvitkovič nepetosti navzočnosti.

Uporaba tehtnih konceptov, ki osmišljajo avtorske poetike, je ena tistih dragocenih sestavin, ki so jo v misel o filmu prinesle vodilne filmske revije druge polovice dvajsetega stoletja – in le vprašanje je bilo, kateri od piscev so sami prestopili med avtorje (od Truffauta prek Bonitzerja in Assayasa do Škafarja), kateri pa raje nadaljevali s knjigami. Šprah se zaveda te razsežnosti sočasa, saj na 72. strani svoje knjige omenja "srečno kombinacijo, ko se ravni intelektualne in ustvarjalne zaveze ujmeta v simbiozi iskanja smisla skozi sorodna ustvarjalna razmerja". S tega stališča je podobnost med Klopčičevo "spominsko knjigo" *Filmi, ki jih imam rad* in Šprahovimi eseji o sodobnem slovenskem filmu več kot le stvar ujemanja edicije in formata: tako kot zna režiser Klopčič presunljivo osebno povedati, katere od svetovnih podob so vplivale nanj, zna pisec Šprah prepričljivo zatrditi, katere so tiste podobe slovenskega filma, ki lahko upajo na svetovno sočasje.

Verjamem, da bi – če bi knjiga nastajala leto pozneje – po teh istih kriterijih v njej našli še Lapajnetovo *Selestenje*, Moderndorferjevo *Predmestje* in Burgerjeve *Ruševine*. Ne nujno zato, ker bi šlo vedno za mojstrovine, temveč zato, ker bi s svojo jasno avtorsko poetiko in poslušom za sočasje dopolnili čas v dekadno, Šprahov izbor pa v zaokroženo deseterico.

S tem pa že prihajam do druge, recimo ji bilančne kvalitete Šprahove knjige. Pomembna je namreč tudi zato, ker si ne obotavlja ločiti "zrno od plevla" – in preprosto, brez slehernega opravičevanja, zato pa s prepričljivimi argumenti, potegniti črto pod tistim, kar bo ostalo. Pri tej odločni gesti naletimo na dvojne poglede: najprej na pogled kot objekt – saj kot pogojni vezni člen med filmi, ki jih obravnava, Šprah postavlja dejstvo, da vsi po vrsti namenajo posebno pozornost prav pogledu.



## povzetki / summaries

### **Prihajamo od daleč in šli bomo še dlje**

**Olaf Möller**

Avtor je hotel napisati tekst, ki bi se po teži argumentov in izpovednosti približal tekstu, kakršnega je priobčil Lav Diaz (str. 47), vendar mu je žal spodletelo.

### **Re-living of the Yugoslavian Film Experience**

**Andrej Šprah**

Exclusive and exhaustive first-hand account of the turbulent history of (recent) Yugoslavian cinema, one of the least-known, under-explored and wrongly-interpreted (Kusturica and co.) territories on the map of world cinema. English translation available at [www.ekran.si](http://www.ekran.si).

### **Nebesa in pekel: o ponovnem izdajanju filmov studia**

**Shaw Brothers**

**Christoph Huber**

Pomladi leta 2002 se je medijski konglomerat Celestial Pictures odločil na DVD nosilcih postopoma izdati celoten arhiv filmov legendarnega azijskega studia Shaw Brothers, ki je od konca petdesetih do sredine osemdesetih let prejšnjega stoletja proizvedel skoraj tisoč filmov. Pričujoči tekst o "največji retrospektivi vseh časov" je pionirski poskus resnega zgodovinskega in kritičnega analize tega kulturnega fenomena, ki sicer skoraj uniformno, nerefleksirano (in neupravičeno) velja zgolj za tobogan zabave.

### **Something to discover about themselves**

**Claudia Siefen**

A short meditation on the difficulties with loving and understanding East-Asiatic movies from a Western point of view. English translation available at [www.ekran.si](http://www.ekran.si).

### **Prikazen avtorja**

**Nil Baskar**

V zapisu avtor rezimira razvoj in evolucijo filmsko-kritične 'teorije avtorja', ki od francoskega novega vala dalje kljub številnim upravičenim kritikam vztrajno determinira večinsko filmsko refleksijo, nenazadnje pa v logiki poznega kapitalizma in komodificirane kulturne industrije postane tudi navidez neškodljivi del vsakdanjega diskurza.

### **Zapiski video džankija**

**Scott Foundas**

Avtor uvodoma popisuje preglavice, s katerimi se srečuje sodobni cinefil pri iskanju redkih filmskih naslovov. Da bi bolje razumel to skorajda religiozno gorečno cinefilsko predanost, se s kancem nostalgije spominja filmov svoje mladosti. Carpenter, Craven, Lustig, Ferrara, Fulci ... Avtorji, ki jih je v osemdesetih video industrija potisnila v obskurnost, a jim hkrati paradoksalno omogočila preživetje znotraj nove, insularne videofilske kulture. Mnogi med njimi še danes ustvarjajo originalna filmska dela, četudi so kinodvorane zaprle vrata, gledalci pa o filmu vedo vedno manj.

### **Naključne beležke o novih tehnologijah, novi cinefiliji**

**Gabe Klinger**

Klinger na začetku povzame in interpretira polemiko o anoreksičnem vs. bulimičnem filmu, ki ga je pred časom objavila revija *Cinema Scope*, nato pa se usmeri naravnost v srž svojega prispevka, k novi globalni cinefilske subkulturi in ekonomiji, ki se je rodila z nastopom hitrih internetnih povezav in kompresiranih video datotek. Tehnološko determiniran značaj nove subkulture pa vzbudi tudi premislek o socialni eroziji 'konvencionalne' cinefilske kulture. Kljub zadržku avtor razume objlubo tehnologije kot v osnovi demokratično, saj ukinja fizične in družbene prepreke med cinefili, hkrati pa je agens solidarnosti, ki ljudem omogoča, da na različne načine sodelujejo pri graditvi kulturnih dobrih, znanja in lastnih skupnosti.

### **Correspondence**

**Stojan Pelko**

Review of Andrej Šprah's recent book *Osvobajanje pogleda* (Liberation of the Look), a compilation of critical essays about contemporary Slovene cinema – a much needed, historical enterprise, backed by a wide range of theoretical concepts, successfully attempting to speak about Slovene cinema in the widest framework of contemporary world cinema. Šprah's writings are at the same time deeply personal and thoroughly analytical. His motto appears to be: if you want to see films well, you have to watch them from the very inside and from the very outside. •

Takoj zatem pa tudi na pogled kot subjekt, natančneje, na subjektivni pogled: "V končni konsekvenci pa je zbranim besedilom odločilno botrovala predvsem osebna, čustvena prizadetost, ki sem je bil kot gledalec deležen ob soočenju z avtorskim pogledom izpostavljenih vizij." (str. 12) V tem prav nič skromnem priznanju arbitrarnosti lastnega pogleda, ki si poleg tega enako arbitrarno postavlja še sam svoj objekt, vidim drugo drznost Šprahovega pisanja, po svoje podobno tistemu, kar nas je vedno fasciniralo npr. pri Sergu Daneyu. Tu in tam je sicer videti, kot bi si pisec za razkritje temeljne ranljivosti slehernega pisanja še poiskal oporo pri drugih piscih, a najboljši je prav tedaj, ko ga odnese čez, mimo citatov, naravnost v svet. Tedaj ne spregovori več le o filmu niti ne le o svetu, temveč prav o njunem temeljnem sočasju: o filmu, kakor ga živimo.

Tretja pomembna reč v knjigi *Osvobajanje pogleda* je izjemen avtorjev posluš za besede avtorjev. Stavki, ki jih praviloma vpisuje v *motto* vsakega poglavja, nam predstavljajo režiserje in režiserko slovenskega filma kot razmišljujoče in artikulirane avtorje, katerih misli Šprah pozorno izbrska iz njihovih intervjujev. Enkrat zato, da bi lažje vstopil v njihov film, drugič podkrepil njihovo pojmovno ozadje, tretjič pa preprosto opozoril na njim lastno poetiko. Ta razsežnost podrobnega brskanja po besedah, da bi nekaj razumel, da bi se ti morda kakšna podoba sploh šele zares razkrila, je nekaj, kar družni pisce o filmu, kadar hočejo pisati zares. Tedaj seveda ugotovijo, da bolj ko gredo v "globine duše", bolj je ta nastlana s knjigami. Od tod potem tu in tam čaroben vtis naključja (ki to nikoli ni), da si v pravem trenutku vstal od pisalne mize, segel na pravo polico, potegnil pravo knjigo, ki se je odprla na pravi strani – in našel točno tisto, kar si iskal. V resnici, če gledaš dovolj pozorno, če je tvoj subjektivni pogled dovolj arbitrarno drzen in predrzen, prave besede in prave podobe preprosto pridejo ob pravem trenutku, ne da bi čisto natančno vedel, s katere strani so prišle: s police ali iz globine. Rabimo pa jih, vse te ne-naključno prežete besede, saj nas sicer podobe kaj hitro znajo ujeti v svoj vztrajnostni čar. Zato me prav nič ne preseneča, da Šprah za uvodni *motto* (ko torej ne gre več za predstavitev posameznih avtorjev in njihovih filmov, temveč kar za našega avtorja in za njegovo knjigo) postavi nasvet Roberta Kramerja: "Pripomoček, ki ga v življenju najbolj potrebuješ, je tvoja moč, da interpretiraš svet. Kajti to je edina stvar, ki nas loči od suženjstva. Suženjstva v odnosu do kateregakoli političnega govora, reklamnega panoja, popevke – vsega, kar se dotakne naših čustev, ne da bi vedeli, zakaj." (str. 8)

Ob koncu svojega eseja o Šterkovem prvencu *Ekspres, ekspres* je Šprah mimogrede primerjal študijske in kratkometražne filme z revijalnimi objavami, celovečerec pa s knjižno izdajo. Morda bi lahko zato za konec tega prikaza zapisali, da je Šprah s prvimi teksti v *Ekranu* posnel svoje prve študijske filme, se v knjigi o Wendersu so-podpisal pod omnibusni kratkometražec, z *Dokumentarnim filmom in oblastjo* (knjigo, ki jo je izdal pri Slovenski kinoteki leta 1998) podpisal svoj prvi celovečerni dokumentarec – z *Osvobajanjem pogleda* pa posnel svoj prvi celovečerec. Odlikujejo ga jasno začrtani junaki, prepoznaven avtorski stil, predvsem pa jasno sporočilo: če hočete dobro videti filme, jih morate hkrati gledati zelo od znotraj in zelo od daleč. Poskusite, ni enostavno. •







The majority of the lucky few who have had the opportunity to see Lav Diaz' *Batang West Side* (2001), his – to quote the filmmaker – “first fully realized work”, claimed the film was nothing less than a masterpiece. “Read that again”, demanded a passionate reviewer. When the Filipino director's latest achievement, the more-than-ten hours-long *Evolution of a Filipino Family* (Ebolusyon ng isang pamilyang Pilipino, 2005) hit the film festivals arena half a year ago, the lucky few were even fewer (almost non-existent), but their enthusiasm large enough to enable the present enterprise. It was an enthusiasm mixed with anger, disbelief and a strong will to change things, for Diaz is – apart from the undisputed and unparalleled quality and relevance, put on display in his latest two films – a phenomenon also because his work is nearly absent from contemporary film discourses. *Ekran* is therefore proud to be the first to publish a wide, comprehensive analysis and appreciation (particularly) of Diaz' latest film. We perceive this volume of exclusive essays also as a successful experiment in overcoming the usual (im)potence of the “Western” gaze – by giving space to express their thoughts to those who actually have something to say regardless of their cultural or geographical background. Firmly believing that words and opinions (still) count, the goal of this undertaking is not only to bring perspective and shed light on Diaz and his films (the immediate reply of all who were contacted and asked to contribute can be summarised in the following sentence: “I strongly believe that *Evolution* is a great film – one of the greatest films in the history of Filipino cinema – and it will be a travesty if it is not acknowledged as such.”), but to – through raising awareness – perhaps even help Diaz finish his film. Almost a decade in the making, *Ebolusyon* was alternatively shot on 16mm and digital video, with the final cut existing only on a lousy video transfer. Christoph Huber wrapped up his capsule review of the film in *Cinema Scope* with the – for the time being – only possible concluding words: “*Diaz needs money for a better transfer, if possible even to 16mm; a better chance for funding organisations to show a true commitment to world cinema seems unimaginable.*” Read that again. •

**Evolution of a Filipino Family (Ebolusyon ng isang pamilyang Pilipino)**

**direction/screenplay/editing** Lav Diaz  
**producers** Lav Diaz, Paul Tanedo, Eric Tanedo  
**executive producer** Paul Tanedo  
**cinematography** Bahaghari, Paul Tanedo  
**with** Larry Manda, Lav Diaz, Albert Banzon  
**production design** Rishab Tibon, Jun Sabayton, Patty Eustaquio  
**with** Noel Miralles, Cristina Honrado, Ava Yap, Poi Beltran  
**sound** Bob Macabenta, Rafael Luna  
**assistant director** Lorna Sanchez  
**production manager** Shai Evangelista, Lorna Sanchez, Banaue Miclat, Sigrid Bernardo

**technical notes**

pre-production – November-December, 1993  
 first day of shoot – March 8, 1994, Lexington St., New Jersey  
 last days of shoot – Third week of November, 2004 Guinobatan and Legazpi City, Bicol, Philippines  
 last day of postproduction – January 28, 2005  
 total running time – 10 hours and 43 minutes  
 – used 16mm from 1994 to 1999  
 – used digital 2003 to 2005  
 – US shoot was not included in the final cut  
 – original working titles a) *Filipinos*, b) *Ebolusyon ni Ray Gallardo* (The Evolution of Ray Gallardo)

**executive producer**

Paul Tanedo  
 Ebolusyon ng Isang Pamilyang Pilipino  
 4721 Columbia Rd.  
 Annandale, VA 22003  
 USA  
 Tel 703 354 2500  
 ptanedo@excite.com  
 www.ebolusyon.com

**cast**

Elryan de Vera – Raynaldo Gallardo  
 Marife Necisito – Hilda  
 Pen Medina – Kadyo  
 Angi Ferro – Puring  
 Ronnie Lazaro – Fernando  
 Joel Torre – Mayor  
 Lui Manansala – Marya  
 Banaue Miclat – Huling  
 Roeder – Bendo  
 Sigrid Andrea Bernardo – Ana  
 Bolay Ferro – Martina  
 Erwin Gonzales – Carlos  
 Divina Cavestany – Mother  
 Dido dela Paz – Dakila  
 Angel Aquino – Rica  
 Ray Ventura – Ka Harim  
 Noel Miralles – Military leader  
 Mario Magallona – Danny  
 Joe Gruta – Drunkard  
 Ponz Desa – Drunkard

**Lav Diaz – filmography**

– *Ebolusyon ng Isang Pamilyang Pilipino* (Evolution of a Filipino Family, 2004/2005)  
 – *Hesus Rebolusyunaryo*, (Jesus the Revolutionary, 2002)  
 – *Batang West Side*, 2002  
 – *Hubad sa Ilalim ng Buwan* (Naked Under the Moon, 1999)  
 – *Burger Boys*, 1999  
 – *Kriminal ng Baryo Concepcion* (The Criminal of Barrio Concepcion, 1998)

**shorts:**

– *Step No, Step Yes*, video, 1988  
 – *Banlaw* (Cleanse), super 8mm, 1985

**unfinished works:**

– *Sarungbanggi ni Alice* (Night of Alice), documentary, 16mm/video  
 – *Malamig ang Mundo* (The World is Cold), video



# DESAPARECIDOS – LAV DIAZ AND THE EVOLUTION OF A MISSING PEOPLE

"I distrust summaries, any kind of gliding through time, any too great a claim that one is in control of what one recounts; I think someone who claims to understand but is obviously calm, someone who claims to write with emotion recollected in tranquillity, is a fool and a liar. To understand is to tremble. To recollect is to re-enter and be riven ... I admire the authority of being on one's knees in front of the event." Harold Brodkey, *Manipulations*

## 1. introduction

When I was asked to write about Lav Diaz's film, *The Evolution of a Filipino Family* (2004), I realised the endeavour would involve a response as much to Diaz's remarkable opus as it would to the concepts of cultural amnesia and collective history. These are not new preoccupations, though some may argue that the struggles with self, memory, historiography and culture have taken on a more immediate resonance in recent decades. However, they bear a particularly visceral edge and present an almost burdensome obstacle in this strange geopolitical collective we've come to call "Asia"<sup>1</sup>. Whatever claims theories of postmodernism have made on the ambiguous character of our times and the doubts it has produced about modernity's promises, the rhetoric around national identity and the values of modernisation still seem to have a powerful influence. Its grip isn't all encompassing, but in some respects, it has set up the terms of engagement as a bargain: amnesia has been demanded in return for capital and apparent progress. Personal and collective historical narratives have been elided in exchange for the idea of a nation with its material promises – a dubious chimera at best.

As Luis Francia has observed, in the context of the Philippines, the 1950s saw something of a reaction against this chimera with filmmakers such as Lamberto Avellana, Eddie Romero and Gerardo de Leon taking a more neo-realist and humanistic approach to filmmaking. The blow to the gut came with the declaration of Martial Law by Ferdinand Marcos in 1972. It was in this period that the betrayal of an authoritarian state selling a fallacious idea of national prosperity took hold with such intensity. It produced a state of disbelief not least because the lie came from within and not from a foreigner, an imperial power or the colonial presence that the Philippines had already struggled with. But it also marked the emergence of a 'New Wave' in Filipino cinema, led by filmmakers such as Lino Brocka, Ishmael Bernal and Mike de Leon. This collective force not only tackled the systematic censorship laws instituted in earnest during the Marcos regime's rule, but also began to produce seminal works such as Brocka's *You've Been Judged and Found Wanting* (Tinimbang Ka Ngunit Kulang, 1974) and Bernal's *Speck in the Water* (Nunal Sa Tubig, 1976).

I see Diaz's film and his approach to filmmaking as an ongoing response to the condition of the Filipino people that began with a real sense of urgency during the 1970s. If it bears any kind of a call-to-arms, it simply asks Filipinos to remember, to look back and to choose willingly to engage their collective histories. *Evolution of a Filipino Family* is also the expression of an artist's vision. As such, it offers a deluge of powerful images and narrative choices that are worthy of nothing less than thorough critical engagement. This essay is hopefully one of many attempts by numerous writers to do precisely that.

## 2. national myths, myths of nationalism

It is almost unavoidable to mention the concept of the nation without making reference to Benedict Anderson (1983). Briefly, his ruminations suggest that the nation is an "imagined community" forged through several critical factors, including anti-colonial struggles, the existence of print media and public debate. But some theorists who ascribed to this theory and extended it to the concept of a national cinema observe its possible limitations in retrospect. Andrew Higson's essay 'The Limiting

Imagination of National Cinema' (2000)<sup>2</sup> notes that this reading isn't sensitive to the "contingency or instability of the national. This is precisely because the nationalist project, in Anderson's terms, imagines the nation as limited, with finite and meaningful boundaries ... the focus is on films that seem amenable to such an interpretation" (Higson 2000: 66). In essence, both the concepts of a "nation" and "national cinema" lack clarity and specificity. As Anthony Smith observes in 'Images of the Nation – Cinema, Art and National Identity', the nation is "the product of modernisation and modernity, and of the secular, modern intelligentsia which creates and disseminates the historical myths of nationhood" (Smith 2000: 47).

This brief outline gives us some window into understanding the ways in which Diaz's film actively demonstrates the contingencies of defining both a nation and a national cinema. The film charts a period from 1971 (just prior to the declaration of Martial Law in 1972) to 1987, a year after the People Power Revolution, which brought down the regime and led to Marcos' exile from the Philippines. In one of the barrios, matriarch and grandmother Puring Gallardo farms the land with her son Kadyo and his three daughters Huling, Ana and Martina. Kadyo's wife has passed away and in a sense, the girls both depend on and learn from Puring who is the emotional centre of the Gallardo family.

The film opens with a long take that brings us into the world within which the family farms and takes care of its buffaloes in the fields. This opening shot reveals a wondrous depth of field, complete lack of extraneous sound and the centrality of time unravelling slowly as people go about their tasks. Diaz's proclivity for a realism that doesn't subordinate time to movement and the dictates of plot continuity sets the scene and tone of one aspect of the film. The other aspect of *Evolution* draws from another form of realism. We see the first of many scenes composed of archival footage. As men with guns react against protestors burning American flags, newsreel vignettes show Marcos reading the Declaration of Martial Law (1972). Markedly, it is at this juncture that we hear of Hilda, Kadyo's sister and Puring's daughter, whose mental stability isn't explained. Hilda is first seen wandering aimlessly through desolate urban streets at night, where she finds an abandoned baby near a garbage dump, a little boy later named Raynaldo who comes to live with the Gallardos. Her introduction is significant in that it is contiguous with the onset of Martial Law with all its attendant forms of oppression. Diaz stated in an interview that Raynaldo is "this melancholic figure – the solitary wanderer and lost child. We feel him ... The search to find and redeem him is a symbolic thing. It is the Filipino soul that needs to be saved."<sup>3</sup> If Raynaldo is literally the product of fragmented families sundered by poverty, anxiety and struggle and symbolically the Filipino soul, then Hilda is one of the many mothers in the film as well as a representation of the Filipino psyche. Her surreal musings, her inability to remember her past or herself and her apparent madness are not an inaccurate rendering of the collective state of a people undergoing a struggle.

Subsequently, after Hilda's death, Raynaldo leaves home aged nine. Wandering like Hilda through urban desolation in Quezon City, he eventually goes to the mountains where he is adopted once again by a family who live there. The father Fernando and his wife Marya are already playing surrogate parents to two boys, Carlos and Bendo (who is deaf). Fernando's life is another strand that represents an irony and tragedy in the country. He obsessively scours the hills and waterlogged valleys for gold with the boys. Meanwhile, wealthy urbanites comment casually over a coffee and conversation that Marcos has 8000 tons in his vault – tellingly, as they articulate this it is apparent that they are utterly disconnected from the events occurring in the rural areas or mountains.



As these familial tales thread in and out, the archival footage reveals the growing presence of the army in the barrios. While this is not a summation of the complex narrative voices and characters that occupy the cinematic landscape in the film, it demonstrates the numerous ways in which Diaz's film is less an example of a "national cinema" and more accurately a film about people's trials and existence. As Higson noted, this fractured narrative style demonstrates how contingent the very idea of a "nation" is. The various families tackle problems and celebrate some genuine moments of quiet pleasure. Juxtaposed with this, archival footage reveals the political tensions and shifts occurring in various parts of the country. As viewers, we can neither attribute causality nor linearity to what we witness. We simply have to watch, undergo, wait and accept not knowing.

As stated earlier, the bounded, neat idea of a nation is also frequently applied to the definition of a national cinema. It is no surprise then, that the inception of the Manila International Film Festival in 1982 inaugurated by Imelda Marcos, wanted to present a sanitised, glamorised portrait of a nation that could be publicised abroad. Within its territorial boundaries however, the government had established the Board of Review for Motion Pictures and Television, which closely monitored and censored anything it deemed to be "subversive". The most antagonistic force to counter this was Brocka's *My Country: Gripping the Knife's Edge* (Bayan Ko, Kapit sa Patalim, 1984). In this same time period, the Concerned Artists of the Philippines had formed to build a systematic opposition to the violations of their freedom. In CAP's manifesto with reference to *My Country* they stated that, "*Among the deletions demanded by the censors are scenes of actual rallies and demonstrations ... Adding insult to injury, the censors have also ordered the bleeping out of the patriotic song, Ang Bayan Ko, from which the film got part of its title – a song aired almost daily on radio ...*"<sup>4</sup>

This historical example of Brocka's film and censorship in the Philippines is important for several reasons. Firstly, Diaz's aesthetic and political decision to use significant scenes of archival footage, particularly of protests and marches, shows his commitment to visually remembering (not just via print media or radio) the country's recent historical struggles. In another sense, *Evolution* pays kudos to Brocka and thus, Diaz is acknowledging his artistic debt to his predecessor. It is an act that attempts to repeat Brocka's own protest and thus, via repetition, shows how the visual medium can influence and affect minds and souls.<sup>5</sup> The silencing of the song in *My Country* is in itself symbolic of how patriotism is so dependent upon context. The Marcos regime had recognised its potential as a rousing rally to forge faith in the state. Brocka reinvented the song by placing it within a revolutionary context in which workers rise against the misery inflicted upon them. This repetition of a familiar anthem in a radical context was clearly a provocation because it demonstrated all too clearly how contingent the idea of a nation (the Philippines) was – a fact not lost on Diaz.

### 3. time in evolution

Film is "*the opportunity to live through what is happening onscreen as if it were his own life, to take over, as deeply personal and his own, the experience imprinted in time upon the screen, relating his own life to what is being shown.*"<sup>6</sup>

As some critics have noted, conventional narrative dictates what motifs must be used to signify memory and the passage of time in cinema. As Shirley Law states (with specific reference to the Italian film *Cinema Paradiso*), a number of visual and aural devices are often used to signal flashback, be it the close-up or objects/sounds that trigger memory. They "*create the mood for regression, interiority and personal reflection ... ellipsis is a conventional narrative filmic device used to move quickly*

*from one period of time to another.*"<sup>7</sup> In vivid contrast to these examples, *Evolution* is a film manifestly opposed to the notion that the passage of time and its characters' lives must be subordinated to a narrative thrust that explains every action within a neat causal grid-work. David N. Rodowick offers a reading of Deleuze's concept of the time-image (as opposed to the movement-image) which seems to be an apt reading of time in Diaz's film. Time-image "*fluctuates between actual and virtual, that records or deals with memory, confuses mental and physical time, actual and virtual, and is sometimes marked by incommensurable spatial and temporal links between shots.*"<sup>8</sup> As Deleuze goes on to explain, "*rational cuts always determine commensurable relations between series of images and thereby constitute the whole rhythmic system and harmony of classical cinema ... In summary, the classic movement-image is based on a rational ordering system (the continuity system) that is intended to make the story as legible and smooth running as possible.*"<sup>9</sup>

This summation of Deleuze's concept is strikingly resonant when applied to the sense of time in *Evolution*. If ellipsis is used in the film, it is not an attempt to leap over the slow passage of time in order to provide rational narrative continuity. Rather, it is to remind us repeatedly that we cannot always attribute a cause to an event or occurrence. The film almost completely avoids using linearity in storytelling precisely to prevent the characters from being stigmatised, judged or typified by a series of descriptors and cause-related events. There are numerous such instances worthy of recollection.

As radio broadcasts and the footage of the military presence in the outlying areas of the country increase, we see scenes of Kadyo living with a group of men, in the midst of training exercises. This scene is not preceded by a clear explanation as to why he is there and therefore, the moment remains elusive for a length of time until we realise Kadyo has been incarcerated for something we have not yet witnessed onscreen. It is only much later in the film that a scene emerges in which Kadyo hides a stash of guns and ammunition in their shack in the barrio. He later supplies the loot he stole from the army to the rebels in the countryside who are in opposition to the government. Kadyo's journey into and out of the penitentiary is also fragmented, interposed with his own quiet but pained search for Raynaldo. Fernando, Marya and the boys Carlos and Bendo are anchored in the story by the fact that Raynaldo lives with them for an extended period of time. But once again, they aren't given a specific identity, or place in the narrative through which they can be categorised as a family with a particular background or history.

Even after extended footage of the People Power protests shows how an overwhelming segment of the population brought the Marcos regime down before Aquino's inauguration, it is muted by the presence of a humiliated, limping Kadyo who finds himself unable to return home and resume normal family life. Periods of anguish are relieved by the sense that resistance is always building somewhere in the country. Despite Puring's evident struggle to earn money and educate her granddaughters to release them from poverty, there are flashes of abandon and pure pleasure when they sing folk songs in almost pitch-darkness to the glow of candlelight. These moments of realism bear a startling simplicity and intimacy that almost makes us feel as though we are intruding upon a private moment of peace amongst friends and family.

### 3.2 fiction in evolution

A motif that arcs over almost the entire film is the aural presence of radio dramas. In fact, aside from Puring and Huling's occasional nights of singing, there is no extraneous sound or music in the film other than these soap operas. They, both, play out in the Gallardo household and feature as an incessant form of distraction and preoccupation for Carlos, Bendo and Raynaldo. Ironically, even Bendo's deafness cannot deter him from having an avid desire to know what happens next in these dramas. In the first instance we hear one of these soap operas, it is used almost as a contrapuntal device; as a woman wails and dramatises her emotions, this flood of heightened anguish blares out of a radio in a scene with relatively silent and stationary people in the barrio. It is both an ironic and telling moment as radios (and eventually, television) come to play significant roles in the film.



In one particular scene, the female protagonist of a radio soap opera is having an impassioned exchange with her family about rising from poverty by doing photo shoots for a tabloid magazine. These are recurrent themes in the dramas, just as scenes of the girls and Puring or Raynaldo sitting in rapt silence, waiting to hear what happens next also recur throughout the film. The radio soaps play several roles. In one sense, they serve to show how much melodrama has dominated the consciousness and modes of fictional expression in the Philippines, so much so that they occupy a prime place in the lives of those who see in them, a vicarious escape from the grip of poverty. However, Diaz's inclusion of shots from inside the studio where we watch the actors and actresses reading their near-hysterical lines with a well-learned cadence also serves another purpose. For one, it is another unexpected instance of realism in the film. It reveals in plain terms, how disparate the lives of urban dwellers, the farmers, miners and mainstream performers are. The dramas bear no connection to those performing them and they offer a neat conclusion of a kind the avid listeners may never experience in reality. In other words, the empathy they offer and the denouement that marks their structure are both a sort of lie.

In another sense however, Diaz's critique of the soap opera is tempered by the predominance of scenes in which we too sit with Raynaldo, Carlos, Bendo, or Puring, Huling, Ana and Martina, listening to the fights, struggles and dreams of "ordinary Filipinos" in these soap operas. As Francia again noted with reference to Brocka, "*he took elitist notions of what constituted good and bad film and stood these on their theoretical heads ... most local melodramas were seen as bakya, a pejorative term literally meaning, 'clogs' – the everyday wear of the proletariat – and used to denigrate popular taste. Brocka and his contemporaries made the so-called bakya films, socially acceptable, a mini-revolution in itself*" (Francia: 355). In a sense, Brocka took the melodrama and moved it in a direction quite unlike its otherwise formulaic structure. This was his skill and prerogative living under the strictures of a censorious regime. Diaz's strength is in showing us the unseen people who listen to these daily soap operas, to juxtapose the exaggerated emotions of fiction against the quiet banality and anxiety of daily life. As stated earlier, he compels us to live in the moment with the families, to listen to these strangely distant tales of suffering and redemption after an entire day of relentless, back breaking work in the fields or mountains.

If the radio dramas are disconnected from the reality of the constituency they often claim to represent, then the news on the radio and television about the protests and Brocka's efforts in the 1980s seem to be even more distanced from the likes of Kadyo and the Gallardo family. When Kadyo in particular, has been housed in a hideout under the dubious charge of a former inmate who may give him a "job" to do for some cash, he turns on the television and watches a short documentary on Brocka by Taga Timog. But the separation between what he witnesses onscreen and where he finds himself could not be more profound or pronounced. In a room without windows, uncertain and angst-ridden by the situation in which he finds himself, Kadyo's predicament is deeply disturbing particularly as Brocka's call-to-arms should speak to him, but cannot and does not reach him with that immediacy. There is an emotional dissonance in Diaz's extensive use of actual footage of Brocka and film critic Gino Dormiendo (who plays Brocka). These extensive vignettes speak again, of the power the cinematic medium has to transform lives and speak truths. However, placed against the immense uncertainty his characters must wrestle with, even this is shown to be contingent, rather than a guarantee that freedom will come with revolution and struggle.

### 3.3 memory, dreams and truth-telling

"We do not remember; we rewrite memory, much as history is rewritten."<sup>10</sup>

There is of course, no comprehensive truth-telling in the final analysis. Tarkovsky was attacked for his films which were deemed "too naturalistic" in their "*deliberate aestheticisation of cruelty for its own sake.*"<sup>11</sup> He retaliated that "*things that exist 'in themselves' only come to have existence 'for us' in the course of our own experience; man's need to*

*know functions in this way, that is its meaning.*"<sup>12</sup> *Evolution* is an expression of a journey that took over a decade for Diaz to realise. In a sense, it is not completely disconnected from its predecessor, the five-hour long *Batang West Side* (2002). In *Batang*, a film largely set in Jersey City around the troubled occurrences within the Filipino-American community, there are fragments of black and white film footage that seem to be disconnected from the narrative that takes precedence. They seem like memories of Hilda in the barrio, but certainty remain elusive. Again, ellipsis with regards to memory functions in both films as a form of survival. In David Gross' analysis of memory in the writings of Proust and Bergson, he states that there is a third type of memory, the "*unsolicited' independent memories that are disengaged from immediate action or perception ... A person dominated by these unsolicited recollections would be overwhelmed by the flood of images and hindered in their ability to cope with reality.*"<sup>13</sup>

In a sense, what is elided in *Evolution* and what appears to be disjointed or incomplete is precisely a defence against this type of memory. Yet, we cannot easily delineate dream from memory or the present. In a particularly arresting scene, a vivid long shot reveals silhouetted trees and figures walking against a pale dawn (or evening?) sky. As they slowly trudge into view, we see that one of them is carrying a cross. This sequence once again recurs after a rare instance in the film of a medium-shot to close-up of Huling and Ana speaking to the camera (to Kadyo?), to say that Martina is missing and that their grandmother Puring is dead. Kadyo struggles to do something for his family from afar and yet, inevitably, he is aware that he cannot stem the tide of time or death.

As the film's end draws near, a series of almost incandescent images begin to play before us. Kadyo's gradual demise as he shuffles through the sun-bleached streets is seen concurrent with Puring's, as she embraces a framed photograph of family members and shuts her eyes. A still more wondrous shot of Huling and Ana wrestling, laughing, play-fighting and collapsing in giggles in the rice fields is juxtaposed against a shot of Raynaldo and Hilda sitting waist-deep in water, the sand-bed ebbing gently around them. Water shimmers and flows over rocks, smoothed by gradual attrition. It is a simple and immediate image, in counterpoint to Raynaldo's train ride home and eventual reunion with Huling, Ana and Martina. As Huling says, no matter what happens, life will inevitably continue. And so it does.

### 4. desaparecidos – bringing the missing back to life

"*That the people are missing means they require an enabling image that can summon them into existence ... If there were a modern political cinema, it would be on this basis: that the people no longer exist, or not yet ... the people are missing.*"

Deleuze<sup>14</sup>

"*the so-called desaparecidos or "missing people" – usually those who were suspected of alliances with the Left or with communists or just plain people who had aired their views against the dictatorship – who were silenced with guns or who had just vanished.*"

Lav Diaz<sup>15</sup>

In an age of irony and scepticism, it is hard to find an artist who would claim to be one without any hesitation or embarrassment about the struggle it entails and the scorn it may produce. Diaz's work is astounding both within the context of Filipino cinema and outside of the cultural, social and political parameters that have produced it. *Evolution of a Filipino Family*, at nearly 11 to 12 hours (morphing all the time), is nothing short of a journey. But it is a journey that does not presume to speak for the people whose stories unravel onscreen. That these stories are incomplete attests to the fact that Diaz recognises the difference between the compelling need to speak his truth and the assumption that the truth is perfect, or finished. I use the term *desaparecidos* in both senses – as articulated by Deleuze and Diaz. *Evolution of a Filipino Family* is both a bringing into being of a people who have thus far remained under-represented and in Diaz's historical sense, a remembering of those who prematurely passed away. •



## Notes:

1. When the Philippines itself is composed of over 7000 islands forming a complex archipelago with a population that practices Roman Catholicism, Islam and tribal indigenous faiths, it only goes to show that the term "Asia" is a misnomer.
2. Higson, A: *The Limiting Imagination of a National Cinema in Cinema and Nation*. Editors: Mette Hjort & Scott MacKenzie. London & New York, Routledge: 2000
3. Diaz, L: The Decade of Living Dangerously: A Chronicle by Lav Diaz. Interview by Brandon Wee in *Senses of Cinema*, Issue no. 34, January-March 2005. [http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/05/34/lav\\_diaz.html](http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/05/34/lav_diaz.html)
4. Francia, L.H: *Side-Stepping History – Beginnings to 1980s in Being and Becoming – The Cinema of Asia*. Editors: Aruna Vasudev, Latika Padgaonkar, Rashmi Doraiswamy. India, Macmillan Press Ltd: 2002
5. Again, as Diaz states in his interview with Wee from *Senses of Cinema*: "... Marcos knew the power of the medium. Whether one is in the aesthetic or entertainment domain, cinema is a very powerful medium. It can change peoples' minds and perspectives, but sometimes blindly, as in Marcos' use of it as a political tool." [http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/05/34/lav\\_diaz.html](http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/05/34/lav_diaz.html)
6. Tarkovsky, A: *Sculpting in Time*. Translated by Kitty Hunter-Blair. University of Texas Press, Austin: 1986, 1987.
7. Law, S: *Film, memory and nostalgia in Cinema Paradiso – Nuovo Cinema Paradiso – Film As Text*. Australian Screen Education: [http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0PEI/is\\_33/ai\\_112130502](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0PEI/is_33/ai_112130502)
8. In Totaro, D: Gilles Deleuze's Bergsonian Film Project Part 2: Cinema 2. *Offscreen*. 1999: [http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/9903/offscreen\\_essays/deleuze2.html](http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/9903/offscreen_essays/deleuze2.html)
9. *ibid.*
10. Homes, B.C: *The Deleuzian Memory of Sans Soleil*. 2000: <http://www.bcholmes.org/film/sansoleil.html>
11. Tarkovsky, A: *Sculpting in Time*. Translated by Kitty Hunter-Blair. University of Texas Press, Austin: 1986, 1987 (p.184–185)
12. *ibid.*
13. In Totaro, D: Gilles Deleuze's Bergsonian Film Project Part 2: Cinema 2. *For Offscreen*. 1999: [http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/9903/offscreen\\_essays/deleuze2.html](http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/9903/offscreen_essays/deleuze2.html)
14. Homes, B.C: *The Deleuzian Memory of Sans Soleil*. 2000: <http://www.bcholmes.org/film/sansoleil.html>
15. [http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/05/34/lav\\_diaz.html](http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/05/34/lav_diaz.html)

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## (R)EVOLUTION OF CONCRETE christoph huber

Probably a month before I first encountered Lav Diaz' epic *Evolution of a Filipino Family* (at the Rotterdam Film Festival in early February 2005), I encountered for the first time – thanks to Dave Kehr – a fascinating bit of information concerning the original version of Erich von Stroheim's *Greed*. King Vidor, one of the few persons invited by MGM studio boss to the now-legendary first marathon screening of Stroheim's rough cut, often referred to as cinema's lost "holy grail", had told Kehr in an interview that (as paraphrased by Kehr) "*most of the running time was devoted to Stroheim's insistence on spelling out every single action of the characters, such as leaving one apartment, going down the stairs, walking down the street, entering another building, climbing the stairs, knocking on the door, going in, etc.*"

Thinking about *Evolution* invariably has taken me back to this story for various reasons, the simplest probably being the comparable extraordinary length (over ten hours in both cases) and a subplot in *Evolution* that immediately brought *Greed* to mind: one character develops an obsession for gold, and while that doesn't lead towards an appropriately grandiose and deadly renunciation of the American Dream in the endless plains of Death Valley, it causes a path of descent into abandoned mines, an image that seems an equally fitting metaphor for the Filipino tragedy that *Evolution* is about. (Receding into this cavernous subterranean space in search of immediate material gratification not only seems a perfect picture for the refusal of the Filipino people to deal with their history, especially including the period of Martial Law declared by president Marcos that is the setting for the larger part of *Evolution*, there's also a clever ironic juxtaposition in the dialogue about the gold that's actually in the president's vaults.) Coincidentally, in a recent interview Diaz has noted that this subplot was the crucial last thread he inserted: "*Gold as a metaphor for so many things in the Filipino socio-cultural milieu.*" Fun- nily enough, the first item on his shortlist of meanings that follow is "gold for greed".

But such comparisons, instructive as they may be, certainly mean less than the questions of feasibility and commitment that seem to be at the core of the connection between these two films, one of which is an invisible/hypothetical touchstone of cinema history, the other has yet to make a real dent in the current film culture. First, a word on feasibility, duly ignoring the fact that one film was made with the backing of a major studio, while the other was an independent production and *arte povera*, both in the truest sense of the word. If somebody wants to discuss what's the grander gesture – getting a big company to produce what must seem a monstrous achievement from a commercial point of view or, for lack of such means, investing a decade of your life in a similar undertaking: Go ahead, waste your time. (I hope it's argued elsewhere in this issue why questions like these





are part of what's wrong with film culture today.) What counts, in both cases, is that the mammoth undertaking and result ostensibly spring from a commitment, an idea of unearthing "truth" (to use Diaz' phrase) without compromises, be they financial, aesthetic or just dictated by what is often referred to as "common sense" (and as often a thinly veiled rationalization for the complacent "majority vote" of what's acceptable).

Not only the enormous and demanding running time, but this rare commitment (which is of course what causes the runtimes) is what makes both films impossible objects in a way. And logically, this applies quite literally: The long Stroheim cut of *Greed* is long lost, which of course, as long as it remains that way, only heightens its mythic aura – indeed, it begs the question, if Vidor's description is true, would it be considered a hallmark of cinema on such a broad basis if it were ever regained, given Vidor's claim that the first (and also lost) four hour re-edit that followed, (again, per Kehr) "lost no narrative incidence whatsoever"... And Diaz' incredible achievement, as it could be seen so far, is somewhat diminished by a visible lack of financial resources, which also was one of the main reasons for its ten years in the making, first on 16mm, then on cheaper Digital Video: It only exists on Video Beta, hampered by aural and visual glitches and a horrible transfer. (The irony, probably not lost on the DV-weary eyes of many a festival-goer, is that the passages of the film shot on video look much better this way than those shot on film.)

Now, while it would be foolish idealism to expect a film like *Evolution* to be immediately making the headlines, it should have merited at least a few more notices than it has so far. Obviously its length plays a part in its neglect (films that are considered epic and difficult get skipped over in favor of larger quantities of less challenging fare at every film festival, by audiences and critics alike), but that alone shouldn't pose to great an aesthetic challenge for a world film culture that has enshrined Béla Tarr's *Sátántangó* as one of its contemporary touchstones (and now has to deal with lots of untalented imitators of dead-time formalism). The reason seems much simpler, as evidenced by the neglect of Diaz' previous film *Batang West Side*, a five-hour chronicle of the Filipino diaspora set in New York, whose form is also initially demanding (though certainly, at least on a surface level – which unfortunately is what counts here – not more than anything by Tarr): a deliberate, slow and ultimately hypnotic pace, consistently unusual camera placement (which never calls attention to itself, typical of Diaz' strict avoidance of all things flashy) and a complicated, yet carefully unraveling structure essential to its cathartic power. (It's really only during the last major scene that all its layers

– emotional, political, historical and dialectical – completely click, and the result is overwhelming.) But unlike *Evolution*, this masterpiece, doesn't suffer from an obvious lack of funds, so its sidelining can only be accounted for by the supposedly "esoteric" nature of its subject: For one thing, the Philippines are not (at least as yet) considered an Asian hot spot, exactly, so there's no hype to be garnered. And Diaz' staunch refusal to pepper his movies with extraneous explanation, including historical markers, certainly doesn't help in a film culture so afraid of knowledge outside its cemented grasp (although anyone who's seen *Batang* can testify that you certainly don't need the extra knowledge to get it, it just deepens the experience). All this may seem ironic, since Diaz' grand subject is ostensibly the heritage of his nation (indeed, I can think of few directors, living or dead, as committed to this cause), but only at first glance: Scrutinized more closely, what Diaz really deals with is the refusal of a nation to come to terms with its troubled past.

Fittingly enough, *Evolution* kicks in at the crucial point in history marking the great final revelation of its predecessor, just before Philippine president Marcos declared Martial Law in 1972. A family chronicle spanning 16 years (from 1971 to 1987, one year after Marcos finally had to relinquish presidency), *Evolution* challenges not only conventional viewing habits and criteria of evaluation, but also a nation's denial of its dark recent history. (In a personal conversation, a visibly disgruntled Diaz pointed to the successful Manila run of the uncritical [to put it mildly] doc about Marcos' widow *Imelda* [2003, by Ramona S. Diaz – no relation, obviously], mentioning how the audience was blithely laughing along with the glamorously madcap posturing of their erstwhile co-dictator.) While this national/historical imperative may be the prime source for the palpable urgency and fervor of *Evolution*, and it allows you to immerse yourself in a whole period on a level that almost feels like you've lived through it, it has a lot of timely things of global importance to impart as well: Just for one thing, it should be kept in mind that Marcos' corrupt terror regime also remained in power thanks to the US support.

Centered around the fate of the Gallardos, a poor peasant family, whose members' hardly dignified lives become even less so, while they are scattered all over the country during the years, *Evolution* unfolds mostly in large, long-shot-long-take near-real-time chunks detailing their daily struggles, lending it not only a hyper-realistic aura that borders on the documentary at times, but also making the devastating major turns of events that happen to the Gallardos, well, every few hours, seem less like crucial intersections, as they are in most narratives, than logical, even inevitable peaks of suffering. It's the unique result of

this method, a kind of unhurried idea of verisimilitude, which at the same time magnificently exceeds any conventional notions of "realism" and allows for an exceptionally multi-faceted narrative, that has since given me an idea of what writer Henry Carr – another person present at Thalberg's private screening of *Greed* – was referring to when he compared Stroheim's original 45-reel version to *Les misérables*, writing "Episodes come along that you think have no bearing on the story, then 12 or 14 reels later, it hits you with a crash." These crashes are intensified by the elliptic approach Diaz has chosen for *Evolution* – indeed, given the convincing, almost organic result of the non-chronological structure, it is quite surprising that the film was conceived as a linear story and only brought into its ultimate form during finalization. The nonlinear narrative is only one element of a rich series of very modern counterpoint devices to the detailed rendering of the slow passage of time: *Evolution* also includes documentary footage of important political events and, more oblique, long excursions into the radio soap-operas that were the only official entertainment for some time in the 70s, and are eagerly devoured by many family members, as well as seen performed by its cast on a sound stage. The latter idea is especially resonant, unmasking the state-sanctioned promotion of escapist fantasy by showing how the "lives" of the "invisible" members of what constitutes almost a fictional second family for the Gallardos are just empty constructs executed with impersonal professionalism. There's a revealing, stark contrast to the many actual members of the Gallardo family that really become invisible (as was the case with most of the "missing people" of the Marcos era, usually by death), but it's also one of the many instances in *Evolution* where Diaz shows his insightful, dialectic relationship to his own craft.

This reflexivity is also visible in the noticeable maturing of Diaz' style (only fitting for a film that acknowledges many paradoxes, it is paradoxically Diaz' first and last film at the time of writing), in which you can see him accumulate lessons learned from other filmmakers, including acknowledged sources like Tarkovsky, Tati and Jean Vigo – to whom the film is, in a way, dedicated –, without ever being in danger of lip-service or, even worse, imitation. (As evidenced by the fact that I don't know how familiar, if at all, Diaz is with Stroheim, but as you can see from this article, there seems to be a grain in there as well, maybe the lesson is quite banal: that great directors always seem to have a spiritual exchange going on.) The complexity of maturation also informs the film quite naturally: Seeing some younger cast members literally grow up before your eyes yields a powerful fascination. (In another testament to the long, troubled shoot, the disap-

pearance of others sometimes is just due to the fact that they died during production: more invisible men.) But of course, given Diaz' insistence on coming to terms not just with history, but especially with the history of his own country, it is two Filipino filmmakers that play the most important part in the cine-genealogy of *Evolution*, both of them markedly being in the film and being not there at the same time (I guess you can see it as another wry comment about historical amnesia, in this case film-historical). There's a fascinating subplot about Lino Brocka, who can be seen voicing his strong opinions on responsibility in politics, cinema, their relationship and other matters. Only that it's not Brocka, but Filipino film critic Gino Dormiendo (a fact that is never acknowledged in the film), who looks almost exactly like the late master and is just as convincing impersonating him. And then there's Taga Timog, who was already the sole person (within the film) privy to the final confession of *Batang West Side*: a fictional character, but – especially in the earlier work – ostensibly a stand-in for Diaz himself, the present-day director who tries to find a proper way to communicate the state of things – and, by logical extension, what led up to it: history, again – to the people. He also has the final word (or more precisely: images) in *Evolution*, handing the last puzzle piece, the appropriately dialectic "Tale of Two Mothers" (for which he is credited as a director), to the audience. There's an endearing playfulness at work here, but Diaz isn't playing games with his viewers, as it's completely beside the point whether one knows about the difference between "reality" and "fiction" in both cases, just as the documentary inserts of *Evolution* can be sufficiently understood without great prior knowledge of Filipino history, even if there's no commentary. (Diaz' style is true to conveying a complex vision of the world, which is exactly why it's never hermetic.)

It's also Taga Timog who's credited with the documentary on Lino Brocka that hapless Uncle Kadyo, having left the Gallardos in search of their adopted "lost child", watches on TV, leading up to what may be the most moving sequence in *Evolution*, also because Kadyo's fate ties together the ideas about a nation's oppression and its historical failures with the ideas about resistance out of commitment to truth, necessarily including cinema. It's an almost unedited 20-minute-take in which the dying Kadyo stumbles through the capital's empty backstreets, and it takes on epiphanic power, as one can't help but realize how it expresses the experience of a nation in agony for centuries – first under foreign powers, and finally, and even more devastatingly, under one of their own. •



## noel vera

# PORTRAIT OF THE ANGUISHED AS A FILIPINO

I first encountered Lav Diaz's rather unique sensibility in Joey Gosengfiao and Lily Monteverde's Good Harvest Film Festival, in 1998. The film was *The Criminal of Barrio Concepcion* (Serafin Geronimo: Kriminal ng Baryo Concepcion), starring Raymond Bagatsing, a minor Filipino-Indian actor (his surname is derived from "Baghat-Singh") who plays Geronimo as a kind of Raskolnikov figure, haunted by guilt for his part in a kidnapping gone horribly wrong. It was not a perfect film, I thought – the pacing was sluggish, half the scenes were dramatically stillborn, and there was no production value to speak of (it was one of Good Harvest's "pito-pito" (seven-seven) films, reportedly made for around 50 to 65 thousand US dollars, shot in seven days (actually around ten), and post-produced for another seven (actually ten to fourteen) – but two things about it stood out: it had an unusually thoughtful tone, and it had a riveting lead actor. Bagatsing was intense yet understated, introverted yet eloquent in suggesting immense amounts of guilt and despair – a major performance, I thought, possibly the best from a Filipino actor in years past (and years since).

Any thoughts of Raskolnikov are hardly coincidental: Dostoevsky is the one writer you think of when you watch Diaz's films. His sense of grand themes, of moments of humanity and depravity informed by a touch of mysticism, are what Diaz is all about. Diaz even gives Geronimo (whose full name is an odd combination of angel and warrior) an infected tooth, a horrific little touch not unlike Smerdyakov's epileptic fits, functioning as a metaphor for the character's inner state (with Smerdyakov, a mental static representing malignant evil; with Geronimo, a lingering pain representing unspoken guilt). Perhaps the most interesting element in Geronimo's character wasn't his guilt so much as his loneliness, his sense of isolation from Filipino society in general – an isolation felt by many a Diaz protagonist, possibly by Diaz himself. The production, hampered by a production budget that could barely convey its reportedly ambitious, two-hundred-pages-plus script, nevertheless managed to be the most impressive debut by a Filipino filmmaker since Raymond Red's *The Eternity* (Ang Magpakailanman) in 1983.

Diaz's next film *Naked Under the Moon* (Hubad sa Ilalim ng Buwan, 1999) is a strange hybrid, the only one of Diaz's features not completely written by him. Diaz started with a script by Suzette Doctolero and with the help of Bong Ramos rewrote the story, turning what should have been a standard melodrama (about a failed priest (Joel Torre) who marries) into yet another existential quest (the priest's daughter (Klaudia Koronel) sleepwalking in the nude, is haunted by memories of being raped). The production, again, was flawed: Klaudia Koronel as the sleepwalking daughter does mostly that throughout most of the film (the actress, a capable comedienne with a body like a walking erotic joke, is wan and lifeless under Diaz's direction). More interesting is the story of the girl's father – who is not only a former priest but also a

cuckolded husband, and who at one point vanishes from sight. The man who leaves family and home, searching – for what, even he isn't sure he knows completely – is a recurring motif in Diaz's films, and possibly represents a number of things: a dissatisfaction with the status quo; a hunger for change and for the unknown; a need to achieve a state of perfection ... a need that even Diaz acknowledges in his films can never be satisfied.

*Burger Boys*, about a group of youths planning a bank robbery – no, actually it's about a group of youths writing a screenplay about a group of youths planning a bank robbery (the original title is *Criminal Games* (Laruang Krimen)) – is reportedly the first film Diaz made with Monteverde's Good Harvest/Regal Films, but the third to have a commercial run (even its release history is paradoxical). It's very possibly Diaz's strangest, and the one that most obviously shows the dearth of an adequate production budget. A subplot concerning a posse pursuing the youth gang, composed of cartoonish grotesques wearing cheap cowboy hats, is embarrassing to watch; on the other hand, casual touches like a father's unfinished statue – an angel with the wings left incomplete – that suddenly comes to life have the haunting quality of Buñuel at his most offhandedly lyrical. The film is too crudely made, both visually and structurally, to be considered a success; rather, it's a vivid, unforgettable failure. Strangely enough, because I had translated the film for the Frankfurt Film Festival's Good Harvest retrospective and received an audiocassette to help in the translation, I realised while listening to the tape that the film plays much better as a radio drama – reveals itself to be an extended prose poem, a fevered dream ...

Diaz's next film, *Batang West Side*, about the killing of a young Filipino-American and the murder investigation that follows, was at five hours the longest Filipino or Southeast Asian film ever made, back in 2001 (there has been a longer since, but more on that later). It's an epic-length picture that, strangely, refuses to act like an epic – no large sets, no big battle sequences, no grand displays of emotion or a sweeping parade of historical events. Instead there is a quiet (the classic Diaz trademark) accumulation of story and characters that, when completed, presents a comprehensive mural of a Filipino-American community – from youngest to oldest, richest to poorest, most sensible to least – in Jersey City, New Jersey.

If a typical Diaz film features a loner-hero who wanders parts unknown on a spiritual quest, Diaz here presents two such loners: murder victim Hanzel Harana (Yul Servo) and investigating officer Detective Juan Mijarez (Joel Torre). Like *The Criminal of Barrio Concepcion*, the basic premise seems inspired by *Crime and Punishment*, only Diaz has blurred the lines even further: Hanzel might be complicit in his own shooting or even committed suicide, while Detective Mijarez may or may not be a righteous guardian of justice and the law.



Hanzel, the film's initial focus, is a classic casualty of the great wave of Filipino migration that has been going on for decades – his mother (Gloria Diaz, in the performance of her career) left Hanzel as a child to work in the United States as a nurse; she falls in love with one of her patients, a rich old man, marries and lives with him, and is caring for his stroke-paralyzed body when she finally brings Hanzel (now a young man) to America to stay with her. Hanzel loves his mother, but cannot stand Bartolo, her lover (the magnificent Art Acuna – a, believe it or not, really nice guy in person); he moves in with his grandfather Abdon (Ruben Pizon) for a while, then lives on his own, renting an apartment with money earned from unknown sources ...

It's perhaps the finest, most fully realised portrait of a Filipino-American youth to date on the big screen. Hanzel and his friends are not your stereotype Filipino-Americans – sexually chaste, clean-cut kids who earn high grades in school and show filial respect to their parents; instead they smoke, brawl, make out, do and push drugs (and in fact “shabu” (crystal meth) use among the young is one of the community's darkest secrets). At the same time he also doesn't give us the usual rebels without a cause – Dolores, Hanzel's girlfriend (Priscilla Almeda, previously known for her soft-core porn films, a revelation here) is a level-headed girl who would rather study than shoot up; Hanzel himself – for a while, at least – attends some classes and learns to use a computer; some of Hanzel's junkie friends hold down jobs, have relationships, and are otherwise funny, likeable people.

Diaz showed unusual sensitivity in portraying adolescents in *Burger Boys*; one character – the young man haunted by his dead father, and his father's unfinished angel sculpture – leapt out of the screen at you he was so vivid, then almost immediately sank back again into the chaos of the film ... but you never forgot the pain and quiet anger on that young face. Servo's Hanzel is that youth reborn, with the time and space to develop into a far more poignant figure – an eternally lost soul, turning from mother to grandfather to the underworld father figure in the hope of finding the love he's never got from any of them (think of his namesake, abandoned by parents in the Grimm fairy tale). Grandfather Abdon comes closest to reaching Hanzel by treating him as an equal, comforting him with his patience, tempting Hanzel with shelf after shelf of literature and knowledge (I love it that Grandfather Abdon's lure is books) – but we already know this promising start is doomed to fail; the film begins, after all, with the discovery of Hanzel's body on the frozen sidewalks of West Side Avenue.

As Hanzel's story unfolds, so does Mijarez's. He's the criminal of Barrio Concepcion in the role of police investigator; the father with an unfinished sculpture; the defrocked priest, returned to speak of images from heaven and hell. He's Hanzel only decades older, with warier,

warier eyes (at one point in the film the two actually bump into each other on West Side Avenue; the resemblance – and differences – between the two are remarkable). The impression develops over the course of the five hours, from hints and clues dropped by Diaz throughout the narrative – how Mijarez likes to call his wife on his cell-phone, but not speak to her; how he tells his therapist unsettling little dreams where nothing happens but the very air is full of unresolved tension; how he sometimes explodes in temperamental fits of anger; how – most disturbing of all – he sometimes just sits there, staring off into space, looking at unseen images that seem either wondrous or horrifying; he can't make up his mind which, exactly. If Servo's performance as Hanzel is the product of innocence and raw talent, Torre's performance as Mijarez is a veteran's, the work of years of observation and imagination fashioning a character that, because of conflicting forces of anger, guilt, and love, finds himself in a state of hopeless equilibrium – hanging suspended between heaven and hell.

But *Batang West Side* is more than just the stories of these two characters plus a constellation of supporting characters – it's Diaz's attempt to ask crucial questions about us Filipinos (Is immigration the great solution that we all make it out to be? Is the family still the central organising unit around which Philippine society is formed? What hope is there for our young, or is there any kind of hope left?); it's his condemnation of and a tribute to the Filipino youth, to their many vices and singular virtues; finally it's a response to a crying need, a correction of a long-time imbalance – a restoration, in effect, of the weight and value of the Filipino soul, accomplished by mulling over the loss of a single life. Yes, Diaz seems to be telling us, a Filipino life is worth this much, at the very least: a five-hour exploration of his life and circumstance and untimely death. This is Diaz's masterpiece, I think, and a great film.

After the long struggle to make *Batang West Side* (at one point the producer had effectively abandoned the project, and Diaz had to scrape together the money to finish it; the film ultimately cost him friends – even his marriage), Diaz went back to Lily Monteverde's Regal Studios to make a commercial film. He was to write an action-packed story-line (military hunt for a rebel leader), use name stars (Mark Anthony Fernandez, MTV Asia VJ Donita Rose), and bring in a finished product of reasonable length (the final running time was 112 minutes).

*Jesus the Revolutionary* (Hesus Rebolusyonyaryo) is a dystopian science-fiction film set nine years in the future. The Philippines has been taken over by a dictator-general, and the Communist party – one of several factions opposing the military regime – is in the act of purging itself. Like Orwell's *1984*, a commentary on Britain at the time of its writing (1948), the film is really a commentary on the Philippines in the year 2002. Manila's streets have



not changed; if anything, they look seedier and more garbage-strewn. They are often deserted; you hear talk of curfews and spot military checkpoints at every other corner. Diaz in effect took his budget constraints – no money for sets, or crowd extras – and turned them into a political point: that Manila in the future will be more of the same, only worse.

Through these streets walks Hesus Mariano – scholar, musician, poet, warrior. He's too quiet and introverted (hallmarks of the Diaz hero) to be an obvious choice for Hope of the Philippines, but Fernandez (son of Filipino action star Rudy Fernandez) plays him with an easy charisma that you imagine can be switched on and off like a blowtorch – when the charisma is on, you can't help saying to yourself: yes, he can lead people to the barricades. Hesus is another of Diaz's journeyman loners, and he wanders the desolate landscape like a time bomb with a troubled mind (not only does it wonder when it should explode, but why, and what's the point of it all anyway?). The film is possibly a working out of Diaz's notions and beliefs about Philippine politics (more of the same, only different) and history (which is cyclical, and tends to repeat itself – the events in the film are based on actual purges that took place within the Philippine party in 1996). The ending can easily be seen as a disappointment; I think it's the film's most daring and ominous conceit, consistent not only with Hesus' character, but with Diaz's philosophy and sensibility overall.

After making what at that point was the longest Filipino (and Southeast Asian) film in history, then following it up with a 'commercial' effort that turned out to be one of the most unconventional science-fiction/action films ever made, what does one do for an encore? For Diaz it was to take footage that he had been working on for some eleven years, shoot additional scenes, and turn it all into a picture almost twice as long as his last two combined. In effect the first film he ever shot has become – has evolved into, if you like – his latest (perhaps one of the more interesting aspects of Diaz's career is the complex and even melodramatic histories of his various productions), and by far (at ten or more hours) the longest.

*Evolution of a Filipino Family* (Ebolusyon ng Isang Pamilyang Pilipino, 2004) covers around fifteen or so years of Philippine history, from before the advent of Martial Law in 1972 to some time after the fall of the Marcos regime in 1986. The title refers to one family but the film actually follows two: the first lives amongst the rice paddies of Gerona, Tarlac and is headed by grandmother Puring (Angie Ferro); the second lives in the mountain forests of Itogon, Benguet Province, headed by Fernando (Ronnie Lazaro).

Linking the two families is the classic Diaz protagonist: loner-wanderer Reynaldo (Elryan de Vera), an abandoned child picked up by Puring's daughter Hilda (Marife Necesito) in the streets of Manila, then brought back to Tarlac after an unspecified incident caused Hilda to lose her mind. Hilda's insanity provokes Puring into complaining bitterly that the woman has brought bad luck to their family, plus a reputation for mental instability; Hilda's brother Kadyo (Pen Medina) defends Hilda and Reynaldo and tells Reynaldo that come what may he regards him as his own blood. After Hilda's death, Reynaldo wanders off to become Fernando's adopted, helping him in his various enterprises – chopping up tree branches for firewood; panning rocky streams for gold; exploring abandoned tunnels for untapped veins of the same rare metal. Puring in a fit of conscience asks Kadyo (who has been in and out of prison for theft) to look for Reynaldo,

hopefully persuade him to come back to the family; in the meantime, Fernando has to confront a larger rival mining gang over exploration rights to the tunnels ...

The film is less complex and yet more experimental than *Batang West Side*: while the running time is much longer, we know less about the characters because they talk and interact less (considering the stretches of silence between lines of dialogue, *Evolution* might be considered a silent film). Perhaps the most unbelievable aspect of the whole production is that Diaz was able to bring the picture in on a budget of two million pesos – just under the budget of *The Criminal of Barrio Concepcion*, or \$40,000 for a ten-hour film, so it may be forgivable, even expected, that the production suffer from serious flaws. Perhaps not the under-lighting – parts of the film go on in almost complete darkness – because these portions add a touch of tension to the film, a touch of mystery (you know something's happening and you're not sure what, but you badly want to find out). Diaz probably wanted to shoot everything in 16mm – the footage he did has a harsh beauty – but there just wasn't enough money for that, so he settled on video. Which should have been fine, but unfortunately Diaz couldn't make the rationale for doing scenes in either 16mm or video consistent – what should have been 16mm flashbacks set in the '70s are sometimes in video (presumably because Diaz found he needed to shoot new scenes, and couldn't scrape up the raw footage to do it).

It's interesting to compare the 16mm footage to the video: where the earlier footage uses dramatic angles and shadows, the video's lighting and framing is more serene, more confident; even in terms of visual style, Diaz's film shows a process of evolution.

Perhaps more troubling is Diaz's use of historical footage: a *coup d'état* from the Aquino administration, for example, precedes the 1986 EDSA revolution that brought Aquino to power. Diaz is presumably showing us someone's memories of historical events, and of course memories aren't necessarily recalled in chronological order, but it isn't clear whose memories these are – most of the characters seem barely aware of what's going on outside their immediate barrio – and why such memory is being evoked at such a point in time. Diaz might also be trying to create parallels between historical events and peoples' lives (the way Visconti did with *The Leopard*, or Bertolucci with *1900*), but you see precious little connection between events in Manila and events in either Tarlac or the Benguet Province. When, for example, Ferdinand Marcos declares Martial Law on television, it isn't clear why these folks' lives are going to turn out for the worse – you see guerrillas, and you see the military rounding up barrio folk, but these could have been going on (and did, actually) even before Marcos' announcement. In fact, the worst events to occur to the two families aren't caused by historical forces so much as by immediate ones, by the people around them – a group of drunken neighbours, or a gang of rival miners ...

What's needed is a way to explicate these connections, to maybe have some character explain why this or that event has consequences within their lives, so many miles away. Rey Ventura's rebel leader Ka Harim would have been the perfect choice – early on he's seen explaining a few things to Kadyo, and presumably he would have gone on explaining things to Puring, or Reynaldo, or one of her granddaughters – but Ventura tragically died in 2004. Diaz may also have felt that too much spoken exposition would ruin the film's air of mystery (one might call this the Kubrick Defense) – but I think a balance



could have been struck between being too obscure and being too explicit; *Batang West Side*, after all, had room for several long speeches, all of which were quite informative, and some of which were downright zany, even hilarious.

I feel ambivalent about the use of Lino Brocka (played with remarkable vigour by film critic/iconoclast Gino Dormiendo) as a crucial plot point. Not in my wildest dreams could I imagine Marcos finding Brocka threatening enough to actually plot anything against him; on the other hand, that Marcos might find Brocka at all worrisome would so tickle the vanity of any film enthusiast – cinema can change the world, yes! – that it's difficult to find fault with Diaz's conceit. Plus there is the possibility that the plotters are in fact deranged (a charge that could be levelled against all of us enthusiasts), so that this subplot is in fact an elaborate prank on Diaz's part, a reminder to all of us to take ourselves seriously, but not too seriously.

Overall, I much prefer *Batang West Side* – Diaz's previous film, I felt, had better characterisation, was more visually consistent, and was for me (to use Diaz's favourite phrase) more organic. More, I would argue that Diaz's protagonist and his method of storytelling are more at home in *Batang West Side*'s milieu than in *Evolution*'s – the alienated wanderer-hero, who looks askance or at least sceptically at family relationships and rootedness, has the temperament to emigrate rather than cultivate. It's possible to have such a character as Reynaldo, wandering around the edges of one's portrait of the countryside – which is what he does here – it's only that I find his character more natural, more inevitable, more – again, that word – organic in the former film than the latter. Diaz has spoken of *Evolution* as being some kind of a prequel to *Batang West Side*, and I see signs of his design; I just don't think the design is completely coherent. *Evolution* is an impressive accomplishment, a work of art created despite near-impossible odds (including, at one point, the loss of an entire cut of the film due to a computer disk drive crash) – but it still feels like a work of progress that could do with more tinkering, more refining, perhaps even additional footage ...

That said, I'd say *Evolution*, even in its present state, is a beautiful work of cinema, and an indispensable viewing. If its themes of history pressing against the lives of ordinary people could use further clarification, Diaz's inclusion of certain footage nevertheless creates considerable impact: the chilling calmness in which Marcos reads Proclamation 1081; the awe-inspiring shot of EDSA as seen from a helicopter, lenses sweeping across miles of people clogging the wide highway (in defiance of the soldiers and tanks surrounding them); the chaos of farmers running as soldiers strafe their ranks. Much of recent Philippine history is dramatic, even moving, especially when seen on the big screen.

More than the documentary footage, though, *Evolution* is perhaps the greatest, most comprehensive attempt ever made to capture the quality and flavor of provincial life. From rice paddy to highland forests, from harvest to planting, from merciless noon heat to the absolute dark of the night-time countryside, Diaz shoots it all, and more, shoots enough of it that we get to savour the kind of measureless existence people live within the various landscapes. Some women walk down a path, sit to rest, get up again to continue their trek; a pair of boys wrestle, get tired, stop, wrestle some more – this is life in the provinces, and if we city folk think we'd go crazy trying to live like this (much less watch it on the big screen) we had

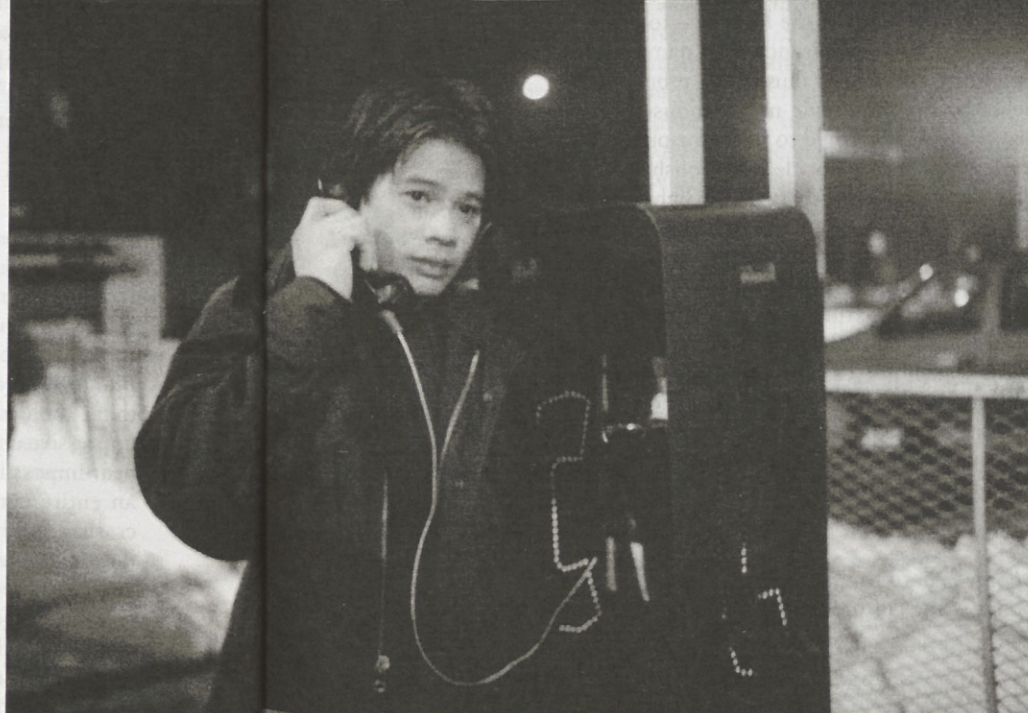
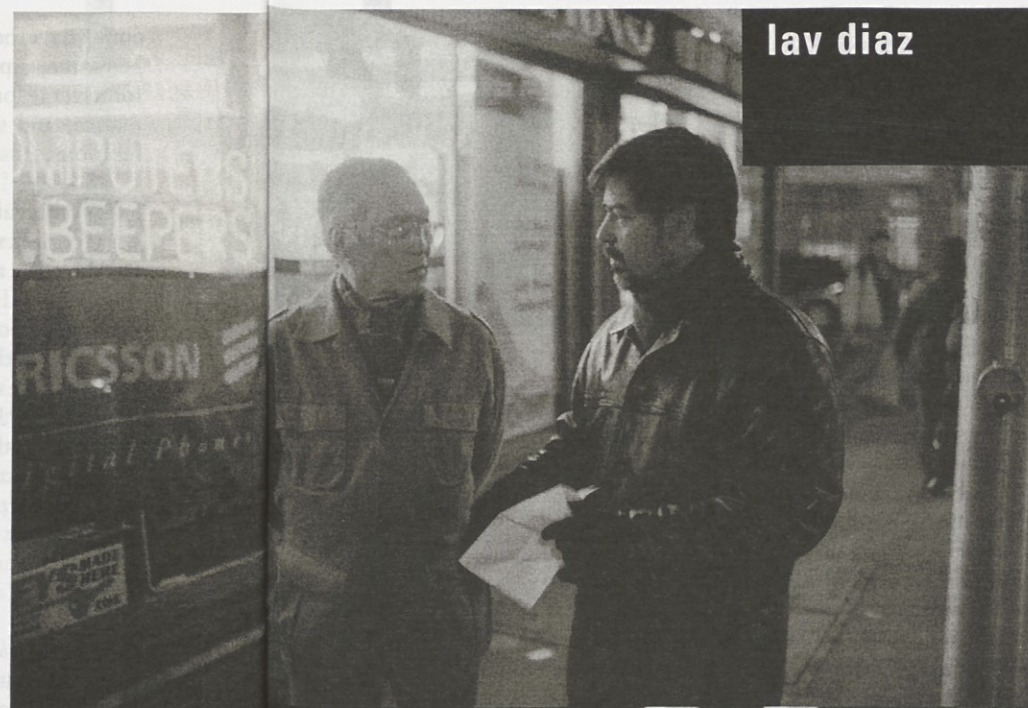
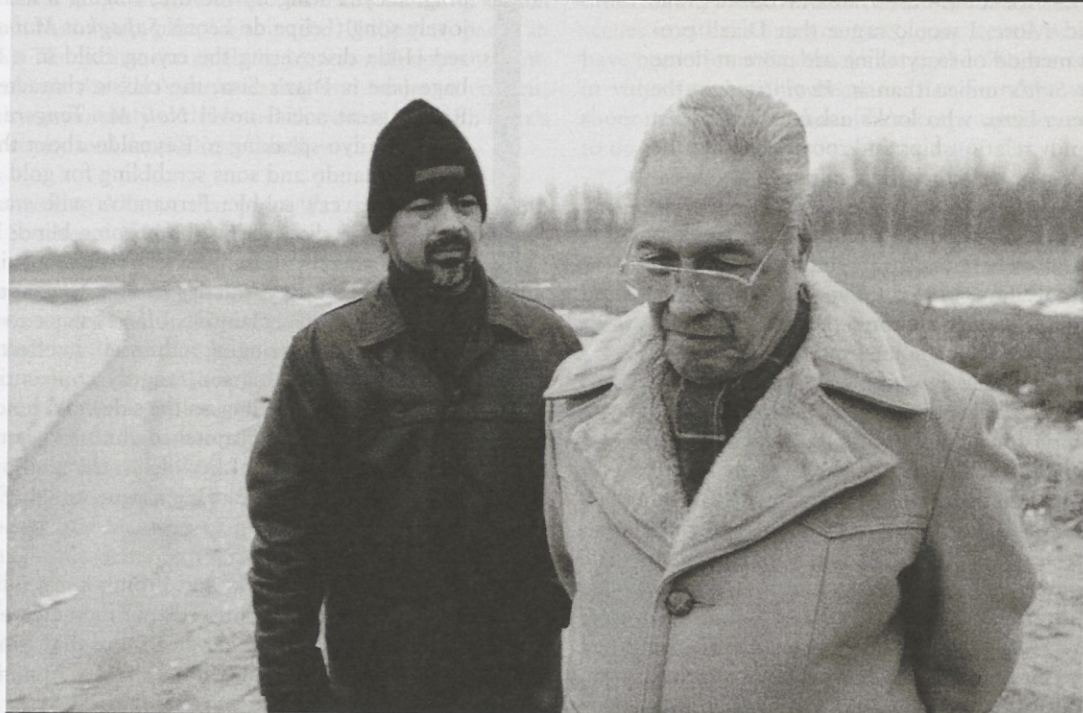
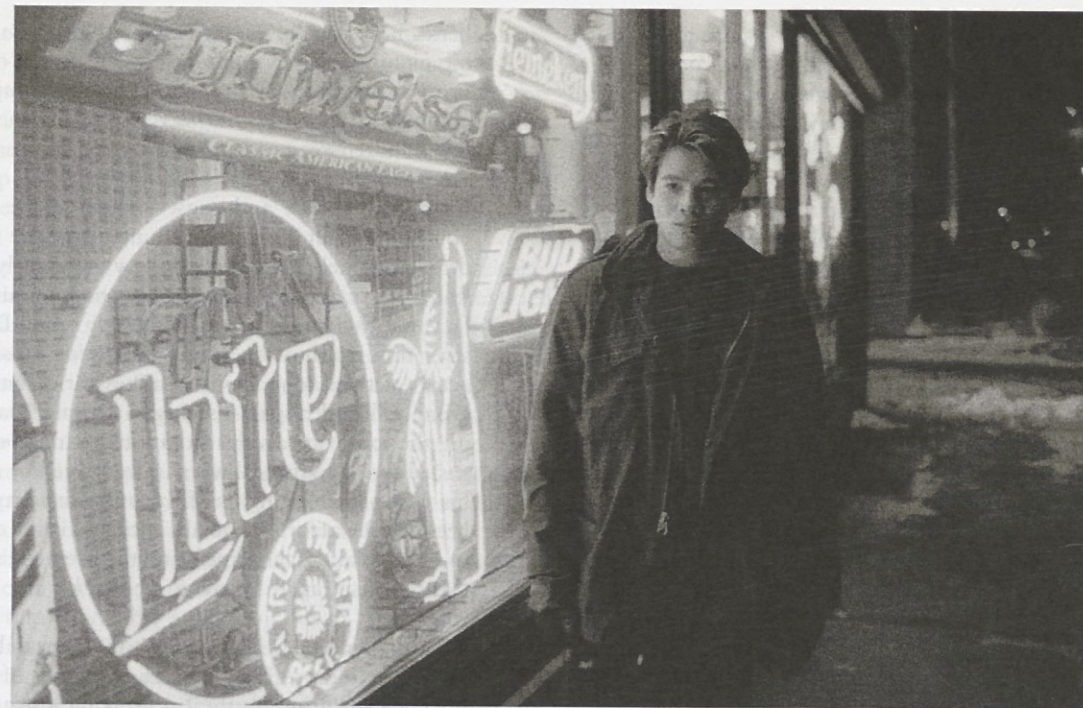
better brace ourselves: civilisation, when you look at the big picture, is a mere blip on the big screen of existence. From living this way to living in a modern apartment to going back to living this way is possibly the space of a few hundred years – maybe less.

It's not all silence and angst – much of the melodrama you find in Filipino films is shunted by Diaz to the radio dramas, which the people follow religiously. Here you find tragedy and horror, sexuality and humour galore; the fact that the stories are make-believe – and Diaz emphasises this by showing us the recording sessions, where actors with headphones and mikes shriek and weep and groan, all in deadpan – seems to liberate Diaz into writing the most outrageous situations (at one point it's suggested that a hysterical woman was raped by a radio). It's his way of reminding us of the huge disparity in attitude between the actors – who are at times visibly embarrassed to be mouthing such tripe – and the listeners, who take all this seriously, as if it were gospel truth.

Into this world – mostly quiet, sometimes absurd, occasionally violent – Diaz injects moments of unbearable poignancy: Puring by the fire, singing a heartbreakingly lovely song (Felipe de Leon's *Sapagkat Mahal Kita*); crazed Hilda discovering the crying child in a heap of garbage (she is Diaz's Sisa, the classic character from Jose Rizal's great social novel *Noli Me Tangere* (Touch Me Not)); Kadyo speaking to Reynaldo about their relationship; Fernando and sons scrabbling for gold amongst the dried-up river's rubble; Fernando's wife standing up to cook dinner, discovering she is going blind; Kadyo coming to Puring, being sent away to lifelong exile. Kadyo in prison, singing Rey Valera's *Kung Kailangan Mo Ako* (If you need me) in a plaintive, off-key voice to a cell full of sleeping convicts (singing to himself, in effect). Fernando, desperate to find his son, angrily confronting the rival miners. Kadyo crawling on the sidewalk, holding his side, his moment of agony stretched almost to eternity. Puring, all the photographs of her life scattered about her, looking sadly upon one. Diaz's epilogue, titled: "The Story of Two Mothers ..."

It's not a perfect work, and I think a not fully developed one, but if only for this series of moments – fleeting, yet unforgettable – I feel it was a more than worthwhile experience, watching this film. •





lav diaz

THE AESTHETIC CHALLENGE OF BATANG WEST SIDE

*Batang West Side* is five hours long.

For many this is an issue. A huge issue, and a headache for many here in the Philippines. But not an issue if we remember that there are small and large canvasses; brief ditties and lengthy arias; short stories and multi-volume novels; the haiku and *The Iliad*. This should be the end of the argument.

It's too long, people can't take it; it's too heavy, people can't handle it; distributors won't pick it up, theaters won't screen it. Wrong. There are theaters that will accept this film. People will watch long films. I believe the masses have the ability to transcend the standards they normally use in apprehending the arts. Allow works of proportion and beauty to exist, and we will develop an audience with philosophies lofty and profound enough to properly appreciate the art of cinema. People will watch and enjoy *Batang West Side*. Theaters will open with this film.

This I firmly believe.

I never intended to make *Batang West Side* five hours long. I simply followed the cutting and joining together of various scenes according to the script I shot. The original script entitled "West Side Avenue, JC" (Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature winner, 1997) was 135 pages long, with 126 scenes. A revised copy (year 2000) that I shot reached a hundred pages and 208 scenes.

I thought the film would run three hours, but during editing I saw that it would run longer and I didn't try to alter this condition; I allowed it to flow naturally. I allowed it to become organic, to acquire a life of its own; this is my philosophy when cutting, when finishing a film. I don't bend to the conventions of editing, or of length; I refused to follow the dictates of industry. There has been no manipulation to force me to conform to tradition, to what has been done before. I've studied the length many times in order to change it, but the five-hour version remains solid – according to the dictates of aesthetics, story flow, and wholeness of vision. I refuse to compromise the integrity of the work to please limiting, emasculating "tradition".

I explained my position to the producers. After many discussions, discourses, and debates that at times led to raised voices and heated arguments, they finally relented, finally believed. They understood that they must not give short shrift to our vision, to abandon our responsibility; that after everything we've gone through and struggled against to finish the film, it would be a great wrong to compromise now. It would be a betrayal of those who sacrificed so much, so long, to compromise – a betrayal of the film, which has acquired a life of its own.

Ever since the introduction of film as the newest, most popular medium of expression, Hollywood has been a tremendous influence on Philippine cinema. Cinema was one of the imperialist tools the Americans brought with



them when they bought the Philippines from the Spaniards (or, conversely, when the Spaniards sold the Philippines to them) back in 1898; it quickly became an element of everyday Filipino life. Due to the length of their stay here (they finally left, along with their military bases in 1992), it may safely be assumed that the Filipino sensibility has been thoroughly colonized by America.

And because of this, Filipinos lost the chance to rise by their own bootstraps; colonization wrecked the Filipinos' dream of establishing a nation molded according to the details in their own unique vision. From the perspectives of politics and history, the Filipinos lost the struggle for freedom – freedom of nationhood, freedom of livelihood and sensibility, freedom of the arts, psychological freedom and freedom of any and every kind – when they were colonized, bought and sold. Add to this the experience of hegemony and war (Japan), dictatorship and terrorism (Marcos) – after all has been said and done, the Filipinos have developed a “loser's culture,” the end result of surviving their long and sadly complex history.

It's clear that what is needed is a profound cultural movement to restore this injury.

Cinema can do a great deal towards accomplishing this.

In Hollywood culture, entertainment and profit are the larger purpose of cinema. Entertainment for the audience; profit for the many producers, directors, actors, film workers and movie theater owners. The same holds true in the Philippines. That is why the Filipino's appreciation of cinema is shallow and base. In their eyes, cinema is no different from a carnival. It will take a long and involved process to change this perception, especially with Hollywood films still dominating Filipino theaters.

(Once in a while in Hollywood though, there will emerge someone different, an Orson Welles or John Cassavetes that without fear or hesitation will move against the flow of things. If ever there was a vivid or incendiary flash of integrity in the art of filmmaking in Hollywood from then until now, it was Welles and Cassavetes.)

Most Hollywood films are ninety minutes or a hundred minutes long, rarely more than two hours. We have become used to this convention, this belief, that cinema should be so long, and no more. This has become the standard measurement of theater owners and producers, so that more people can come and watch per day, and the grosses can consequently be higher.

### **the blockbuster culture/ the garbage culture**

Hollywood developed the blockbuster culture, the profit culture.

It's only right to admire a profitable film because the cost of filmmaking is so high. It's only right that there are businessmen in film – they are an important part of the industry.

### **no illusions**

The film has no illusions of heroism. We have no intention of bragging that we are special. We simply wish to contribute to the development and growth of the long

awaited new direction of Philippine Cinema. We wish to help (even just a little) in its overthrow, and ultimate change.

At the same time, we are also unafraid to create a different impression among people; it's all part of the process. The Philippines has been left too far behind in world cinema (meaning not Hollywood but WORLD CINEMA, where there can be found the startling new works of Iranian and Taiwanese filmmakers). It is a new age, and we need courage to innovate and create. We need to begin developing a National Cinema, a cinema that will help create a responsible Filipino people.

That is the vision that inspired *Batang West Side*.

It's not just the length. Some will express surprise (or express more fitting if less printable sentiments) at various elements of this film, especially the use of digital video re-shot on a TV monitor to 'dirty' the footage – to create lines, crudity, a roughened appearance. The damaged texture is a metaphor for damaged illusions, a rebuke of the long-held belief by the Philippine movie industry that a film has to be clean and polished to be fit for public screening. Not only is this movie not clean or polished, eighty percent of the film was shot with available light only.

### **radical**

A film this long is radical for Filipino sensibilities, even down to the “damaged” texture and story structure, “radical” because this is something totally new to them. Only a radical sensibility can provoke the longed-for change in Philippine Cinema. Only through such a sensibility can Philippine Cinema acquire the proper vision, be made whole. Only thus can Philippine Cinema, long-proclaimed “dead,” be resurrected once more.

### **culture**

*Batang West Side* is hard to take at first glance, if our basis for watching is the culture and rhetoric of Philippine Cinema.

The habit or convention of watching films constitutes a culture of its own, meaning there is an experience, a whole tradition, a perspective of an entire community or society, a sensibility created that has become characteristic of individuals in that society.

This is the objective of *Batang West Side* – the examination of the Filipino consciousness. Why are the Philippines the way they are now? The Filipino people? Philippine cinema? This aesthetic goal can be achieved through analysis of the comprehensive form (length/structure/appearance) and context (word/flesh/vision) of this film, and of other films to come. Let's not be contained and limited to convention and formula; we need to probe and probe, to explode the wall of corruption. The perspective is ever historical, and ever advancing.

### **change**

Ultimately, the objective of *Batang West Side* is simple – change. Whoever wishes to hinder this film is an enemy of change. Whoever is an enemy of change is an enemy of Philippine Cinema. •

Manila, December 2002

Translated from Tagalog to English by Noel Vera



## BATANG WEST SIDE: THE SPACE OF ABSENCE AND THE SITE OF RESISTANCE

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*“Cognition, like culture, is organic, where meaning can flow without imposing manipulative forces or elements. Humankind’s capacity to grasp meaning is organic too. Cinema can create this culture. But the real power of cinema comes when there is honesty in the work. You can use or discard all the theories, philosophies and verities that have sprung out of this great modern art but I believe that its greatest value will be that of honesty. And qualifying honesty must always be on the level of responsibility. The search for the truth must always go hand in hand with responsibility.”*

Lav Diaz

A deserted night street, covered with a few inches of dirty snow, showered with the cold light of the street lamps ...; and there at the very bottom of this image a human figure arises from afar, wandering in its long and slow arriving past the patient eye of the camera ... This scene, so saturated with loneliness and emptiness that it hurts to the bone, represents not only the initial but also the most frequently used image Filipino director Lav Diaz confronts us with in his in-depth and extensive investigation into the unenviable reality of his people’s diaspora in the North American Jersey City: *Batang West Side* (2002). The film, which aroused the interested film public with its epic structure and monumental design, starts out as a classic whodunit – with a body found lying on the pavement of West Side Avenue and a detective handling the case in a committed and meticulous manner. The victim of an unknown perpetrator is Hanzel Harana (Yul Servo), a barely 21-year-old Filipino immigrant who had but two years before come to stay with his mother in “the promised land”. The detective is his countryman, Juan Mijarez (Joel Torre), who is not in the least left indifferent by the suffering, the lack of perspective and the tragic fate of his kinsmen. The death of this young man, in a deserted street late at night with no credible witnesses, turns out to be a complex, Rashomon case, whose investigation is with every new actor ever more removed from the rules of the genre and is slowly turning into a complex psycho-sociological drama with the main – symbolic – protagonist becoming the Filipino man himself.<sup>1</sup> Namely, in his fourth feature film Lav Diaz concentrates above all on the question of the (lost) identity of the Filipino man. He is our contemporary, placed in the now, which spares but the few wealthiest people in the world, and in a diasporal environment, in a kind of paradigmatic community where its inhabitants’ basic identity problems crystallize in a concentrated form. Namely, an individual abroad is never only a bearer of the subjective social role but is always also a representative of his people. Through the investigation procedure we together with Mijarez come to meet with Hanzel’s family members living in the USA; with his mother (Gloria Diaz), his grandfather (Ruben Tizon) and – only by the way – his father, who comes utterly distort from the Philippines only to collect his son’s body. Besides the mourning, frustrated representatives of the divided family the detective’s interrogations introduce us to Hanzel’s girlfriend, his closest friends and a number of individuals, be they Hanzel’s acquaintances and allies or his enemies – the key suspects of the case. The colourful collection of actors and companions of the tragical death soon proves to be a precisely conceived matrix of typical characters by which Diaz carefully sets up a paradigmatic structure of Filipino society as a whole. The selected protagonists, their relationships and their role and positioning in the unfolding of this complex narration bear evidence that nothing is left to chance and that the director exercises control over the extensive subject-matter of the five-hour film narration with incredible ease, certainty and confidence in himself and the medium of his expression. In this narration Diaz’ subjective *auteur* vision comes to its full expression alongside his unflinching belief that an endeavour to restore the severed link between man and world is the pre-

condition of creativity and the overcoming of the manipulative nature of the film medium itself: “... in creation, you will have a thousand and one options that represent the truths of your process assuming you, the maker, are the one who makes the decisions. It is a process that would culminate in an eventual dynamic between the film and the viewer, and the viewer and the world. And if you believe that your work can truly be elevated in an aesthetic domain and that it can sustain itself, then its potential for meaning is vast and limitless so that it would be complete.” (Diaz in conversation with Wee)<sup>2</sup> In his awareness of a film’s self-existence Diaz comes very close to those conceptions in modern discussions of creativity that assign to a work of art a privileged place of the only thing in the world that sustains itself: “[Art] preserves and is preserved in itself (quid juris?), although actually it lasts no longer than its support and materials – stone, canvas, chemical colour, and so on (quid facti?). /.../ The work of art is being of sensations and nothing else: it exists in itself.” (Deleuze, Guattari 1994: 163–64) In Diaz’ case the aspect of self-positing is at the same time a principle of an entirely concrete creative process – by letting the shot scenes come alive in all their greatness, a film rises above its subject-matter, is established as a whole and stands up on its own – independently and necessarily: “I couldn’t do anything anymore, that’s the work, that’s it.” (Diaz)<sup>3</sup> The feeling of the necessity of the sequence of events is the driving force of the inner dynamics of *Batang West Side*, where the nature of police work itself reveals a network of relations running much deeper and entangled more fatally than it first appears in view of the seeming outer pragmatic looseness. In such a consonant composition the only “dissonant element” of the film seems to be Mijarez’ – accidental – meeting with a documentary filmmaker who, with his camera, is on the lookout for the truth of the Filipino people’s life in diaspora. “The camera will catch plenty of stories. Some even true, I hope”, is his motto in decisively opposing the detective’s initial aversion, which at the end of the film – when the two meet again and at first glance surprisingly bond – brings us to the revelation of one of the key enigmas of the film. But the afore mentioned tight composition, based on Diaz’ efforts to search for truth according to the valuation criteria of an artist’s honesty and his unflinching responsibility for man and world, is of the kind that is not supported by “the laws of physics” or – in our case – by the normative controls of the established ways of film production. It is held together by the effort to become authentically cinematic; to bring into accord the inner means supporting the work of art and that binding notion of “the ultimate cinema”, put forward by Diaz’ great role model Andrey Tarkovsky: “I see chronicle as the ultimate cinema; for me it is not a way of filming but a way of reconstructing, of reconstructing life.” (Tarkovsky 1994: 64–65)<sup>4</sup> And in accordance with life itself the basic conception of *Batang West Side* – its need to reconstruct the life of the murdered young man – is permeated by the tragic determinations of death and bitter memory. Its key sound dimension is therefore a collection of cries, sighs, shivers, (self-)accusations and whispers ..., its predominant emotional dimension is a combination of the feelings of grief, fear, loss, desperation and solitude ..., its elementary spatiality is a claustrophobic series of ghetto streets and temporary housings suffocating one even in the case of a lavish rich suburb villa ..., its central temporality is the momentariness of the opening letting the past emerge – both recent (the last two years of Hanzel’s life) and, above all, the time of Martial Law as one of the most traumatic periods of Filipino history ... The various dimensions of Diaz’ accomplished narration continuously flow into each other in a permanent ellipsis and, at the same time, a constant – narrative – superimposition. Ellipsis, as the actual characteristic narrative method of *Batang West Side*, as well as double exposure (which does not figure directly but as a specific form of double encoding, giving expression to the dramatical



function specifying the essential determiners of Diaz' narration: the co-existence of two levels of reality – concrete physical and imaginary, non-material) is a figure that besides its primary narrative function always conveys also the heterogeneity of film time.

This pervasion of time can be clearly seen already in the prologue of *Batang West Side* – the starting ten-minute exposition ending with a murder of a young Filipino as the initial plot set-up ... “I grew without a father. I have a father, but my memories of him are all from when I was only seven years old. His image remains incomplete in me save for the rare picture my mother kept and for brief memories of him taking care of me. When I was seven, he left. My mother wept for a long time waiting, than looking for him. It almost drove her mad.”

These are words in the off field underlying the introductory sequence of the film, in which from the depth of the frame, along a deserted night street, an at first barely noticeable figure of a staggering, evidently “absent” young man slowly approaches. In the scene, filmed as a patient long take in full shot, which is one of the most typical ways Diaz shoots exteriors, we follow the protagonist – in whom we shall recognize Hanzel Harana, a soon-to-be victim and subject of a police investigation – up to the immediate vicinity of the spot, about to become the place of his death. A cross cut takes us to a dream-like, breath-taking black and white scene in the Filipino countryside where grief consumes both a child and his desperate mother as well as a grown up man sobbing on the shoulders of a young man, collecting his falling teeth into his hand ... Cutting back to a man dozing off in a parked car and the sound of a far off shot waking him, reveals that it was him we have just seen in the dream – i.e., detective Juan Mijarez, who obviously dozed off while on a stake-out. Mijarez diligently writes down his dreams and then checks whether his nightmare (teeth falling out in a dream supposedly foretell death) harmed anyone. He calls the hospital where his mother is lying, connected to machines keeping her alive. Learning she is fine, he calls his wife, who he lives separate from and has not called in two years, to check on his two sons. Before leaving the stake-out scene he receives a message from his partner about a murdered Filipino youth on West Side Avenue. When he arrives at the scene of the crime he recognizes in the victim Hanzel, whom he did not know personally but who was familiar to him from the indispensable “inventory” of the streets. (“I’m familiar with Hanzel Harana. I always see him at West Side Ave. One time I bumped into him”, the detective recalls in inner monologue.) It is exactly this inner monologue as a particular kind of voice-over – proving to be a standard method of Diaz’ introspection – and the visual reconstruction of the moment when the policeman and the young man bump into each other that give the whole its specific meaning of a crucial scene. Not only because of the fact that this is the only scene in the entire film in which Diaz, as an emphasis, uses both slow-motion and re-play at the same time, but also because it introduces the principle of retrospective reconstruction as the key narrative strategy of *Batang West Side*. It is clear now that the introductory monologue did not speak of Hanzel’s childhood (though his situation was exactly the same save him growing up without his mother), that it was detective Mijarez stressing his father’s absence and it is therefore he who at the very beginning proves to be the central (individual) protagonist of the film. It becomes clear also that the shot waking Mijarez from his nightmare meant the moment of Hanzel’s death. “Dissonance” between the visual and acoustic dimension of the scenes, on the one side, and on the other, the stressing of elements explicitly talking about the nature of film time – the sound of the shot for example has the function of a kind of acousmatic quilting point – are factors indicating that the passing between different time levels is the basic stylistic bravura of *Batang West Side*. At the same time the images of the sketched prologue material acquire a characteristic saturation with meaning, at first coming off more or less as one-dimensional, because of their ascetic visualization, but in the – subsequent or retroactive – contextualization within the whole they reveal all their multiplicity of meaning. Such a complex structure, with all its registers of multiplicity, coming to its full the very first few moments, is a sign of an ambitious aesthetic conception giving itself over to organicity wherein the key emphasis crystallizes through aspects of temporality.

As mentioned before, one of the fundamental aesthetic elements of Diaz’ film articulation is the long take, i.e., the sequence shot, and specifically, as he himself points out, the long take in real time.<sup>5</sup> Between its two

most common variants, the stationary or quasi-stationary long take and its mobile counterpart, the author favours the first. This is quite understandable if we take as a presupposition that it is the principles of the first that give the director an opportunity for “*integrity and patient intensity of his gaze*” (Le Fanu). These are precious elements of liberating the gaze, embellishing Diaz’ endeavours for an authentically cinematic image – such as abides in the binding principle of Andrey Tarkovsky: “*The image becomes authentically cinematic when (among other things) not only does it live within time, but time also lives within it, even within each separate frame.*” (Tarkovsky 1994: 68) With the patient arranging of everyday scenes in their basic time/space determinations – as a kind of observation “*of life’s facts within time, organised according to the pattern of life itself*” (Tarkovsky) – the author takes up a committed task of according the viewer’s film experience to the immediate experience of his own ordinariness. In putting everything on the presence of time as the fundamental “tension” of the shot, steadily persisting in its slow pace, putting forward the feeling of duration even when the “narrative logic” of a whodunit would dictate a dynamical build up of the visual pyrotechnics of lightening montage cuts, a specific relationship with the viewer is being established. Submitting to duration, necessary in order to establish the tension of the gaze that in his artistic integrity Diaz strives for, is a (pre)condition for opening up the viewer’s perception – for his letting the filmmaker captivate him with his gaze. Such a mobilizing of the gaze – attainable through different film techniques – is intensified with the stylistics of long takes mostly when this is a means of those aspects of essentialization that reflect in a tendency towards presence as such.<sup>6</sup> With the strict intensification of screen existence in the scenes of the simple moments of everyday life (where narrative time is usually prolonged and diegetic nullified), the reactualization of the interest in the ordinariness of life comes to its full expression, wherein the merely apparent banality of man’s everyday experience deservedly comes under a detailed investigation ... His conscious and uncompromising focus on life in its immediacy places Diaz in a constructive dialogue with some important stands of contemporary film art: On one side, he comes close to elements of contemporary minimalism, which carefully exposing the social emptiness of a common man’s everyday and focusing on the here and now, reveals above all aspects of individual desolation – the consequences of catastrophic social “development”. With re-directing its interest to immediate experience, minimalist art comes to clear stands on the nature of reality. Its essentialization is reflected in its apparent simplicity, as a result of a strict focus – the elimination of all superfluous factors. It is a process of careful distillation and concentration wherein “*a sort of crystallized abundance*” (Motte) is expressed. Minimalist art is not simplified and obscured but it actively transforms the very centre of current values: “*it locates profound experience in ordinary experience*”. (Serota, Francis) In view of the correspondence between Diaz’ creative efforts and certain minimalist elements, we cannot talk about his visual asceticism as a reductionism or nihilism, on the contrary, it can be considered as a principle of substantialization bringing to its full expression above all the in-depth interest in presence as such. With its artistic activity turns again towards the questions of perception, which means there also comes to a reconsideration of the subject. On the other side, a resonance of the current new realistic initiatives all over the globe, most notably perhaps the creative approaches of French new realism, can be sensed in Diaz’ coming close to the throb of reality. The most prominent place in French new realism belongs to the so called realism of proximity (“*un réel de proximité*”), reflecting above all in the “*documentary style of the observation*” (Powrie) and in the thought-through selection of a film’s subject matter: individuals or social groups the director knows thoroughly. The film treatment itself is not an indirect rendition of an imagined experience, but rather the reality of an individual being endangered by the “achievements” of brutal capitalism coincides with the activity of the author who is himself often explicitly engaged in identifying and actualizing the pressing problems of socio-cultural reality. The characteristic new realistic elements of *Batang West Side* can be considered in view of the Brechtian conception of realism as an uncompromising “probing of reality”, originating from a need for the reconstruction of phenomena, penetrating the mere surface of things as a kind of speculum allowing us to probe the world. In doing this, it takes no notice of the set rules, “chlichés” of opinion; Brechtian “*... idea of realism is not a purely artistic and formal category, but rather governs the relationship of the work of art to reality itself, categorizing a*



particular stance towards it.” (Jameson 1980: 205). At the same time the radical rejection or even undermining of conventionality presents an obvious manifestation of progressive film. Progressive in the context of a definition by Robert Philip Kolker, who stresses it is all about “... *cinema that invites emotional response and intellectual participation, that is committed to history and politics and an examination of culture, that asks for the commitment of its audience; a cinema that offers ways to change, if not the world, at least the way we see it.*” (Kolker 2001: 2) This illumination gives a wider contextualization and with it an “outer” argumentation to the director’s statement, which we dare take as a universal “programme declaration”, as his creative *credo*, wherein he decidedly emphasizes: “... *that the foundation of a truthful work should be honesty and responsibility. My struggle lies here: my so-called vérité or aesthetic stand.*” (Diaz in conversation with Wee)<sup>7</sup> Even in view of Diaz’ exciting concurrence with the most actual of present times it is by no means surprising that in his “programme guidelines” there echo many principles from renowned chapters in film history, e.g., the postulate of “the artist’s responsibility” as conceived by Andrey Tarkovsky in the homonymous chapter in *Sculpting in Time*, where he emphasizes that: “... *the more he [the artist] aspires to a realistic account, the greatest his responsibility for what he makes.*” (Tarkovsky 1994: 184) In line with the committed correspondence to certain characteristics of contemporary film searchings, defined above all by the awareness of the mutual responsibility of us all in the world and to the world – which is the precondition of an active partaking in the shaping of its structure – we can consider Diaz’ conception and expression of film time also as an opposition to certain tendencies in the “modernizing” conception of temporality caused by a massive progress in new media technologies. It is exactly the specifics of the long take with reference to the question of real time aesthetics that have been decisively reactualized due to the concord with some of the important current discussions raising the questions of change in the treatment of the real (time) conditioned by new technologies.<sup>8</sup> The notion of real time, moving first from cinematic perception of continuity to the TV conception of “liveness”, had culminated in the computer time of instantaneity, and is now through digitalization coming back to film in the universal form of special effects. In the unconstrained process of technological progress, in which the question of reality moves right along the temporal axis, the insistence on articulating time such as is made possible by the long take is perceived as a kind of an oppositional praxis. It is a form of resistance to the present which, placing everything on the presence of time (in pure form), opposes the new-technology tendencies towards “an erasure of memory and history”.<sup>9</sup> It is exactly history and memory (as we have already mentioned and will see later on) that are among the key factors of Diaz’ artistic enlightenment project; his organic tendency towards the redemption of the Filipino soul, accurately captured in the form of his binding principle: “... *I formulated my thesis that true cinema can redeem the Filipino soul.*”

Though we assigned to the long take in real time a primary place in the aesthetic conception by which Diaz establishes inner continuity and quality of a particular scene – “*For it is the continuous time, the real time in the long take which allows for the possibility of contingency, the unforeseen, the unexpected, in the cinema.*” (Doane) – we must point out that *Batang West Side* is in a chronological sense a most non-continuous and non-linear work. The present of its diegesis is suspended throughout with longer or shorter time jumps (as indicated by the above description of the key points of the prologue). The central narrative line of the police investigation into Hanzel’s death – representing the temporal anchor of diegetic present – is subject to constant digressions with which Diaz explores the possibility of accessing the truth about the young man’s life. This is then also supposed to help reveal the truth about his death. The story of a short-lived “diasporal experience” of the young Filipino man comes to life in a certain narrative stratification of different time levels taking place parallel to the investigation into his death. The dispersed fragments of truth thus return to their original moment in a form of concentric undulation. And at the same time death itself opens up aspects of the past: on one side, in way of mourning, which in the memories of loved ones conjures up time past, and on the other, in a colorful series of manifold truths left by Hanzel’s presence on the face of the earth, among his fellow man. Diaz does not focus merely on the grieving family members and those closest to Hanzel, who with his death

immerse in memory and self-interrogation looking for their share of the responsibility, an equally thorough investigation is also directed at the main suspects as well as the detective himself in whom the death of his countryman arouses a series of painful remembrances of his own – obviously traumatic – past. Each protagonist Diaz introduces into the whole not only brings his individual “story” but is also the bearer of a certain period or (is the victim) of tragical events in the history of the Philippine people. “*The story, its presence, is only a reason for memory and reflection. On the history of the Philippine people in the years covered by Batang West Side: it is hidden in the characters – firstly as an individual, secondly as a collective memory/fiction –, who are projected into epically extended spaces of time in almost every scene; the memories as well as the speculations on the murdered young man always – be the road ever so winding – lead (back) to the Philippines in time of the Marcos’ regime, which turned the richest nation of South Asia into the biggest poorhouse of the region, its only export goods now being people.*” (Möller 2005: 6) First among the narrative strategies enabling the author to conjure the past and materialize it in the present is the elliptical loosening of logical connections of ordered time sequence, the connections of cause and effect, successions or the linear sequence of events. The basic stylistic approach with which Diaz subverts the established logocentric connections is retrospective reconstruction opening up time rifts and enabling a free transition between factual and remembered. But even in these transitions, in the modes of the reconstruction itself there is no inner logic, no causality. There are three predominant modes of reconstruction: sometimes it is parallel, when with the help of cross cutting, we at the same time follow the talked about events, but more often “classic” retrospection, wherein the reporting on an event melts into a visual reconstruction of the reported, and “anticipatory” retrospection, where the reported event is only later placed in the order of the whole, alternate. In-between the pointed out narrative levels there sporadically intrude Mijarez’ dreams and occasional reminiscent flashbacks triggered by a certain situation in the present. These scenes of imaginarity have their counterpoint in film fragments the viewer shares in either directly – when the protagonists watch the film on TV, or indirectly – when he is himself “addressed” as a firsthand witness or even as a “camera-man” of the film within a film ... Through the development of narration gradually the situations of unexpected or “unexplained” transitions come to predominate in which the sequence of scenes is in complete “accord” though the scenes may be taking place on different time levels. Ever more often what is factual and what is reconstructed in memory seems to merge into a kind of punctured whole conveying the coexistence of different levels of reality – physical and imaginary. And the more the laws of “logic” are undermined the deeper are the punctures through which the past comes flooding, the one that the author is trying to redeem in order that through its “active introspection” he contribute his share to the redemption of the Filipino soul<sup>10</sup> – according to “III. thesis on the philosophy of history” by Walter Benjamin: “*To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past – which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments.*” (Benjamin 1940: 1) The viewer in this manifold yet extremely fragile composition – which is never in danger, though, due to its valuable bond being on one side, the author’s full responsibility and on the other, a strong emotional charge – gradually loses his firm footing. Due to such time “inconsistency” he is in a way stuck floating in a time loop; yet it is exactly this subversion of a firm chronological support that makes him search more intensively for some other hold, which Diaz offers in the narrative’s emotional dimension. The viewer thus becomes more susceptible to the *emföhlung* in the manifold film dimensions ... By this we of course do not mean the aspects of a viewer’s identification, but have in mind the element of the “creative spirit of the audience” in the sense of Kiarostami’s “unfinished cinema”, believing in art as a – possible – factor in “changing things” and presenting new ideas: “*Art gives each artist and his audience the opportunity to have a more precise view of the truth concealed behind the pain and passion that ordinary people experience every day.*” (Kiarostami 1995: 1)<sup>11</sup> This principle not only directly corresponds to aspects of free creative activity (as a kind of a form of resistance to the present), advocated by contemporary film thought headed by Gilles Deleuz, but it shares its conviction about the engaged viewer with the author of *Batang West Side* himself: “*Give the audience real cinema so they can react and reassess their lives, make them aware that they have choices and responsibilities.*” (Diaz in



conversation with Romulo) The reaction is actually possible only when a pledge is established between the film and the viewer which – as in any relationship – is based on trust. One of the key factors in attaining the viewer's trust is the awareness of the free gaze: “... if people were allowed to see freely they would see truly” (Vaughan). The seeing itself is determined by far more than the eye can reach, for in it there is encompassed the whole of an individual's experience, which the gaze of the filmmaker faces. The authentic gaze stimulates registers of seeing that are not subject to conventions of a certain mode of representation encoding the meaning of the images on screen, but are open to the awareness of the gaze itself; the gaze in which its representational aspect is accounted for in the “sum total” of the film act. Such cinematic authenticity, attainable only through the possibility of a confrontation as a fact of actuality, wherein the filmmaker's gaze and the viewer's seeing coincide, is the precondition of the free gaze. In it the fundamental time relations reactualize, wherein the need for impressions of reality declines while the need for impressions of presence intensifies. “*What film archives, then, is first and foremost a lost experience of time as presence, time as immersion. This experience of temporality is one, which was never necessarily lived, but emerges as the counter-dream of rationalization, its agnostic underside – full presence. Hence, time's reality in the cinema is both that of continuity and rupture.*” (Doane 2004: 272)

Diaz takes great advantage of the awareness of the double nature of cinematic time reality in his treatment of the third, in the context of *Batang West Side* probably most important, aspect of time – history. With a characteristic time articulation the director strives towards such forms of “conjuring the past”, or the presentation of its absence, as are not based only on narrative “digressions and subversions” but, as already mentioned, on opening passages through which history emerges in the narrative. Again we are not dealing here with a matrix, with a universal principle of “conjuring”, but there is once more at work here a heterogeneous series of ways of “activating the past”. Above all in Diaz' treatment of history it is almost never (but for the rare exceptions of dream sequences, reminiscent flashbacks and film clips) a matter of direct representation or enactment of past facts and actions but merely of their transmission. When there is talk about a concrete individual experience of one involved in a historical event, Diaz most often uses the form of memory narration; when for example, the subject under consideration is the question of conflicting ideologies, the author metaphorically focuses on rival groups pushing shabu (crystal meth – specific “social” drug of the Filipinos which is exported out of the Philippines), religiously announcing their base “calling” as the vision of a new prosperity for the Filipino man ... The complex series of aspects of history actually shows that *Batang West Side* as a whole is the particular way of historical articulation; namely, the essential elements of its structure are representations of the traumatic facts in Filipino history, as is also stressed by the author himself.<sup>12</sup> The characteristic of historical time in Diaz' visual treatments is at first sight in an interesting harmony with Walter Benjamin's “dialectical concept of historical time”. We have in mind his notion of the concept of history – from his prominent *Theses on the Philosophy of History* –, arising from the opposition to its evolutionist variant, based on the concept of progress, as a form of “*progression through a homogenous, empty time*” (Benjamin). “*The 'dialectical concept of historical time' aimed not to preserve the past but to activate it. Benjamin's theory of 'dialectical images' which flash up at the moment of danger was explicitly conceived as a historical pedagogy – a means of transmitting the past while drawing attention to the particular way in which the past is seen in the present.*” (McQuire 1998: 178) The presupposition of the “moment of danger” in the context of *Batang West Side* refers to the treatment of certain parts in the film as the crucial scenes. These are on one side, the “intensified” situations in which the viewer's interest is more strongly mobilized than in most others, on the other, the scenes wherein certain points of the story are meaning-wise and emotionally clarified. The example of the first, and by no means only, is in *Batang West Side* certainly the – already initially pointed out – sequence of Hanzel's death.<sup>13</sup> Aspects of the second can be seen, for example, in the representation of Mijarez' reminiscence (late in the second half of the film), aroused by him touching the victims gun and culminating in a hallucination where it is him who fires the bullet into Hanzel's brain. In this horrifying scene (the only one, despite the horrifying amount of violence in *Batang West Side*, we can consider in light

of the definition of the so-called ultraviolence), Diaz not only points out aspects of collective guilt when he shouts at us: “*We killed Hanzel Haryana*”, but with his blasting the inner continuity of the scene – with which he throughout the film so patiently built the feeling of the presence (of time) – he also reveals the fundamental nature of his aesthetics and ethics: his aesth-et(h)ic stand, which he shares with the binding stand of permanent human responsibility: “*We are not responsible for the victims but responsible before them.*” (Deleuze, Guattari) The individual enactments, or better yet the intrusions of the imaginary, as a kind of Proustian *mémoire involontaire*, are contrasted with a massive material of voluntary memories. On closer view, the persistent methodology thus offers another aspect in considering Diaz' conception of history: not to ascribe to the crucial scene a privileged role but to, despite its greater intensity, consider it as equal to the others. We thus return to the initial presupposition that the structure of the film stands up on its own exactly because of its compositional “imbalance” ... In the imbalance of the relationship between the concrete and the imaginary we can sense an echo of the subtle nuancing of Benjamin's difference between two premises in V. and VI. philosophically historical theses. In the fifth Benjamin says: “*The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again.*” The sixth begins: “*To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.*” (Benjamin 1940: 2) In this duality, which of course does not presuppose difference but an important complementing, we can sense also the key “values” of Diaz' treatment of history. Diaz succeeds in merging Benjamin's presupposition of the evasiveness of the image of the past and its irretrievability, threatening to disappear every time it “is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns”, with his awareness that “*in every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest the tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it*” (Benjamin). The key means allowing for such a merging is a network of “parallel presents” erasing the transitions between different narrative levels. This network is also a net Diaz' camera not only uses on the look-out for the present in which the image of the past will be recognized as one of its own concerns, but with the strengthening of the role of “individuals' presents” in the film – when the focus on the events after Hanzel's death predominate over the reconstruction of his life – the centre of gravity shifts towards the here and now, towards presence as such. But this does not mean a subversion of historical perspective – quite the opposite. It is only through the tension of presence, in which the moments of danger (or crucial scenes) are not pointed out but considered equal to the rest in the entire complex structure of “conjuring the past” – saturated “only” with duration, emptiness or feeling of loneliness, loss and suffering –, that another, perhaps the most committed gaze can open up. It is a gaze most uncompromising in the sense that the author does not hesitate to treat the present – which finally prevails on the diegetic as well as narrative level of the film – and with it himself as the actual stage where the past generations of his people “*retroactively resolve their deadlocks*” (Žižek). This is a conception that is as a reflection of Benjamin's “dialectical notion of historical epoch” exposed by Slavoj Žižek in his paper *The Fragile Absolute*. In sharpening the opposition to the naïve evolutionist approach to historical development Žižek puts forward a thesis that the presupposition “that the present redeems the past itself”, is not only a historically relativistic assertion, but that a characterization of a past era always encompasses also our present stance. “*What we are claiming is something much more radical: what the proper historical stance (as opposed to historicism) 'relativizes' is not the past (always distorted by our present point of view) but, paradoxically, the present itself – our present can be conceived only as the outcome (not of what actually happened in the past, but also) of the crushed potentials for the future that were co-contained in the past. In other words, it is not only – as Foucault liked to emphasize, in a Nietzschean mode – that every history of the past is ultimately the 'ontology of the present', that we always perceive our past within the horizon of our present preoccupations, that in dealing with the past we are in effect dealing with the ghosts of the past whose resuscitation enables us to confront our present dilemmas. It is also that we, the 'actual' present historical agents, have to conceive of ourselves as the materialization of the ghosts of past generations, as the stage in which these past generations retroactively resolve their deadlocks.*” (Žižek 2000: 90–91)



The pragmatic reality allowing Diaz' specific film structure in *Batang West Side*, where both his "proper historical stance" as well as his "aesthetic stand" comes to its full expression, is diaspora. Its socio-cultural determinations are in the present context not important so much because of its characteristic of being "a nation in miniature" but above all because of the "concentrated" form of the identification manifold from which Diaz picks out only those nuances he needs for the desired result. Therefore it would be difficult to call *Batang West Side* a diasporic film. Even if we refer to the monumental research on "exilic and diasporic filmmaking", *An Accented Cinema* by Hamida Naficy, we can see that *Batang West Side* can be placed somewhere between both conceptions, for it moves away from the strictness of both definitions.<sup>14</sup> Even though Lav Diaz himself has an individual diasporic experience, having for quite some time (between the years 1992 and 1996) lived and worked in the USA, we cannot declare him a "diasporic filmmaker". Namely, all his films, except *Batang West Side*, are labeled Filipino and he presents himself as a Filipino artist on a committed mission to "redeem the Filipino soul". "To seek the truth, to cast doubt and, ultimately, to redeem the soul are the goals of Diaz's art and he manages this in particularly spectacular fashion in his fourth film *Batang West Side*." (Romulo) Therefore, in the present constellation it is above all the marginal status of the Filipino (or any other) diaspora and the pure fact of the dislocation of Filipino man that are of key importance to us. Both refer in a metaphorical sense to his "historical fate"; they represent both the authentic historical state of a Filipino man's permanent struggle for his identity and integrity as well as his present unenviable reality. Marginality, a specific "state of being" not only of diasporic communities but any kind of minority group (fundamentally defined by a difference in race, nationality, religion, sex, disease, age, culture, politics, ideology, ... because of which their basic freedoms are under threat), is constituted above all as the place of resistance. In it the struggle against the dominant ideological practices and the (self)awareness of the need for a – retroactive – consolidation of one's own identity is of the same importance as the resistance towards concrete oppression and oppressors. "Understanding marginality as position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people. If we only view the margin as sign, marking the condition of our pain and deprivation, then a certain hopelessness and despair, a deep nihilism penetrates in a destructive way the very ground of our being. It is there in that space of collective despair that one's creativity, one's imagination is at risk, there that one's mind is fully colonized, there that the freedom one longs for is lost. Truly the mind that resists colonization struggles for freedom and expression. That struggle may not even begin with the colonizer; it may begin within one's segregated colonized community and family." (hooks 191: 342) The gradation of social actors in *Batang West Side* – from an individual, family and household community to (symbolically) the whole nation proves that Diaz is well aware of the different levels of oppression and reification. But still the emphasis that at the end is shifted to the individual and the regaining of his lost identity as a form of self-identification is the historical key to solving the "difficult" questions posed by *Batang West Side*. That is why the fact of dislocation as a form of identification through absence, lack, representation ... is of great importance to Diaz as a filmmaker. And that is why the essential "recognitions" take place as film acts – a form of the film within the film.<sup>15</sup> On one hand, there are the documentaries of Taga Timog – a documentary filmmaker Mijarez looked upon unfavorably during the investigation, but whom he befriended after leaving the police force – on the fate of Filipino women driven abroad by the need to secure their children's existence in the homeland (also the story of Hanzel's mother). On the other, there is Mijarez' self-exposure before the objective of the film camera obviously inspired exactly by the watching of the mentioned documentaries. Mijarez' confession, which reveals his "historic" identity of a denunciante, regime's deep penetration agent, torturer, rapist and executor who had with the help of a plastic operation changed his identity after coming to the USA, speaks of a "concealed fact of his past" accompanied by concrete empirical data. With the film within the film method Diaz literally asserts film as the truth exposing medium thereby bringing a concrete film act into accord with his enlightened convictions: "I want the audience to see the truth and to discover their truths by experiencing the realities that I am presenting or re-presenting. I respect the audience's capacity to understand, think, be open to a broader view of life, embrace different milieus, cultures, new principles and philosophies; or at another

er extreme, to confront them, create an atmosphere of discourse, introspection and criticism; or at yet another, to be simply immersed in what they are watching." (Diaz in conversation with Wee) Respect that Diaz points out here – the respect towards the viewer as well as the main subject of his film investigation: the Filipino man – is one of the basic conditions keeping the whole together before the viewer's gaze. Especially in the case of such a monumental and extensive work. And it is exactly the immense respectfulness reflecting even in the smallest detail that proves that the complex structure of this film venture, we have throughout considered above all in view of its social engagement and its dialogue with the current film trends, is not a work of a cold, analytical, calculating mind. Its standing-up-on-its-own is due mostly to Diaz' refined feeling for "telling a story" and setting the mood. Every sequence of *Batang West Side*, the structure of every frame, the conception of every film gaze ... prove that Lav Diaz is in his essence an insightful "storyteller" and above all an unsurpassable poet. But in his poetic vision Diaz, despite his commitment to history, acts from an oppositional stand towards "the totalizing quest of meaning" (Minh-ha), rooted in the established conception of poetry as a fulfilment of historical narration: "Poetry improves on historical narration because it creates order and thereby reveals meaning, which seems to remain hidden in ordinary lives." (Barnouw) Diaz' poetics on the contrary, is in its wager on presence and in its surrendering to dis-order and the principles of self-positing identified as the poetry of ordinary life. This is, among other things, in accord with the binding presupposition of Vlado Škafar (Slovene director and film activist), who discovers universality exactly in ordinariness: "If you seriously devote your attention to the ordinary man, you always come to know how exceptionless he is. It is herein that universality lies." And so in light of the poetry of the ordinary, echoing the profoundest of experience, Diaz' famous principle of an active comprehension of the world: "Read poetry, man!", receives in *Batang West Side* its visual counterpart: "Watch poetry, man!" •

#### Notes:

1. In an (as yet unpublished) interview by Erwin Romulo Lav Diaz thus describes the development of the script: " ... I initially wrote a story that deals with the struggle and guilt of a mother and the death of her son whom she brought to America. Then it grew and grew until I made it into a Diaspora of Filipinos living abroad – the struggle of our countrymen detached from their homeland while at the same time using as a backdrop the Filipino struggle as a whole. The more than 300 years of Spanish colonization wherein our ancient culture was erased, the 100 years of American intervention that further confused our culture, the 4 years of Japanese rape during World War II and the 20 years of Marcos terrorism were the things I wanted to tackle in one unified work. That was the vision: even if you had individual characters struggling with their individual lives, you can still see the whole Filipino struggle from the very start."
2. Although the above quotation – as well as the motto of this article and most of Diaz' thoughts that follow – comes from an interview Brandon Wee made with Lav Diaz for *Senses of Cinema* on the presentation of his latest film, a more-than-ten-hour-long epopee *Evolution of a Filipino Family* (Ebolusyon ng Isang Pamilyang Pilipino, 2004), his discussion seems equally relevant to the film under consideration in this article. On one side, because it lucidly recapitulates in a concise form the thoughts from some of his previous talks (e.g., with Erwin Romulo or Alexis Tioseco for *Indiefilipino.com*), and on the other – and above all – because of the fact that this time Diaz asserts his creative credo and his "aesthetic stand", as he puts it, in an almost manifesto fashion.
3. The following description of the making of *Batang West Side* as Diaz' "first fulfilled work", can be read as a particular kind of articulation of the free creative activity principle: " ... it's the first work that I was able to push for what I wanted to do – my vision, the length, and the kind of aesthetic. I threw away all the theories and I just did it very organically. Especially during the shoots, we are not using lights and we're just pushing things. And then during the post-production I didn't go for the warp factor editing, like doing fast cuts, no, no way. We just keep putting things together and the work just showed itself. It's like a canvas; it just grew and grew and grew, and came out that way. I couldn't do anything anymore, that's the work, that's it." (Diaz in conversation with Tioseco)
4. In Diaz' case the definitions of a cinematic image go hand in hand with the concept of "pictorial possibility": "There is pictorial possibility that has nothing to do with physical possibility and that endows the most acrobatic posture with the sense of balance. On the other hand, many works that claim to be art do not stand up for an instant. Standing up alone does not mean having a top and a bottom or being upright (for even houses are drunk and askew); it is only the act by



which the compound of created sensations is preserved in itself." (Deleuze, Guattari 1994: 164)

5. "I avoid close-ups when treating the characters I create in my films. I prefer long and oftentimes static takes, just like stasis – long, long takes in real time. My philosophy is I do not want to manipulate the audience's emotions." (Diaz in conversation with Wee)

6. In his radical investigation of the renewal processes of new world cinema, inspired by the *oeuvre* of Abbas Kiarostami, Jean-Luc Nancy assigns the principle of "mobilizing the gaze" a privileged place of key changes in "cinema becoming the art of looking": "It is not a matter of passivity much less of captivity; it is a matter of tuning in with a look so that we too may do the looking. Our gaze is not captive, and if it is captivated it is because it is required, mobilized. This cannot occur without a certain pressure acting as an obligation: capturing images is clearly an ethos, a disposition, and a conduct in regard to the world." (Nancy 2001: 16)

7. Besides the already mentioned "kinship" to actuality we cannot ignore a surprising "agreement" between some of Diaz' self-analysis and the reflections of Chinese director Wang Bing who is, with his nine-hour debut – dealing with the horrifying effects of the demise of heavy metal industry and the uncertain fate of thousands of workers in Northeast China – *Tiexi District: West of the Tracks* (Tie Xi Qu, 2003), an author of a similar monumental film venture as *Batang West Side* and *Evolution of a Filipino Family*. "In *Evolution*, I am capturing real time. I am trying to experience what these people are experiencing. They walk. I must experience their walk. I must experience their boredom and sorrows. I would go to any extent in my art to fathom the paradox that is the Filipino. I would go to any extent in my art to fathom the mystery of humankind's existence. I want to understand death. I want to understand solitude. I want to understand struggle." (Diaz in conversation with Wee) "What I discovered is that the search for truth is always characterized by a certain revelation. The revelation is that truth is not something you can search for. Truth is something already out there, repeated by people every day. /.../ And that constitutes a life cycle. And that life cycle is what I mean by a certain speed and rhythm. Once you're in that cycle, you're with them [people]. And then you don't feel time passing slowly, but you feel time just passing, and time passing on both sides." (Wang 2003: 24–26)

8. "The concept of real time seems to be ubiquitous at the moment – used primarily to convey a sense of the capabilities of new media, of new computer technologies with specific and distinctive relation to temporality. These relations hinge on the concept of 'instantaneity'. Television news anchors frequently exhort their viewers to keep up with the news in real time by visiting the station's or network's website. 'Real time' here connotes immediacy, continuity, an intolerance for delay, and most of all, a certain solidity associated with the guarantee of the real. It would seem that only remaining residence of the real, in an age of simulation, the virtual, and the artificial, is the time." (Doane 2004: 264)

9. "Why is the real no longer a matter of being there, but of being then? And why is it so crucial that this 'then' is in fact a 'now'? Such an erasure of memory and history would be the zero degree of the logic of innovation, a form of commodification in which the commodity itself, always already out of date, would be superfluous." (Doane 2004: 281)

10. The psychoanalytical method of "active introspection", which Mijarez's psychiatrist explains to him, is in fact very close to Diaz' own film "introspection": "I believe a man will be stronger emotionally, psychologically, even spiritually if he analyzes his dreams, his memories. He acquires what I call 'active introspection'. Like an exorcism. We are possessed by dreams and memories and we have to confront them so there is a cleansing within."

11. "I believe in a type of cinema that gives greater possibilities and time to its audience. A half-created cinema, an unfinished cinema that attains completion through the creative spirit of the audience, so resulting in hundreds of films. It belongs to the members of that audience and corresponds to their world. /.../ If art succeeds in changing things and proposing new ideas, it can only do so via the creativity of the people we are addressing – each individual member of the audience." (Kiarostami 1995: 1)

12. "I want Filipinos to treasure and embrace history, to examine it no matter what one's ideology is. We must learn to grasp the significance of these events. We must have a historical perspective if we want to be able to move forward progressively as a people and as a nation." (Diaz in conversation with Wee) cf. also note 1.

13. "What happened to Hanzel is the same thing that is happening to the Philip-

ines. Everything has no direction. The efforts of our heroes have gone to waste."

This tragic insight of Hanzel's grandfather is in accord with some of the key interpretations of *Batang West Side*. "The specific identity of the murderer ceases to be the key question in the film and Hanzel's death becomes a powerful metaphor for the attack on the Filipino soul." (Ramani) "The investigation, undertaken by a Filipino detective is then used as a bold metaphor to mount an admonishing attack on the collective Filipino anima when the dead man's family is introduced and its unflattering history unveiled." (Wee)

14. "People in diaspora, moreover maintain a long term sense of ethnic consciousness and distinctiveness, which is consolidated by the periodic hostility of either the original home or the host societies towards them. However, unlike the exiles whose identity entails a vertical and primary relationship with their homeland, diasporic consciousness is horizontal and multisited, involving not only the homeland but also the compatriot communities elsewhere. As a result, plurality, multiplicity, and hybridity are structured in dominance among the diasporans, while among the political exiles, binarism and duality rule." (Naficy 2001: 14)

15. At the same time all other forms of film reference perform their "historical role": *Batch '81* (Mike de Leon, 1982), which we see on TV, and the posters from movies on the fate of Filipino women signed by the giants of Filipino cinema Lino Brocka, Mike de Leon, Ishmael Bernal. "If photographs, films or video tapes do preserve a past, it is the trace of a past which was never simply present, but was always already heterogenous, discontinuous and forking: a time which reversed (deferred) some portion of its 'being-present' for unspecified future." (McQuire 1998: 173)

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## (ON) TIME: LAV'S (R)EVOLUTION

paolo bertolin

Cinema as an art or better yet as a language, as a system of items that can be articulated in ways that are semantically and syntactically meaningful, embodies time and is embodied in time. This now common place remark has been at the center of cinematic theory and critical debate since the birth of film itself, and has produced a noteworthy stream of theoretical reflections of huge relevance and influence, not only for the specific field of cinema, but also for the opening of new perspectives in philosophy at large, as in the case of Bergson's or Deleuze's work.

While the embodiment, reflection or representation of time have been at the center of much academic discourse involving the linguistic resource of cinema in articulating time, through camerawork, screenplay and mostly editing or absence of editing, or the codification and decodification of the temporal dimension generated by those proceedings, it seems to me that much less effort and little critical output has been devoted to two other facets of the way time is sculptured through filmmaking. On the one side, the ever-perilous terrain of detecting and analyzing the audience's reception of time in film and especially of the time of the film itself remains widely unexplored: at the first level, this concern regards how the viewer, both correctly or wrongly, decodifies cinematic time, as in the process of applying and understanding a learnt set of conventions of reading patterns that sometimes might be also subverted or inventively redefined; at the second level, as for the reception of the time of the film itself, one has to encompass both the not-so-banal general questions of sociological and cultural determination in the actual practice of cinematic fruition and the more subject-oriented interrogations about the experiential and perceptual sides of inhabiting or being inhabited by time as duration, as the length of the film text.

On the other side, still little attention has seemingly been paid to deconstruct or at least put into question the very notion of time that is subsumed and often taken as given in our readings of cinematic texts. What I am arguing here is that we often tend to forget how and to what extent in cinematic analysis (and not only here), structurally basic, yet eminently complex notions of time and space, not to mention self, are or might be (over)determined by cultural encoding; something that is so deeply inscribed in ourselves that it might be difficult to detach or distance oneself from. Time as we know, conceptualize, live and of course apply it to cinema might thus be posited as a variant, a coordinate that possibly changes at different latitudes and longitudes on the cultural spectrum. Inevitably, then, one has to also raise the question of whether a preferred, habitual or even dominant determination of the codified meanings and perceptions of time is at work whenever cinematic texts are experienced by viewers or investigated and dissected by critics or theorists. Moreover, one might be also coming to terms with how the notion of time in film mirrors the inscription of cultural differences, changes in epoch or even the concept of cinema itself in the texts themselves and their readings.

Lav Diaz's ten hours thirty minutes *Evolution of a Filipino Family* (Ebolusyon ng Isang Pamilyang Pilipino) provides a deeply resounding and stimulating challenge to the aforementioned assumptions and prompts responses that deal with all the questionings just raised. In addition to this, *Evolution* also symptomatically revolves around another, conceptually distinct issue connected with time and time in film, that of History and more specifically of the representation of History in film and the articulation of History through histories (here intended as both fictional narratives and accounts of individual lives).

All these aspects concoct a high textual complexity that undeniably exceeds the scope and ambition of this work. I therefore will not attempt to fully untangle these many intermingled nodes of complexity, but rather provide a framework from which further, deeper and more academically sustained approach might take reference and depart, while hopefully including at least some insights into Diaz's masterwork.

### I.

Right from the outset, *Evolution of a Filipino Family* represents a quintessential challenging and outstanding cinematic experience. It belongs to that very restricted pool of films that qualify as exceptional because their running time exceeds the usual format and standard of feature filmmaking by so much that it makes them something of an "event", the kind of film that festivals include in their programs branding them as "milestones" and get to be seen by a very narrow number of extremely committed viewers. Examples of this breed of films include Edgar Reitz's *Heimat* (I, II and III), Jacques Rivette's *Out 1*, Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's *Hitler – Ein Film aus Deutschland*, Bernardo Bertolucci's *Novecento*, Manoel De Oliveira's *Le Soulier de Satin*, Bela Tarr's *Sátántangó*, and, recently, Marco Tullio Giordana's *La Meglio Gioventù* and Yousry Nasrallah's *La Porte du Soleil*. It is interesting to point out here *en passant* that, besides Nasrallah's, all the works included in this indeed non-exhaustive list are signed by Westerners, more precisely Europeans, while five out of eight deal explicitly with the History of a country, if not, as in the case of Nasrallah, with nation-making itself. What is relevant at this point, nonetheless, is to stress what is perhaps most obvious about all of them, but at the same time most unconventional and daring: their very length.

When a film exceeds the usual allotted landmark of 90 to 120 minutes, and stretches its duration more and more towards the three, four and even more hours, it starts to undermine a set of unquestioned assumptions about film. Assumptions intimately related to the status of cinema and the position it occupies both in the wider system of society and economy and in the daily life of individuals. On the one hand, in fact, the usual duration of 90 to 120 minutes is one that is today deeply connected to the unwritten laws of exhibition in theatres and broadcasting on television. This format is the one that, while keeping to the viewer's standard request and expectation of development in storytelling, to which he/she has been trained since his/her very first experiences of cinematic viewing, and historically since the establishing of the canons of narrative feature filmmaking in the ages of silent cinema (when the "excesses" of Von Stroheim were already harshly sanctioned by the industrial establishment), at the same time, maximizes the number of daily screenings in theatres and better fits into the flux of television schedules, allowing respectively the largest sales of tickets and multiple insertion of commercials. The urge of cutting films exceeding the "habitual" running time is evidenced by default practices adopted by producers, distributors, exhibitors or TV broadcasters and periodical querelles between them and the auteurs who struggle for the integrity of their work that punctuates the history of filmmaking. These days, such burning issues have been somewhat muted by the emergence of DVD as a proficient means of reintegrating sequences directors were striving to include in their films, but were denied to by the keepers of capital in the movie-making industry. The sheer possibility of "adding" material lost or often just simply left in the editing room has ingenerated a somewhat dubious



(and very profitable) fetishism for the so-called director's cut, which might make sense for opuses involved in troubling fates in the past, but which today has assumed the blatant and lavish aura of the "good selling point"...

Works such as Lav Diaz's *Evolution of a Filipino Family*, therefore, not only represent vindications of an auteur's integrity, but also implicitly defy the occupation and abuse of cinematic time by capitalism. The fact that Diaz himself insists that his work has to be seen in one breathe, in just one long seat, appears clearly as the ultimate act of an artist's self-consciousness, one that reveals his heartfelt concern with matters of tempo and crescendo in the fruition of his art (issues precisely related to the development in time of the film). One that might as well scare audiences away for its sheer "integralism" or "egotism" in robbing the viewer of one entire day of his/her life, preventing him/her from the customary multiplicity of activities in everyday routine or, as for the critic or *cinéophile* at a festival, depriving him/her of multiple visions. However, when re-positioning Diaz's demands on the viewer of *Evolution of a Filipino Family* in the larger picture of how capitalism has shaped the norms of cinema consumption and of the life routine itself, one can readily grasp the intrinsically subversive nature of this same artist's "integralism".

On the other hand, in fact, when focusing on how capitalism, now in its advanced stage of late capitalism, has (re)modeled the daily lives of human individuals in contemporary, Western or Westernized society, establishing unquestioned routines forged according to imperatives of optimal time allocation and fears of wasting time, all underscoring the common place, but revealing the principle of "time is money" (and, on a more existential level, the *horror vacui* that prevents us to be reminded of the ultimate end, of death), devoting yourself for ten hours and a half to one single "activity" seems not only a Herculean enterprise, but also and mostly an unthinkable, unimaginable sacrifice. In other words, the loss of precious, non-refundable time feels even more painful than the physical tour-de-force itself. It is not so easy to realize, though, how the emphasis on and the concerns about time, time consumption and the value of time enforced by capitalist society, to an extent that they are almost encoded in our genes, are ones that reveal the full appropriation of both work and the so-called "free time" by capitalist logics. In the whole-comprehensive scheme of capitalism, when not occupied by labor intended to direct profit-making, individuals are supposed to engage in self-recreating activities of leisure and entertainment that are themselves, intrinsically, sources of consumption, and of course profit.

The industry or rather industries of entertainment that take (interested) care in providing individuals with services and products to occupy and consume their free time rely on a double concept of diversification; obvious diversification of products for their output, and also the diversification of prospected activities, in terms of consumer expectations. The commodification of free time and entertainment implies and inevitably leads to the same "sane and healthy" situation of competition verified in other sectors of the capitalist economic system; a competition that is particularly diversified and intense, since it involves an immensely wide variety of products and activities. A direct effect descending from this intense and integrated competition in conquering the free time of consumers is the social, cultural and economical pressure on the consumers themselves towards the diversification of activities (not only of entertainment), and conversely the stigma associated to obsessive, compulsive mono-activity. These mechanics mostly act in non-overtly commercial manners, operating at different levels in constructing a collective mind or routine that asks and compels individuals to engage or at least try to engage in multiple tasks and chores in their everyday lives, especially when it comes to re-creating and re-generating themselves in their free time through entertainment. Entertainment might therefore be profiled as the sensitive and crucial nexus of actual re-creation, re-generation and re-enforcement of the system itself (in particular when it comes to ideological aspects of the content of mass audio-visual entertainment).

As contextualized in this quick and certainly oversimplified framing, a film like *Evolution of a Filipino Family* – and of course its likes – ap-

pears as a disruptive, subversive and eye-opening agent provocateur. The commitment of spending ten hours and a half of one's own life watching a film goes far beyond personal *cinéophile* abnegation and sheer matter interest (say, in this specific case, the Philippines and their history); it implicitly appeals to one's own ability and will to detach from the superstructure of society and economy that perpetually and unperceivedly molds our existence. Films like *Evolution of a Filipino Family* open factually a space and time to abstract and disengage from the system we are constantly immersed in, allowing for the opportunity to become aware of the system itself and to realize how pervasively it works. The complicity and affinity matching the viewer and Diaz's film is one that at least for those ten and a half hours is capable of opening a window of subversion to the musts of *emploi du temps* in capitalism.

There is another aspect to the whole question of very long films that has to be addressed here, one that is specific to the case of *Evolution of a Filipino Family*: the very fact that this is a Filipino film. As previously observed, up till now it has been the almost exclusive privilege and credit of European or Western directors to accomplish the enterprise of disruptively breaking the conventions of duration in narrative feature filmmaking. Even the mentioned case of Egyptian Yousry Nasrallah's passionate epic of the Palestine nation *La Porte du Soleil* has to be further qualified as a project supported by European capitals and intended to be broadcasted by the French-German cultural network ARTE as a two-part TV series. In the light of this remark, the uniqueness of Lav Diaz's film, as a totally "homegrown" Third World production (in the sense that it did not benefit from European funding) might be even better understood.

If what I have here been labeling as the standardized canon of full-length feature filmmaking, the 90 to 120 minutes narrative fiction film, is clearly meant to define the product mainly catered by Hollywood, if not the greatest in output – Bollywood claims this leadership – certainly the most influential and invasive film industry in the world, one has to notice how the spaces of contention and competition against Hollywood and the format it imposes on global audiences both in the most overt and the most unconventional ways seem to be the prerogative of European or First World filmmakers.

Moreover, Third World cinema itself, when striving to get access, if not to the global arthouse market, at least to the parallel market of festivals, seems more and more "condemned" to ask for a subsidy from a proliferating constellation of European agencies that intervene at various stages of production, asking in return festival screening priority, distribution rights and the like. I don't want to criticize here the function and the valuable work of these laudable institutions, but point out the possible limits their specific needs in terms of festival exposure or arthouse visibility might dictate on the choice of what to and what not to subsidize. Subject matters are inevitably the most relevant and determinant factor, as projects centered on political issues or societal problems, such as female emancipation, as well as ones that stress cultural diversity, verging sometimes on the border of risky self-exotization, seem to always run on a fast lane. Questions of format and duration seem not to be usually raised, but maybe just because the pressure to conform to a global standard annihilates them from the very start.

Ten years in the making, *Evolution of a Filipino Family* provides then a truly un-compromised attempt at Third World filmmaking that advocates the right to trigger aesthetic and conceptual (r)evolutions without the good-willed, but often binding support of international funding. Although this might not have been meant or planned, the mere completion of *Evolution of a Filipino Family* without (in its funding) and against (in its form and aesthetics) global capital signifies the thorough achievement of a masterpiece without boundaries.

## II.

When reflecting upon time as perceived, used and manipulated in the late capitalist system, I have willingly emphasized how this model fully applies to Western or Westernized society. It is worth reminding here how the expansion of the capitalist system and mind is one that has been



undeniably parallel to that of modernization throughout the globe, and how in colonial and post-colonial realities the two also equal Westernization. The current situation of geo-politics aptly mirrors how the after-maths of colonialism still linger or weigh over non-Western nations: this is particularly the case with East, South East and South Asian societies, where economical and technological development and societal and political improvement have not been paralleled by a comparative increase in their weight in international politics – and this tendency seems not, if ever, to be reverted in a short time. The competitive advantage of North American and Western European nations thus permanently condemns those areas to a status of “the periphery of the empire” that does not register or account for either their cultural, historical and social specificities or their steps and efforts towards the adherence to the dominant modes of modernization, capitalism and Westernization.

In the outlined context it might seem difficult, although eminently appropriate, to pose the question whether space for alternative or even resistant models is still allowed, either on a macro or a micro level of society, economy or culture. In the form of a film discourse, Lav Diaz's *Evolution of a Filipino Family* provides a double act of resistance to the normative, basic and essential conceptualization of time in modern, Western(ized), capitalist-oriented society: first, as mentioned above, through its torrential length, undermining the deeply encoded patterns of behavior (film viewing, multiple-activities scheduling); secondly, through an articulation of diegetic time in film narration that reflects a perhaps culturally-specific and non-Western, but certainly pre-modern and pre-capitalist conception of time.

Before being reshaped by European colonialism into the modern nations of Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines (not to mention smaller entities as Singapore, Brunei or Timor East), the area of insular South East Asia constituted a quite homogeneous cultural basin, referred to as the Malay world. Although the thousands of inhabited islands feature hundreds of languages and ethnicities, they are all usually listed as composing one tightly knit family of Austronesian languages and cultures whose common root and affinity has been kept vital by centuries of commerce and exchange through the navigable straits. One widely known common cultural feature of the Malay people has been the capability of welcoming different cultural inputs and influences in successive waves (from India, China, Persia, the Arab world and then the Western colonizers), being always able to customize and adapt them to the specific needs and traditions of South East Asia. This flexibility and permeability could also be regarded as a culturally specific means of resistance towards the total absorption of and by “foreign” models.

Quite an interesting example in this regard is provided by the persistence of an unusual “practice” of time in contemporary Indonesia, Philippines and, to a lesser extent, Malaysia. This practice, which is said to still puzzle European and North American businessmen in the Westernized metropolises of Manila and Jakarta, is known in Malay-Indonesian as *jam karet*, or “rubber hour”. When scheduling a friendly rendezvous as well as a business appointment, people of Indonesia and the Philippines implicitly agree on the unspoken assumption that the actual time of meeting will not be the assented one, but an undefined “sometimes after that”, which might mean fifteen to thirty minutes after the originally scheduled time. Outrageous for the Western or Japanese obsession with sharp timing as it may be, the habit of “arriving late” clearly underscores a profoundly different way of living and conceptualizing time, one that assumes the possibility and desirability of stretching time. In a world where the dominant mode of living and conceptualizing time mainly matches expressions such as “in time” or “on time”, which imply individuals’ submission to the dictates of time itself, instead this alternative way submits time to individuals’ exigencies and rhythms and its very survival in an otherwise hostile environment might seem astonishingly unsettling.

Although Lav Diaz's *Evolution of a Filipino Family* might in some way seem to provide a cinematic reproduction of the culturally specific notion of *jam karet*, it actually does so by going straight to its perhaps

forgotten roots. Characters in Diaz's film never live according to the logics of modern, capitalist, Western time, as embodied by the *simulacrum* that materializes and visualizes the passing of time, the clock or the watch, an object whose presence is never to be found in *Evolution*, and neither is any reference to timing and scheduling in hours or minutes. The characters of Diaz's film work, interact, wait, walk and die according to a different system of time, one that is at the source of *jam karet*, but actually goes even beyond its cultural specificity. The characters of *Evolution of a Filipino Family* are peasants still living in a pre-modern, rural space-temporal dimension, whose logics and tempo are those governed by the cycle of work in the fields, by the passing of days, months, seasons and years, as measured through the changing of nature and environment, and especially by the daily motion of the sun from dawn till dusk.

Since the characters live time according to sunlight, in *Evolution of a Filipino Family* the rendition of light itself acquires a crucial relevance that accounts for one of the most striking compositions ever seen in filmmaking. Light is light and darkness is darkness in *Evolution*; the whole film appears to have been shot carefully and rigorously using only natural light, thus creating a sense of density and grain meant to provide a perceptual correspondence to the peasant characters' experience of darkness and light. This virtual proximity becomes patent in the nighttime sequences, where only the fable flame of rudimentary oil lamps lights the space, leaving the surrounding space in almost ominous pitch darkness. There one can really feel some sort of materiality of light through the rendition of film images and, at the same time, share an abstract correspondence with the perception of the characters.

The materiality of light in *Evolution* is nonetheless the emanation of a broader scheme to materialize Filipino peasants' experience of time. Since the very first sequences Diaz asks the viewer to attune to this “new”, yet elemental and antique way of experiencing time, immersing him/her right away into the dull and slow course of work in the rice paddies. Diaz stretches the depiction of daily chores as well as breaks of lazy relaxation conveying a double effect of realism and abstraction: their nude and crude protracted duration stands for their real length and dullness, still they obviously cannot match a real time reproduction, hence they abstract real time duration by exceeding sensibly an economic employment of time in film representation. Throughout the film, the formal device of long takes makes the viewer systematically aware of time as a palpable presence that requires adjustment and adaptation. Although an unavoidable abstraction of the actual time experienced by Filipino peasants in the rice paddies, the time perception and dimension that *Evolution of a Filipino Family* strives to (re)produce and (re)create radically differs not only from that subscribed by standard filmmaking, but also from the one experienced daily by viewers in contexts of modern, urban(ized) and Western(ized) capitalist societies.

The declination of cinematic time in *Evolution of a Filipino Family* puts the (Western/ized) viewer in contact with a reality far-removed in space and time, subverting practices, tropes and conventions of the usage of time in filmmaking, thus undeniably putting into question the superstructure that over- and pre-determines them (film itself, as a product of modernity is indeed a Western medium, mostly submitted to Western encoding and decoding). Diaz's final aim is recognizably to appraise and pay homage to the pre-modern, rural roots of Filipino culture and society, from which his alternative cinematic rendition of time also originates. Pursuing this goal, however, he also enacts a manifest act of subversion and revolution: rewriting and inhabiting a modern, Western and capitalist medium through and with pre-modern, Filipino and rural codes.

### III.

In his seminal work *Pasyon and Revolution* (Ateneo de Manila University Press, Quezon City, Metro Manila 1979), historian Reynaldo Clemeña Iletto pleads for a new approach to the writing of History in dealing with the Filipino popular movements between 1840 and 1910. Iletto rejects the traditional interpretations of historiography, which deny the-



se failed peasant uprisings relevance in the process leading towards Philippines' independence because of the incapability of recognizing their specificity, and contests the appropriateness of the habitual methodologies of historical research in approaching popular movements. Iletto sees the scholastic views on those events as pertinent to a conception of History and the work of historians molded on long standing models of theory, practice and methodology codified by a Western tradition of bourgeois historiography. As in many works of post-colonial historians, Iletto thus challenges teleological readings and writings of History that only serve the dominant classes' need to uphold and enforce the existing economical and social structures. In his attempt at working "Towards a History from Below", Iletto refuses to resort to the customary sources of official History, compromised by middle class and upper middle class power over the codification of meaning in public discourse, and, in order to unveil the collective experience of a people, engages instead into a search of traces of History in popular culture, of masses' accounts or reflections in and over History.

Iletto focuses explicitly on the introduction of Catholicism in the Philippines by the Spanish colonizer. Originally intended as an effective means of social control and homogenization of the masses, Catholicism was selectively accepted and re-appropriated by Filipinos in the same manner people of insular South East Asia had been for centuries absorbing and adapting to their needs influxes from Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, always preserving a substrate of local pagan tradition. This discerning proceeding applied by Filipinos to the faith imposed by colonizers made them able to retain and foreground aspects connected with and echoing their specific cultural traditions and ways of conveying collective meaning, while neglecting or resisting others, irrelevant to or contrasting the articulation of the discourse on Filipino identity, culture and History. Iletto draws attention to the eminently productive re-appropriation of stories and rituals connected to the Passion of Christ, displaying how Filipinos have consistently exploited and plied the resources of imagery and meaning provided by the "Pasyon" to find ways of connecting and mirroring their own everyday "passion" of subordinated, colonized people with Christ's path to the Cross. Moreover, Iletto stresses the fluidity and vitality of this active negotiation, verified in subtle switches of meaning according to the state of contingent historical and societal situations.

The theoretical framework and analysis of *Pasyon and Revolution* seem irrefutably fit for approaching the treatment of time as History in *Evolution of a Filipino Family*. Of course, the attempts at telling History through film, and of doing so even "from below" are innumerable, but one has to reconsider how these attempts were conveyed and how Diaz's differs from them. If we just take a look at our selective pool of very long films, and focus on those that thematize History or nation making, we will find a blatant divide. Syberberg's idiosyncratic *Hitler* left aside, either in Reitz's three installments of *Heimat*, Bertolucci's *Novocento* or even more in Giordana's *La Meglio Gioventù* and Nasrallah's *La Porte du Soleil* we are bound to encounter similar narrative patterns featuring (supposedly) ordinary characters who find themselves either on purpose or involuntarily mingled with the major happenings and traumatism of their country's History. Protagonists in these films take either an active or a passive part in the events creating a direct implication of the macro level of History on the micro dimension of their (fictional) histories. The codification of this prototype fictionalizing the discourse on History dates back to European Romanticism, when the issue of nation-making came into absolute prominence and was felt as an inescapable obligation for the bourgeois middle-class that nurtured the intellectuals and literates that in those days were fashioning the codes of the modern novel. Even if this might sound as an oversimplified paradigm, it is undeniable that most of the ordinary characters in films such as *Heimat* or *La Meglio Gioventù* are actually not as ordinary as they are intended to be. By their very implication in History, they can be aptly profiled and tagged as "heroes", or rather "romantic heroes", as those featured in Romantic novels. The notion of ordinariness is of course symptomatically compromised, in ways that undermine and negate the actual enactment

of narratives of History "from below". The European, Romantic tradition that encrypts the individual self into the collective process of nation-making creates a generally paradoxical pattern of fictionalization that identifies the ordinary heroes' fates with the dominant paradigms of agency or emotional response to the historical events in question. For the mere ease of providing ready-made resources for identification through characters that shape as "heroes", and secondarily for offering (often involuntary) the means to uphold the dominant readings of History, this modern, romantic and bourgeois grammar has been fully embraced by cinema when dealing with History.

A truthfully contrastive example of History from below in cinema has however notoriously been made available to academic discourse by the films composing Hou Hsiao-hsien's "Taiwan trilogy". *City of Sadness* (Beiqing Chengshi, 1989), *The Puppetmaster* (Hsimeng Rensheng, 1993) and *Good Men Good Women* (Hao Nan Hao Nu, 1995) not only represent altogether one of the highest achievements in worldwide filmmaking of recent decades, in terms of aesthetic, textual and conceptual complexity and articulation, and could by no means also be regarded as another "dissimulated" very long film in three acts (although to my knowledge no one has yet to re-posit them in this peculiar manner) about History and nation making, but they also rework the very conceptualization of History in filmmaking with an inspiringly eye-opening and thought-provoking approach. In both *City of Sadness* and *The Puppetmaster* the implication of Hou's characters in History is remarkably tangential, as rather than being part of the action or being touched by their direct consequences, they usually just experience more generalized and peripheral developments or changes in everyday living ingenerated by happenings or decisions always taking place in a never visualized elsewhere. Hou's camera and focus always stay in his characters' settings letting History intrude through the reports conveyed by the voicing of characters, the writing of letters or the announcements of media, namely the radio. The denial of the visualization of History and its account through indirect, often polyphonic voicing reveals Hou and Taiwanese people's neat skepticism towards official History, a skepticism matured experiencing manipulations and programmed oblivion enacted by the regime of Kuomintang. Hou's cinematic answer to the sheer impossibility of attaining objective accounts of History takes shape in a proliferation of truly indirect approaches, either through reports that are meticulously identified as subjective or official or through the individual histories of his characters, in the changes in their lifestyle, habits or conditions due to the "side effects" of History.

Undoubtedly, Hou's approach to History in fictional cinema represents a pertinent parallel to Iletto's work in historiography, as it problematizes the sources of official History itself and privileges subjective, popular and non-normative memory over the compromises of dominant discourse. Hou's landmark trilogy has been casting a profound influence on Asian cinemas for over a decade now, both in terms of aesthetics and the conceptualization of History; by result of pure stimulus or sheer convergence, Lav Diaz's *Evolution of a Filipino Family* is no exception. Diaz's approach to History (the Marcos' years) replicates in many aspects Hou's, but also presents at least a couple of specificities or differentiations. Even more than in Hou's films, the characters of *Evolution* are far-removed from the main stages of History and their direct intervention in its course is nil: when Kadyo kills a group of sentinels to steal their weapons and sell them to guerilla militants, he is by no means acting out of ideological reasons, but just for the sheer necessity of granting basic survival to his family. The complete "alienation" of characters' histories from History plays also to a somewhat metaphorical extent, as it seems to be overtly evoked by Maria's impending blindness or Reynaldo's dreamlike meetings with the animated statue of José Rizal. This irreparable, yet meaning-pregnant fracture gives reason to Diaz's divergent strategy of inserting historical coordinates. In *Evolution*, for example, the radio plays a different but stronger and more extensive role than in Hou's films: although Diaz's characters extensively listen to it, their favorite broadcastings are soap operas, not news; Diaz thus stresses the power of the media in building collective consciousness



or lack of consciousness of society, politics and History, for they provide the ruling power with vehicles of efficiently distracting mass entertainment. Diaz hence appeals to the more customary insertion of archive footage to document the salient episodes in the History of the Philippines happening parallel to his characters' histories; but he does so quite unconventionally. Although the archive footage is arranged chronologically throughout the arc of the film, its appearance does not follow the norms of a carefully-placed and precisely-distanced punctuation: events quite separate in time are tracked down and resumed in clusters that break the main flux of fictional narration without providing solid and punctual anchoring of the plot to the historical background. The archival footage sequences thus seem to just act as an "in the meantime" referred to yet another stream of narration, implicitly downplaying the intrinsic weight or relevance of History or equaling themselves with those of the characters' histories. Moreover, the "non-rational" disposition of the footage itself might be read, like the whole recursive, elliptic and non-linear structure of the film, as an attempt to contrast, as in Iletto, Western-descended teleological and evolutionary models of History and histories to a specifically Filipino paradigm, relying on a more cyclical conception of time.

In terms of aesthetics, Diaz, as Hou, mainly relies on long takes shot with mostly fixed camera. Although this choice seems to reflect the same concern for giving time and space to the dynamics of human interaction, it is worth noticing how converging styles also envisage cultural specificities. Whereas Hou Hsiao-hsien's painstakingly-composed *tableaux* include blockings and an articulation of depth that reflect the arrangement of Chinese or Japanese-style housing in Taiwan, Diaz's compositions are for the largest part *en plein air*, exteriors that portray the communion of peasants or miners' characters with the environment they live in, a nature on which their culture is molded and their survival relies.

By the aforementioned means of plot configuration and style Diaz is thus able to come as close as possible to a cinematic, fictional rendition of the "History from Below" advocated by Iletto. This of course represents a further refusal and subversion of dominant modes of cinema, and of narration of History at large. Although *Evolution of a Filipino Family* is undeniably indebted to the groundbreaking precedent of Hou Hsiao-hsien's "Trilogy of Taiwan", Diaz's film displays a vital and consistently specific Filipino declination of this pioneering paradigm.

### IIIb.

There is one sequence of *Evolution of a Filipino Family* where all the questions of the articulation of cinematic time and of History in cinema seem to converge and merge to create a stunning vertigo of the aesthetic sublime and conceptual complexity. Kadyo's death takes place (and time) through a series of extensively protracted long shots following his stabbing, adding up to an impressive length of thirty minutes.

His murdering significantly follows his decision to abandon a plot aiming at the assassination of director Lino Brocka, a resolution matured after listening to Brocka's speeches recorded on the videotape provided by the heads of the plot. This is a deeply resounding and meaningful moment in the film, since at this point Kadyo is awoken to consciousness and acquires an awareness of the political and social system he lives in that no other character has experienced before. This enlightenment is the result of a "revelation" delivered by Brocka, the grandest filmmaker of the Philippines and for a long time the unheard critical conscience and an international delator of Marcos' regime; his presence in *Evolution* appears as Diaz's respectful and sincere tribute to a filmmaker whose cinematic style certainly does not represent a model for him, but whose commitment to his people and country impart a great lesson and profound inspiration.

Added to this, for once in the film, the staging of Kadyo's death, the final act of one of the histories in the film, occurs simultaneously with a key event in Philippines' History: the 1987 Mendiola massacre, when the Philippine Marines Corps shot at farmers demonstrating for land reform. While Kadyo has been brought to an individual awakening by Brocka's words, the Filipino people see their hopes for change in the new Presidency of Corazon "Cory" Aquino shattered by a new, brutal performing of the regime's old time practices: the metaphorical pattern of

fictional histories validates a full, recognizable correspondence with the actual happenings of History.

Once the metaphorical mode of Diaz is exposed and set, what follows resounds in its full, disruptive potential. Kadyo's slow, protracted, exhausting death, staged as a continuous and iterated path of falls and subsequent rises, is none other than a new, contextually meaningful and rooted re-appropriation of the Pasyon, of the Passion of Jesus Christ. As Filipinos have been doing for more than a century, Diaz plies the visual motif and repertoire of Pasyon to comment upon History in cinema. As the nexus of a double identification, Kadyo's protracted sufferance and his long path to death not only stand for Christ's ascent to the Cross, but for the plight of the Filipino self in the course of History. As a coherent signature to his multi-faceted (r)Evolution of cinematic time and History Diaz once again stresses the pride of Filipino culture: Kadyo's body is collected and disposed of with the bodies of the victims of Mendiola Massacre by a crowd of youths in a sequence that replicates *Spoliarium* (1884), the grand masterpiece of Filipino painter Juan Luna.



## EVOLUTION OF A FILIPINO FILM (EBOLUSYON NG ISANG PELIKULANG PILIPINO)

alexis tioseco

*“Brakhage said of reading Freud, ‘The first thing I understood is that here was a man trying to save his own life.’ Brakhage later acknowledged that the quote applied to him: his films are made with an intensity, a kind of ‘wit’s end’ desperation, that suggests a consciousness on the brink. Brakhage was not a craftsman doing something he loved; he used his craft to try to come to an understanding of whether – and on what terms – he could continue to go on living.”*

Fred Camper on Stan Brakhage

*“We should acknowledge that our viewpoints about Kiarostami differ in terms of what kind of information we consider most important. For me, Kiarostami is first of all a global filmmaker and secondarily an Iranian filmmaker. For you, he’s first of all an Iranian filmmaker. Even though I’m interested in learning about Iran through Iranian cinema, and his films are certainly a part of that, I feel that I go to his films to learn about the world, not just Iran.”*

Jonathan Rosenbaum, in dialogue with Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa

*“If great films invent their own rules, reinventing some of the standards of film criticism in the process, Béla Tarr’s *Sátántangó* surely belongs in their company.”*

Jonathan Rosenbaum

The above quotes, though in reference to three different filmmakers and (specifically) one film, apply just as well to my appreciation of the cinema of Lav Diaz and (specifically) his film *Evolution of a Filipino Family* (Ebolusyon ng Isang Pamilyang Pilipino).

The first quote, taken from Fred Camper’s essay for the ‘By Brakhage’ anthology released by Criterion, may relate just as well to Lav Diaz as it does to Stan Brakhage. While Brakhage’s and Diaz’s work are strikingly different, there are similarities in vision and purpose.

Diaz’s films express the same idea of a man trying to save his own life; trying to reconcile and struggle with himself, his demons, and his place in society as do Brakhage’s. Where Diaz differs, however, is that he paints his personal struggle within a much larger and broader canvass, one that looks at the individual in a historical, social, cultural, and global context (making him different from Brakhage, though not necessarily better or more important).

Diaz’s latest work, *Evolution of a Filipino Family* is the second in his ‘Philippine trilogy’. Though completed after *Batang West Side* (2002), its production began much earlier, and it effectively functions as the first part of the trilogy. Depicting the critical years of 1971–1987 in Philippine history, *Evolution* essays the struggle of the Filipino people; starting a year prior to Martial Law, enduring the sixteen year Martial Law period, and glimpsing the unrest that prevailed in the year that followed it.

*Batang West Side*, shot entirely in Jersey City, New York (with the exception of a few dream sequences shot in the Philippines), utilizes a non-linear narrative and the investigation into the death of a Filipino youth in America to scrutinize the state of the Filipino people post-Marcos. It surveys the lives of the diaspora abroad, challenging the choices Filipinos have made and the ‘American Dream’ many of them long for, and confronting a past that we as a nation have yet to reconcile.

*Heremias*, whose script was recently completed and which will begin production this year (2005), follows a single Socratic character as he suffers tragedy, witnesses evil, endures despair, questions God, and ultimately, offers himself as sacrifice. Binding themes from *Evolution* and *West Side*, *Heremias* examines the present state of the brutalized Filipino psyche.

*Evolution* witnesses the infliction of the wound on the Filipino psyche, *Batang West Side* examines its scars, and *Heremias* offers a remedy to cure its woes. Together, I undoubtedly believe, they will represent three of the most important works in contemporary world cinema, and in Philippine cinema-history.

The second quote, which was taken from a dialogue between American film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum and Iranian critic and filmmaker Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa for their book on Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami, makes a critical point about the differing ways in which we receive works, and in turn, write about them. Just as Kiarostami is received by Saeed-Vafa primarily as an Iranian filmmaker and secondarily as a global filmmaker, so too is Diaz’s work, universal and profound in its humanity and pathos, so ingrained in Filipino culture, with themes and issues tackled so relevant to Filipino people, that I, as a Filipino, first receive him as a Filipino filmmaker. Allow this to be a declaration and apology for my shortcomings: though my reception of Diaz will be primarily as a Filipino filmmaker, his work speaks just as poetically and universally about suffering, perseverance, reflection, humanity and sacrifice and the world we live in today as it does about the Philippines and what it means to be Filipino.

The third quote, taken again from Jonathan Rosenbaum (a critic whose writing has had a profound influence on the way I see and understand cinema), was said in relation to Béla Tarr’s astounding 7 ½ hour masterwork *Sátántangó*. Diaz’s 11-hour *Evolution* shares more than just its fondness for long takes, epic duration, historical footing and black and white photography with Tarr’s *Sátántangó*, it also similarly challenges our preconceived notions of the use of time in narrative cinema, and by its use of mixed formats and the long duration in which it was shot, forces us to strike-up new standards in criticism in our attempt to assess it.

When speaking to people about *Evolution*, its length, without fail, incites violent reactions: “I won’t watch that, I have better things to do!” “Why is it so long?” “Is its running time justified?” Even someone as well-versed in cinema as film critic Gino Dormiendo, refuses any attempt to understand the work, and he even appears in the film portraying Lino Brocka! “*Any filmmaker that cannot make their point in two hours has a problem*”, Dormiendo candidly declared in an interview on television. Dormiendo, a professor of film at the University of the Philippines (who had not seen the film itself at the time of speaking the above words), is not alone in his position however, as there are many others who share his sentiments. With those that simply cannot find the time to watch the film on one of its rare theatrical screenings, I sympathize. But those who dismiss the work on the basis of running time are buying into a shallow and narrow-minded concept of cinema; one so limited and constrained by the dictates purported and ingrained by the Hollywood machine so as to rule out even considering a work such as this. Prominent works of considerable length have existed as far back as the early feature works of D.W. Griffith. Who is to say that cinema hasn’t evolved enough in the past ninety years, or even more so in the past five-to-ten with the mass popularity of digital video, so as to dismiss radical changes in the utilization of the medium? Change was never wrought without first attempting to defy the norm. *Evolution* is a work of art that does not neatly fall into our standard definitions of cinema or video, and therefore must be scrutinized through an entirely different lens.



## length matters

Camper's assessment of Brakhage can be appropriated to Diaz. Diaz is not a craftsman doing something he loves, but is using his craft to try to come to an understanding of whether – and on what terms – both he, and the society he lives in, can go on living. Frustrated with the limitations – in production, content, time, aesthetic – and the exploitation involved in working in the film industry, and seeing no way of being able to wrestle creative control or the final cut from the hands of producers, Diaz drifted away and began his career as an independent filmmaker—a key move that led to great struggle, but marked the beginning of the fulfillment of his aesthetic, and full potential as a filmmaker.

*Evolution*, which is more than twice the length of his previous film *Batang West Side*, is so far removed in duration and aesthetic from our common notions of cinema, even more so from the melodrama and escapism rich cinema in the Philippines. It serves as Diaz's rebuttal to the long-standing tradition of Philippine cinema. Producers, directors, and critics in the Philippines alike have long wailed in duress at the mired state of Philippine cinema. But at the same time they continue to churn out offensively mindless works of entertainment and fantasy that belittle audiences. When confronted and asked why they don't produce more serious or quality films, the retort most often given is that "*Filipinos don't want to watch that. They go to the movies to be entertained, to escape; not to think.*" Diaz's cinema proclaims the opposite – that audiences do want to think, reflect, and change; that they do not want to live in stagnation, poverty, and a corrupt, morally bankrupt, society. His is a cinema that respects its audience by challenging them, and asking them to meet it halfway, to invest more than their time, but a part of their selves, into the viewing experience.

It is through the recorded image of his camera that Diaz attempts to make sense of the world, both for his audience and himself:

*"In Evolution, I am capturing real time. I am trying to experience what these people are experiencing. They walk. I must experience their walk. I must experience their boredom and sorrows. I would go to any extent in my art to fathom the paradox that is the Filipino. I would go to any extent in my art to fathom the mystery of humankind's existence. I want to understand death. I want to understand solitude. I want to understand struggle. I want to understand the philosophy of a growing flower in the middle of a swamp."*

*Evolution's* 11-hours running time is not merely for the sake of shocking audiences or calling attention to itself at festivals. The length of the film and the aesthetic that it puts forth are directly tied to its intention. What Diaz is proposing with his trilogy, is that we have not taken seriously enough the grave events of our past, that we do not yet understand it, and have yet to settle as a nation. Even recent (and well received) cinematic depictions of the Martial Law-era-Chito Rono's adaptation of Lualhati Bautista's *The Seventies* (Dekada '70), which places the events of Martial Law in the light of suburban melodrama, and Ramona Diaz's documentary *Imelda*, a portrait of the icon and wife of the former dictator Ferdinand Marcos that revels in her charisma and charm—have been far more interested in entertainment and celebrity than healing and understanding.

*The Seventies* follows the life of a suburban, well-to-do family. *Imelda*, celebrates and mocks the excesses of the lunatic cited in its title. Both films offer a view of the era through the eyes of the privileged. *Evolution* contrasts these depictions by framing its story around the lives of those that have been marginalized, both in cinema and in society – the underclass. It follows the lives of a single rural, farming family in an unnamed village, charting their stories over the course of the Martial Law period, and framing it with harrowing historical footage. Diaz's *Evolution*, by far the most humane and touching portrait of Martial Law era Philippines, asks us not to view the lives of the characters in the film, but to live with them: to work, walk, wait, sit, eat, cry, struggle, sing, rejoice, and reflect with them; to paraphrase Diaz: to experience what they experienced.

## production

*Evolution* can, in a sense, be considered both Lav Diaz's first and latest feature-film. Though it is his sixth completed feature-work (having ma-

de four studio works, and one independent film previously) it is also the first one to have begun production. *Evolution* was made over an 11-year period, beginning in 1994, not as the story of a Filipino family, but of a single character, Ray Gallardo, a Filipino seaman who jumped ship in New York. The scenes of Ray's life in the Philippines were originally intended as flashbacks, but as the shoots progressed and the story developed, it began to take prominence in the mind of Diaz, who eventually decided to pursue the Philippine story and set aside the footage shot in America.

The reason for the long drawn out production of the film was entirely an economic one – Diaz and producer Paul Tanedo simply did not have the financial resources to shoot continuously. Shooting would stall whenever they did not have money and would resume again when funds were raised; a period of several years sometimes passing between shoots. Shot entirely in black and white, *Evolution* was originally photographed using 16mm film stock. In 2003, with the high cost of purchasing and developing the film, mounting production costs, the project having been dormant for nearly four years and the emergence of digital video, Diaz has decided to take the grand leap from film to digital video.

## aesthetic

All of these difficulties, however, have coalesced relatively seamlessly into the fabric of the film; making it all the more a fascinating and rich experience to see. The black and white photography of the film blends with the historical footage and paired down cutting pace to create a non-fiction documentary-like feel; one that is further enhanced by the duration it took to make the film. Because the production lasted for so long a period, no make up, special effects, or change of actors is necessary to portray the aging of the characters—the actors age along with the characters they depict; an affect most startling in the case of the character of the child Reynaldo (Elryan de Veyra).

Before viewing the film I feared that the discrepancy between the footage shot on 16mm film and that shot on DV and video would be distracting. The difference in quality is jarring, but it has been utilized to appropriate effect, and has thus become a fascinating aesthetic device that, for the most part works! Roughly thirty percent of the eleven hours is comprised of the early 16mm shoots, with the remaining seventy percent in various forms of black and white digital video. Though uneven at certain points (having used different video cameras), a relative consistency in the storytelling exists, as the beautifully rendered 16mm footage, almost ethereal next to the high contrast resolution of the digital video, represents either flashback or dream sequences. It is when, late in the film, Diaz introduces a dream sequence shot on digital video that causes one to be momentarily confused.

The early 16mm shoots are predominantly filmed in medium and close-up, with shots rarely lingering for prolonged periods of time. The video shoots are often in long shot and done in long takes, sitting, waiting, and observing the daily routines of the characters. The feeling of watching and comparing the two is awe-inspiring, as one can chart not only the evolution of Diaz's aesthetic – from brief medium and close-ups, to long shots and extended takes – illustrating his liberation from the constraints of commercial cinema; but also the evolution of the art form of cinema itself—and the possibilities afforded by the coming of this technology.

The relevance of the period to the current national condition is crucial, as so many of the problems the characters face in the film are still prevalent if not more pronounced in our society today. In one scene, Kadyo, played by Pen Medina, is speaking to the leader of a rebel group (Rey Ventura), after having sold him guns. The rebel leader congratulates Kadyo on a job well done, and asks him to join their group. Kadyo politely declines, telling him that he only did it for the money; in order to feed his family. The scene then cuts and we enter a bar, where Kadyo is at a table drinking. A bar girl, 'Zsa Zsa' is then brought to his table, and the two slow dance to crooner Eddie Peregrina's rendition of *Together Again*. The passion of Peregrina's voice, the flare of the grainy black and white 16mm footage, and the look of blissful escape on Kadyo's face, his hand sliding down to caress Zsa Zsa's *derrière*, all combine to present one with the notion of a sweet memory. It is a magical scene, and one of



the few ones of pure bliss in the film. Diaz is compassionate to the character of Kadyo, and understands that this is, just as the radio dramas are to his family, his only form of escape; his only opportunity to be transported away from the weight of reality. As sympathetic as Diaz is, though, the scene with the rebel that occurs prior to this one serves to illustrate Kadyo's weakness, and perhaps that of us as a nation: for every step we take forward we take a step back or to the side, justifying our penchant for escapism by the gravity of our sorrow.

In another scene the family listens to the radio, hoping to catch the latest episode of an ongoing drama series. As one of the daughters learns that it is filmmaker Lino Brocka, she says his name off-handedly and disinterestedly ('It's just Lino Brocka') and then changes the station. Brocka, considered by some to be the greatest of all Filipino filmmakers, is portrayed by one-time film critic Gino Dormiendo. Brocka was an outspoken artist and activist with a flair for the dramatic, and Diaz here has him speaking out against censorship; critical words that serve as a reminder to our society today. Where once film and filmmakers played a critical role in shaping the national consciousness, railing against the censorship imposed by Marcos and fighting to make serious works in the context of a repressive regime, today, many filmmakers tread shallow waters, with such prominent directors as Laurice Guillen and Marelou Diaz-Abaya, themselves contemporaries and colleagues of Brocka, espousing self-censorship by championing the banning of the film *Live Show* (Toro, 2002) by Jose Javier Reyes and praising SM Cinemas, the largest theater chain in the country, for their move to ban screenings of R-18 rated films in their cinemas. Acts that surely have Brocka turning in his grave.

After the last second of video passes, the screen turns black, and a title card appears: *The Story of Two Mothers* (Ang Kuwento ng Dalawang Ina). A scene repeats from the film's opening: Hilda finds a baby in the dumpster, full of ants. Her voice like that of a madwoman, repeating phrases, her appearance like that of a homeless junky; she takes the baby and walks away. A woman enters the screen, and we learn that it is the mother who abandoned the baby. We hear her speak in voiceover as she kneels to lay roses on the spot where she once left Reynaldo:

*"For the past 16 years I've come back to this street.  
This is where I left my child.  
In a time of forgetfulness ...  
In a time of weakness ...  
Everyday I think of her.  
Everyday, I am sorry.  
Forgive me."*

The screen cuts to black, and the film ends with a quote: "Alam ko kung pano namatay si Jean Vigo" (I know how Jean Vigo died) – Taga Timog, filmmaker. Taga Timog, which in English translates to 'from the south', is the fictional alter-ego of Diaz. *Evolution* is an allegory, a tale that documents the tumultuous period wherein a country was broken, its people abandoned, and its psyche displaced. It is through the epic struggle to complete the film that Diaz has gained an understanding of just how Jean Vigo died: trying to save his own life. •



LAV DIAZ'S EBOLUSYON,  
A REARRANGEMENT  
OF A TROUBLED LANDSCAPE

Perhaps, it is by cosmic design that the writing of this essay on Lav Diaz's latest effort, *Evolution of a Filipino family* (Ebolusyon ng Isang Pamilyang Pilipino, 2004), should coincide with the broadcast premiere of Ramona Diaz's documentary *Imelda* (2004) in the United States.<sup>1</sup> (The two Diazes are not related.)

The two works, while they both deal with the Marcos years, either directly through the subject in the latter case or through a historical background in the former, assume contrary positions. *Imelda*, on one hand, attempts to humanize Imelda Marcos, considered the other half of the conjugal dictatorship, beyond the notoriety of 3,000 pairs of shoes supposedly found in her closet when the Philippine People Power stormed the Malacanang Palace in 1986. On the other, *Evolution*, the ten-hour film dramatizes the plight of a peasant family living in abject poverty amidst the oppression and violence of the Marcos regime.

As both writer on film and as student of history, this is the most opportune time to provide some basis for a critical assessment of Lav Diaz's work, so as to render an earnest judgment of the film.

My intention is not to make a comparative evaluation of the two works – although I foresee one in the near future – but to comment on that period of my homeland's history with cinema as a medium of revelation. I must say, there is a risk in doing so. Given my temporal and spatial distance from the subject in question – I have lived in the United States for the past 12 years – I must recall past experience to be able to produce a thoughtful appraisal of the period and of the film.

True, the wounded psyche as Lav Diaz is wont to describe it, wrought by the Marcos legacy of pillage and murder, still remains to be expressed and manifested fully in Filipino artists' creative works. (Ferdinand Marcos was elected president in 1965, then reelected in 1969. In 1972, a year before his second term should have ended, he declared Martial Law in his attempt to keep himself in power in perpetuity.) There have been various attempts, both then and now, in music, literature, theater and visual arts, that succeeded in conveying the sense of outrage and disillusion with state institutions.<sup>2</sup> In film, a number of film artists made films that contributed to popular debate, even at the risk of their lives and careers: Lino Brocka (*My Country/Bayan Ko*, 1984), Ishmael Bernal (*Manila, By Night*, 1980) and Mike de Leon (*In the Wink of An Eye/Kisapmata*, 1981; *Batch '81*, 1982).<sup>3</sup>

Regrettably now, no major work has come up that is able to make a thoughtful and sober estimation of the Martial Law years in the Philippines. The historical distance, almost twenty years after the fall of the dictatorship, could have afforded us an opportunity to reflect on the slaughter of our citizens and the plunder of our nation's resources arising from Marcoses' greed for power and wealth, thereby enabling us to learn lessons from it, in a way that Western artists ponder on the Holocaust years.

Attempts are at best, modest: there is one, through the revisionist cinematic interpretation of Lualhati Bautista's Martial Law classic novels, both of them directed by Chi-to Rono, *Child, How Were You Made* (Bata, Bata Paano Ka Ginawa, 1998) and *The Seventies* (Dekada '70, 2002); and another, through an anarchist critique of the Philippine revolutionary struggles in Gil Portes's *How Does One Become a Mother* (Andrea, Paano ang Maging Ina, 1990), Joel Lamangan's *Why Does One Lo-ok to Yesterday* (Bakit May Kahapon Pa, 1995) and Mario O'Hara's *Demons* (Pangarap ng Puso, 2000).<sup>4</sup>

It seems ironic to find another strand of creative impulse on the subject that is more recent: an outright denial of the "wounded" Filipino soul; if ever, it is capable of redemption, only if one forgives. This is exemplified by the religious incarnation of family drama in Laurice Guillen's *Change of Heart* (Tanging Yaman, 2000) and the Christ-like representation of the hero in Mariou Diaz-Abaya's *Reef Hunters* (Muro-Ami, 1999).<sup>5</sup>

Along this line, what appears to be most disturbing is the tendency of a few filmmakers to put a so-called human face on the oppressor. This is exemplified by *Imelda*, where the filmmaker, Ramona Diaz has not only succeeded in recuperating the Marcos cult but has entirely diminished, if not trivialized, the long years of suffering of our people



under the Marcos dictatorship. Implicit in the project, because Imelda Marcos was granted a forum to narrate her part in history (a few sound bites from a couple of progressive journalists do not suffice), is to exonerate her – or even the whole of Marcos family and their minions – of the sins of Martial Law. One asks, Whose sins were those then?

In the film's final frame while the closing credits are rolling, we watch the Marcos children, Imee and Bongbong who are now public officials in their father's home province, make their entrance in glee into an auditorium filled with their political supporters. As if saying, We are back!

The effect is both scary and devastating. To this writer then, writing this essay on Lav Diaz's *Evolution* becomes a moral responsibility.

It is in this context therefore, that one discerns the true worth of Lav Diaz's ten-hour opus. By sheer length, *Evolution* has no precedent. However, it is the audacity of its vision – thematic and aesthetic – that makes it one of the most important films in the history of Philippine cinema.

The ambition of *Evolution* is not merely to chronicle one Filipino peasant family's struggle for survival through the dementia of the Marcos' Martial Law years but to document the Filipino people's own. The time period, 1971–1987, assayed by archival footages, newsreels and the re-construction of actual events, e.g. interviews with the late activist-filmmaker, Lino Brocka, interspersed at various points in the film, corresponds to the events leading to the declaration of Martial Law through the upheaval that follows the People Power revolt. This provides a contextual framework upon which the filmmaker is able to dramatize the story of the Gallardo family against the tumult of the period, representative of the larger society.

*Evolution*, shot in black & white, opens with Puring (Angie Ferro), the grandmother, and her three granddaughters on the farm, their drawn faces and bodies projected as shadowy figures obscured by the blinding rays of the sun. This sequence of shots sets the emotional tone of the film: pained, wounded, desperate. Nevertheless, this family of women, because the men in their lives have been beaten by fate or misfortune, remains the moral core of the narrative. Theirs are the lives, intertwined with others, that progress painstakingly slowly through the whole length of the film, signifying the impoverished, almost dead-end existence of the Filipino, but only punctuated by instances of violence.

The rape and murder of the mentally-challenged daughter, Hilda (Marife Necenito). The maiming, incarceration and eventual killing of the son, Kadyo (Pen Medina). The savage abduction of Carlos (Erwin Gonzales), adopted son of Fernando (Ronnie Lazaro).

In-between, while the narrative bifurcates into two main arcs – one, Raynaldo (Elryan de Vera) leaves after he shoots his mother's rapist-murderers, and the other, Kadyo searches for Raynaldo in Manila after his release from prison – at the center of the film is the story of Puring and her three granddaughters: Huling (Banaue Micalat), Ana (Andrea Fernando) and Martina (Lorelei Futol). It is in their uncontained rage and fear of an uncertain future –

an overall tone of resignation and despair – that enables the viewer to understand fully the brutality of the Marcos' years.

Not a few may comment on the length of the film as an instance of directorial conceit. On the contrary, one has to make a case that it is the long novel format that affords us occasions to reflect on the impact of Martial Law on our present lives. Moreover, it enables us to experience the past, as if exorcising ourselves of the demons of the past.

There is pain in this process of recognition. A feeling of dread permeates even moments of quietude. The uneasy stillness of the rice fields, one barely hearing the wind, presages the savagery of the war between the government and the rebel forces in the countryside. The eeriness of the unhurried rain that accompanies Fernando's trek to the mountains in search for gold foreshadows the impending tragedy in his family. These are scenes that resist the idyllic, pastoral spectacle of rural life commonly seen in both contemporary art and popular culture.

Devoid of a commercial film's artifice – such as swelling music, special lighting, stylized editing and design – and entirely reliant on the almost real-time enactment of events, *Evolution* compels us to look at film in a wider cinematic context as a form of resistance to mainstream narrative and style. Consequently, or because of it, the filmmaker allows us to examine the subject, the Filipino tragic past, with a sense of urgency, in a way that is more probing and thoughtful.

This duality of filmic vision – film both as document and fiction – raises the issue of cinema as an aesthetic and cultural medium. The employment of what appears on the surface as either unrelated shots or diversionary narrative contrivance – one recalls the use of actual news footages of the massacre of farmers in Mendiola in the vicinity of the presidential Malacanang Palace and the staging of the studio taping of the radio drama serials – serves to disrupt the process of fictionalizing; thus, it provokes us to comment, to see storytelling as a device to inquire into the larger issue of the human condition at a particular time-space.

The ubiquitous insertion of the radio drama serial for one, provides a necessary break from the drudgery of everyday life – both for the benefit of the characters and the viewer – in the same way that they/we find solace in their songs and in their stories. Nevertheless, it is the use of the radio drama serial, because it adheres to the conventions of storytelling – linear narrative, suspense-driven, hero-centered – that reminds us, observers and students of film, of the popular origins of the cinematic melodrama. Similarly, the frequent singing of *Sapagkat Mahal Kita* (Because I Love You) (words and music: Felipe de Leon), a popular *kundiman* (Filipino love song), and the jukebox playing of the current pop tunes of Eddie Peregrina and Rey Valera, underscores the use of music as an emotive device in conventional cinematic storytelling.

In *Evolution* however, radio drama – as well as music – serves both as critique and a reconstruction of popular cinematic tradition and narratives. One points to the filmmaker's particular selection of materials. One drama serial entitled *While There Is Hope* (Habang May Pagasa), follows a young girl's dream of being a movie star,



her way out of poverty, and ends up in sex movies. The other, *Hope Awaits Everyone* (Ang Lahat May Pag-asa), tells of a young girl who gets seduced by her stepfather but is thrown out of the house by her own mother for her transgression. These drama serials represent two common narrative tropes in popular Philippine fiction, also cinematic melodrama, and serve to counterpoint filmmaker Lino Brocka's assertions on what ails Filipino movies in particular, and the larger Philippine society. The typical closure that is characteristic of these narratives impedes any possibility of a critical assessment of the sociopolitical condition that defines them.

What Brocka suggests, in his words and in his more meaningful works, e.g. the aforementioned *Bayan Ko* and other films, *Manila, In the Claws of Neon* (Maynila, sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag, 1975), *Jaguar* (1986) and *Pray for us* (Orapronobis, 1989)<sup>6</sup> – it may also be Lav Diaz's concern – is the imperative to wage a sustained, even protracted, counterhegemonic offensive, both pedagogic and agitational, to alter/reconstruct attitudes and practices, eventually transform society. Implicit in this effort, are attempts to re-configure film, not merely as a marketable product, but as an instrument for social change ...

Significantly, *Evolution*, by directly rejecting formulaic conventions of popular film, is able to re-imagine cinematic space for its viewer with a grammar that is liberative and with a narrative that allows the interruption and contradiction inherent in the social realities to play out. *Evolution* owes its potency to its consistent refusal to prescribe solutions, more or less letting opposing forces continually engage in a space of tension.

More than anything else, the eventual valuation of *Evolution* lies not only in its repudiation of the formal characteristics of popular film, but in its courage to insinuate that film is what social critic Edel Garcellano refers to as "... extension of the contemporary sociopolitical ferment of society."<sup>7</sup> The film, by acknowledging the issue of land as central to social unrest, suggests that it is only through the peasant class reclaiming ownership of their land that the nation will find its own redemption.

The failure of institutions to make changes in people's lives – be it government, church or the revolutionary movement – however, constitutes the film's thesis. A visually powerful image of Kadyo's almost twenty minute walk through his death after being stabbed is reminiscent of Christ bearing the Cross to the Calvary, thereby representing a collusion of these institutions. The futility of his death – a senseless, nameless death – evokes a feeling of unease because one does not find finality in it. There are no kins who are able to reclaim him. There is no closure. This, in effect, is the great Filipino tragedy.

It is only through the agency of art, the filmmaker making his film, that we, the viewers, are only able to redeem ourselves. Lav Diaz in *Evolution*, has to let his protagonist Raynaldo come back to his cousins' fold. He also has to retell the story of the baby who was left in the dumpsite many years ago. It was presumably, Raynaldo. He has to create the tale of the two mothers: the mother who bore him, the mother who saved him from the ants.

In the meantime, my country, my people continue to grieve. •

#### Notes :

1. Ramona Diaz's *Imelda* was premiered on US public television on May 10, 2005 as part of the annual Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. In January, 2004 it was honored with a cinematography prize at the Sundance Film Festival. Lav Diaz's *Evolution of a Filipino family* was screened in March, 2004 at the Pacific Film Archive (Berkeley, California) as part of the annual San Francisco Asian American International Film Festival.

2. Even during the Martial Law period, artists and cultural workers have produced works that convey the feeling of outrage against the US-propped government of Ferdinand Marcos, notably works of underground writers, Emmanuel Lacaba and Jose Maria Sison. But it was after the assassination of oppositionist, Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino, that a great number of artists – in music, visual arts, theater, film – joined forces with the proletariat to protest against the morally bankrupt Marcos government in the streets and through their art. To cite, the Lualhati Bautista, Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA), visual artists Jose Tence Ruiz and Antipas Delotavo, Patatag.

3. Lino Brocka, Ishmael Bernal and Mike de Leon are widely considered the main figures in what critics often mention as the second Golden Age of Philippine cinema, 1970–1990. Brocka's *My Country* (Bayan Ko, 1984), a story of a union workers' protest in a printing press, was shown at Cannes Film Festival where Mr. Brocka created some furor when he wore a "blood-streaked" Philippine map-designed *barong* shirt (Philippine national costume). Bernal's *Manila, By Night* (1980) dramatizes the impoverished lives of multiple characters in Manila. The Marcos government attempted to ban its exhibition at international film festivals because it is apparently a smear on Manila's reputation as premier city in Asia. De Leon's *In the Wink of an Eye* (Kisapmata, 1981), about an incestuous relationship between a retired policeman and his daughter, and *Batch '81* (1982), about the violence of a student fraternity hazing, are allegories of the authoritarian Marcos government.

4. Lualhati Bautista's popular novels *Bata, Bata Paano ka Gina-wa* and *Dekada '70* are considered feminist documents of the Martial Law period. Their filmization, both directed by Chito Rono, reduced their political significance by merely dramatizing the personal travails of a woman living through the tumultuous years of Martial Law. Portes's *Andrea* and Lamangan's *Why Does One Look to Yesterday* (Bakit May Kahapon Pa, 1995), both have a woman revolutionary as the protagonist, but presented her as too individual, emotional and crazed. O'Hara's *Demons* (Pangarap ng Puso, 2000), while breaking some ground on non-linear storytelling, is really a pastiche of revolutionary iconography that is confused and directionless.

5. Laurice Guillen and Marilou Diaz-Abaya, in their earlier works, bore great promise and appeared to usher in highly valuable feminist perspective in popular cinema when they started making films in the early '80s. They left filmmaking towards the end of the decade – apparently in frustration over the state of the industry – and returned in the mid '90s with an entirely different attitude to cinema. Guillen's work has since borne Marian (after Virgin Mary) thinking in film, notably *Tanging Yaman* with a scene of the grandmother seemingly ascending to heaven. Diaz-Abaya's, on the other hand, has become a metaphysical rendering of social realities, notably in *Muro-Ami*.

6. Brocka's *Manila*, about life in the slums of Manila, was considered a landmark in Philippine cinema (cinematography was done by Mike de Leon). *Jaguar*, also screened at Cannes, tells of a lowly bodyguard of a politician, who gets involved in a crime. Orapronobis, a story of an ex-priest who tries to save the lives of his former lover and her son from the clutches of a demented paramilitary head, serves as an indictment of the Cory Aquino regime's continued human rights abuses.

7. Garcellano, Edel E. "A Choice of Film Review (Or, Reviewing the Reviewer) in Knife's Edge. *Selected Essays ...* University of the Philippines Press, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines, 2001.



## contributors

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**Andrej Šprah**. After finishing studies of philosophy and comparative literature, Andrej Šprah became more intensively involved in film writings when in 1997 he collaborated with Stojan Pelko on the monography on Wim Wenders *Pogib in počas: podobe Wima Wendersa* and became member of the editorial board of film magazine *Ekran*. In 1998 he published a book *Dokumentarni film in oblast: vprašanje propagande in neigrane filmske produkcije v času med oktobrsko revolucijo in drugo svetovno vojno* (Documentary Film and Power: The Question of Propaganda and Non-Fiction Film Production During the October Revolution and World War II). Between 1997 and 2001 he was a regular lecturer at Ljubljana's Autumn Film School: International Colloquium of Film Theory and curated the 2001 school's edition titled *Current Problems of "Third World Cinema"*. In 2001 he published a short novel *Soraya* and in 2005 a collection of essays on contemporary Slovene cinema titled *Osvobajanje pogleda* (Liberation of the Look). He frequently publishes his writings – mostly on Slovene cinema, "Third World" cinema and non-fiction film production – in magazines *Ekran*, *Apokalipsa* and *MovEast*.

**Alexis A. Tioseco** is a film critic and programmer from the Philippines. He has written for a variety of publications, including the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, *The Philippine Star*, *Senses of Cinema* ([www.senses-ofcinema.com](http://www.senses-ofcinema.com)), *Cinemaya* (upcoming issue), and *Screen International*. He is a staff writer for *indiefilipino.com* ([www.film.indiefilipino.com](http://www.film.indiefilipino.com)) and is a regular contributor to *Screen Hub Asia* ([www.screenhub-asia.com](http://www.screenhub-asia.com)). He was one of 8 international critics selected for the Berlinale talent campus 2005.

**Mauro Feria Tumbocon, Jr.** has written extensively on Philippine cinema and culture for more than two decades in both the Philippines and the United States. He was member of the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino (Filipino Film Critics Society) and founding chair of Kritika, a multidisciplinary critics group in Manila. At present, he is founding director of the Filipino American cineArts which organizes the annual Filipino American film festival in San Francisco, now in its 12th year.

**Noel Vera**. Graduated Legal Management in Ateneo de Manila. MBA from University of Michigan-Dearborn. Former officer of the Bank of the Philippine Islands. In late 1994, walked into newsroom of *The Manila Chronicle* and turned in a piece on *Forrest Gump* – possibly first and only negative article on the film ever written in the Philippines. Called two weeks later to ask when it might come out and learned it was printed two days after submission. Has been regular film critic since. Moved to *The Manila Times* only months before *Chronicle* was closed by strike, 1997; moved to *Businessworld* years before *Manila Times* was sold, 1998 (second move prompted by editorial censorship of unflattering (read: honest) article on local filmmaker's latest opus). Has denied responsibility for closure of both papers. Philippine correspondent of *Cinemaya Magazine*, film digest based in New Delhi, India; occasional correspondent of *Film International*, film magazine based in Tehran, Iran. Has no political connections with Iranian government whatsoever (despite huge love for their films). Has contributed articles to the *Cambridge Book Review*, the Hongkong International Film Festival, the Singapore International Film Festival, the Far East Film Festival in Udine, Italy, and *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Has helped develop and write screenplay of Tikoy Aguiluz's *Rizal in Dapitan* (Rizal sa Dapitan, 1997), as a result sharing FAMAS Award for Best Story. Has translated into English the screenplays of Mario O'Hara's *Woman on a Tin Roof* (Babae sa Bubungang Lata, 1998), *Sisa* (1998) and *Demons* (Pangarap ng Puso, 2000); Jeffrey Jeturian's *Fetch a Pail of Water* (Pila Balde, 1999); Chito Rono's *Playing with Fire* (Laro sa Baga, 2000); Lav Diaz's *Burger Boys* (1999) and *Batang West Side* (2001) for international screenings. Has played consultant and programmer to the Cinemania Film Festival, the Far East Film Festival in Udine, Italy, and the Singapore Film Festival. Has had no regrets. So far. •



**Desaparecidos: Lav Diaz in evolucija manjkajočih ljudi**  
**Vinita Ramani**

Avtorico v prvi vrsti fascinirajo vprašanja reprezentacije zgodovine na filmu, problem modernistične interpretacije pojma tradicije in politični aspekti Diazovega enajsturnega epa, ki jih za konec poveže z Deleuzovo idejo odsotnih (manjkajočih) ljudi. Na konkretnih primerih iz filma razmišlja o ideji nacionalnih mitov, o filmskem času in o tanki meji ločnici med dokumentarnim in fiktivnim filmskim dispozitivom.

**(R)evolucija konkretnega**  
**Christoph Huber**

Pregledna, estetsko-socialna analiza Diazovega filma *Evolution* je nadgrajena z umestitvijo tega filipinskega filma v najširši filmsko zgodovinski kontekst. Avtor Diazov film primerja z "izgubljenim svetim gralom" filmske zgodovine, deseturno verzijo *Poblepa* (Greed, 1924) Erica von Stroheima, pri čemer v obzir jemlje tako po eni strani nadvse različna in po drugi strani presenetljivo podobna produkcijska okvira, znotraj katerih sta oba filma mukoma nastajala, kot tudi brezkompromisna, prelomna estetska načela obeh avtorjev, metaforični besednjak obeh filmov, nekonvencionalni narativni in ritmični strukturi in pa, seveda, iskren politični angažma, iz katerega se je Diazov film rodil in se k njemu vrača.

**Portret trpečega kot Filipinca**  
**Noel Vera**

Pragmatičen, prvenstveno faktografski tekst je zagledan v najnovejši film Lava Diaza predvsem v kontekstu evolucije režiserja kot umetnika: postreže z obilico koristnih informacij o režiserjevi življenjski poti in širši umetniški formaciji, pod drobnogled vzame njegove starejše filme in jih primerja z najnovejšim, za nameček si – na tehten in trezen način – privoščiti tudi nekaj kritičnih misli o slednjem, ki ga osebno smatra za ne sčela dokončano delo.

**Estetski izziv filma Batang West Side**

**Lav Diaz**

V obliki manifesta režiser na kratko povzame svojo vizijo in obrazloži potrebo po določenih estetskih prvinah, ki jih mnogi razumejo kot (preveč) radikalne.

**Batang West Side: prostor odsotnosti in prizorišče odpora**  
**Andrej Šprah**

Temeljita estetsko-teoretska analiza Diazovega predzadnjega filma *Batang West Side*, v katerem je režiser prvič odstopil od ustaljenih obrazilov filmskega pripovedovanja in zakoračil na nove teritorije (ki jih bo temeljito zakoličil tri leta kasneje s filmom *Evolution*). Tekst se zaključuje s spoznanjem, da gre Diazova prizadevanja vendarle brati predvsem kot vizualno poezijo.

**O času: Lavova (r)evolucija**  
**Paolo Bertolin**

Diazov enajsturni film je v tem tekstu uvodoma obravnavan prek temeljnih pojmov filmskega izraza: to sta prostor in – še pomembneje – čas. Avtor ugotavlja in dokazuje, da je *Evolution* v tem smislu revolucionarno delo, saj navedena pojma do obisti prevpraša in nadgradi v neponovljivo, enkratno vizijo, ki si ne zasluži le naziva "mojstrovine", temveč ima status "dogodka". Avtor o filmu nadalje razmišlja skozi zdravo marksistično optiko in v njem bere politični manifest prihodnosti; korekcijo izkrivljenih kapitalističnih percepcij na geografskih, kulturnih in zgodovinskih linijah.

**Evolucija filipinskega filma**  
**Alexis Tioseco**

Avtor ugotavlja, da je *Evolution of a Filipino Family* prvi del "filipinske trilogije", ki priča zadajanju udarca filipinski duši. Drugi del trilogije, *Batang West Side*, raziskuje brazgotine, posledice tega udarca, medtem ko bo tretji del, *Heremias* (trenutno v nastajanju), ponudil zdravilo; kot celota bo trilogija predstavljala eno najpomembnejših del sodobnega svetovnega filma. *Evolution* je izrazito "lokalen", je neločljivo vpet v filipinske tradicije, in obenem – morda ravno zaradi tega – tudi izrazito univerzalen. Tioseco nadalje sistematično obdeluje tri prvine, ki najbolj zaznamujejo Diazovo delo: obrazloži potrebo, celo nujo po epski dolžini filma (enajst ur); osvetli ozadje produkcije (film je nastajal enajst let); najbolj podrobno se naposled posveti radikalni estetiki, ki jo že uvodoma primerja z ustvarjanji Béle Tarra, ter vsebinski analizi filma, kjer izpostavi politično-poetično komponento Diazovih vizij.

**Evolution Lava Diaza: preureditev trpinčene pokrajine**  
**Mauro Feria Tumbocon, Jr.**

Kratka zgodovina filipinskega (političnega) filma, ki mu v perečih tem za obdelavo nikoli ni manjkalo (španska, japonska, ameriška kolonizacija/okupacija, Marcosova diktatura), se zaključuje z ugotovitvijo, da Diazov *Evolution* predstavlja vrhunec tovrstnega filmskega ustvarjanja. Avtor medij filma razume kot zrcalo družbe in tako preplete zgodovino svoje domovine z zgodovino tamkajšnje kinematografije. •



## CANNES 2005:



**l'enfant** otrok

luc in jean-pierre dardenne

belgija/francija

Nova izdaja canneskega festivala se je pričela s standardno skepso; bodo veterani, ki so v uradnem programu dominirali kot malokdaj, upravičili svoj privilegirani status, ali bomo poročevalci po padcu zavese ponovno prišli do družne ugotovitve, kolikšnemu številu mlajših, neveljavljenih režiserjev so bila vrata raja ponovno neupravičeno zaprta. *Ekranovo* festivalsko poročilo, ki vsebuje zgolj cvet letošnje izdaje, je v tem smislu dovolj zgovorno; med desetimi izbranimi naslovi se je znašlo kar devet veteranov (Allen, Jarmusch, Trier, Dardenne, Haneke, Cronenberg), starih festivalskih mačkov (Wang, To) ali preprosto institucij (Jones), ki – uganili ste – niso razočarali. Nekateri so dobesedno vstali od mrtvih, drugi so posneli svoj najboljši film, tretji preprosto nadaljujejo svojo “špuro”. Deset dobrih, zadovoljivih filmov v enem samem festivalu (ki vztraja na svetovnih premierah) je dandanes prava redkost. Našteli smo ji devet; deseti je odkritje leta, suvereno, lucidno, tragikomično potovanje na konec noči, s katerim bo Romun Cristi Puiu brez dvoma zaznamoval filmsko sezono. Tudi v Sloveniji.

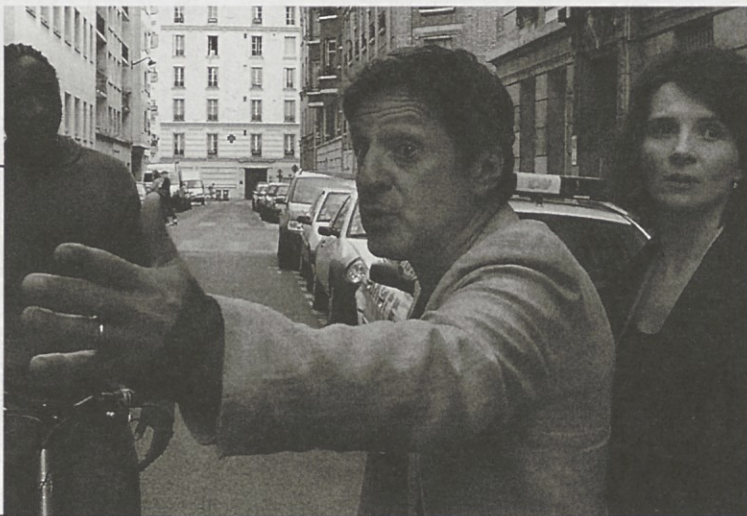
Bruno je dvajset let, Sonii osemnajst. Oba sta brezposelna najstnika, pred nekaj dnevi se jima je rodil sin, ki ga bosta klicala Jimmy. Živita od njene socialne pomoči in Brunovih malih prevar ter preprodajanja ukradene robe. Njuna prihodnost ni rožnata; Bruno počasi tone v dolgove, zato nekega dne prične razmišljati o dobičkonosnem poslu, ki vključuje njegovega novorojenčka.

Sinopsis zadnjega filma bratov Dardenne, ponovnih zmagovalcev canneskega festivala (po *Rosetti* leta 1999), prinaša zdaj že “klasično” sinergijo osebnih težav, socialne stiske in družbene marginalnosti. Danes njune filme prepoznamo tudi brez najavne ali odjavne špice; vse od *Obljube* (La promesse, 1996) dalje z dokumentarno kvaliteto, prepričljivimi liki in izredno dinamično, čeprav nevsiljivo kamero gradita brutalno prepričljiv svet brezperspektivnih belgijskih predmestij, hkrati pa krepi ta osebni rokopis, naslonjen na opus Roberta Bressona. Če je bila *Rosetta* ohlapni rimejk *Mouchette* (1967), je *Otrok* parafraza *Žeparja* (Pickpocket, 1959), še ena trda, brezkompromisna drama, pesimistična vizija ukradene mladosti, še ena socialno motivirana zgodba o zločinu (Bruno proda otroka, a po Soniinem zgroženem odzivu stopi v stik s posredniki in zahteva otroka nazaj, kar ga pahne v velike dolgove) in kazni. Oziroma odrešitvi. Mimogrede, otrok iz naslova bržkone ni novorojeni Jimmy, temveč njegov nesposobni in neodgovorni oče Bruno.

Film morda ne premore tako čustvenih reakcij kot *Rosetta*, niti moralnega imperativa *Sina* (Le fils, 2002), toda brata Dardenne znotraj sodobnih trendov evropskega socialnega realizma, tipa zloščene, salonske, populistične “družbene kritike”, ki se tudi zavoljo afirmativnega odnosa mnogih festivalov kot plevel širi naokrog, ohranjata visoke, praktično nedosegljive standarde.

S.P.





**caché** skrito

michael haneke

francija

Michaelu Hanekeju se je tokrat posrečil velik film, ki po eni strani obdeluje točno tiste teme, ki ga obsedajo že od njegovega šokantnega prvenca, filma *Bennyjev video* (Benny's Video, 1989), psihološke shriljivke v meščanskem okolju s poudarkom na problematiki zatajene krivde, po drugi strani pa zmore osebno družinsko zgodbo transcendirati in uokviriti s čisto konkretnimi zgodovinsko političnimi podtoni. Haneke, neprekosljivi sodobni mojster suspenza, na svoj suh, eksakten, minimalističen način postopoma ustvarja vzdušje ogroženosti v družini višjega srednjega razreda, ki jo nekdo na lepem začne terorizirati s pošiljanjem video kaset s posnetki njihove ulice, stanovanja, ovitih v alarmantne "otročke" risbice krvavega otroka in petelina z odsekano glavo. Ko začne George (izjemno prepričljivi Daniel Auteuil), sicer samozavestni voditelj televizijske pogovorne literarne oddaje, v agoniji strahu in neartiliranega besa sam naskrivaj odkrivati "storilca", se začne pred gledalci razkrivati njegova lastna travma iz otroštva, ki ogroža njegovo samoljubno samopodobo, v doslej neznani, značajsko neprijetni luči pa ga nenadoma zagleda tudi njegova žena (Juliette Binoche). Kot šestletnik je iz družinskega gnezda z izdajstvom odstranil "tekmeca", osirotelega alžirskega dečka, ki sta ga hotela posvojiti njegova starša, in ga tako nezavedno oropal za ljubezen, varnost in izobrazbo. Majidova starša, delavca na njihovem posestvu, je leta 1961 na višku francoske represije v Alžiriji na demonstracijah v Parizu ubila policija. Tisto, kar je v Hanekejevem filmu skrito, ni vprašanje, kdo je Georgeu dejansko pošiljal kasete (zelo verjetno in psihološko utemeljeno Majidov najstniški sin, ki je poznal očetovo tragično zgodbo), temveč nelagodje v dejstvu, da je travmatično "realno" evropske politike – ko je bilo v Franciji, stari evropski demokraciji, še nedavno, v šestdesetih letih, dopuščeno brutalno pretepati in celo streljati na demonstrante! – skrito v zanikanju, potlačitvi krivde in soodgovornosti za krvavo, izkoriščevalsko kolonialno dediščino, ki se dandanes Evropi vrača kot grožnja v obliki milijonov osiromašenih, izkoreninjenih, napol asimiliranih generacij emigrantov, ki jim islamski fundamentalizem ponuja instantno verzijo izgubljenega "kulturne identitete".

M.V.



## the three burials of melquiades estrada tommy lee jones

francija/zda

Eno lepših festivalskih presenečenj je pripravil igralec Tommy Lee Jones s svojim kinematografskim režijskim prvencem, ki so ga Canneski selektorji tik pred festivalom odstranili iz tekme za zlato kamero, nagrado za najboljši prvenec, ker naj bi Jones pred leti že režiral televizijski film. Jones je bil rojen v Teksasu, zato je bilo kar logično, da dogajanje svojega prvenca postavi na mehiško mejo, film pa zapakira v formo moderne vesterna. Ne gre za tip anti-vesterna oziroma post-vesterna, ki je v začetku sedemdesetih let, v času umiranja ameriškega paradnega žanra, kritiziral modernizacijo Divjega zahoda, pojavo strojev, avtomobilov in vse večjo korupcijo, ter lamentiral nad privatizacijo "javnega prostora", zapiranjem in ograjevanjem neskončnih prerij. Ne, Jonesov poklon Peckinpahovim junakom se z vso težo naslovi predvsem na moralno razsežnost starega Zahoda, na nepisano pravilo, da beseda nekaj velja. In Pete Perkins (Jones), lokalni rančer ob mehiški meji, svojemu zvestemu pomočniku, Mehičanu Melquiadesu Estradi, obljubi, da ga bo v primeru smrti dostojno pokopal; ne kjerkoli, temveč na domači grudi, v rojstnem mestu, kjer ga že dolga leta čaka njegova družina. Ko Mike Norton (Barry Pepper), novinec v enoti ameriške obmejne patrulje, po nesreči ustrelji Melquiadesa, želi policija incident karseda mirno zakriti, zato Melquiadesovo truplo brez obdukcije po hitrem postopku pokoplje. Pete čez nekaj dni prejme zaupno informacijo o storilcu, zato vdre k Nortonu in mu ukaže, naj odkoplje Melquiadesovo truplo. Skupaj bosta na konjih (nelegalno) prečkala Rio Grande in Melquiadesa pokopala v njegovem rojstnem kraju. Tako kot mu je obljubil. Jonesov vestern je fragmentiran, počasen, čustven, duhovit, brutalen ... in peklensko dober. Odločitev festivalske direktcije o umiku iz tekme za zlato kamero je bila nazadnje irelevantna, saj je *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* kot edini pobral dve uradni nagradi, za najboljši scenarij (Guillermo Arriaga, zaslovel je s scenarijema za Iñárritujeva *Pasjo ljubezen* in *21 gramov*) in najboljšo moško vlogo, ki je šla v roke Jonesu.

S.P.





Manderlay

## manderlay

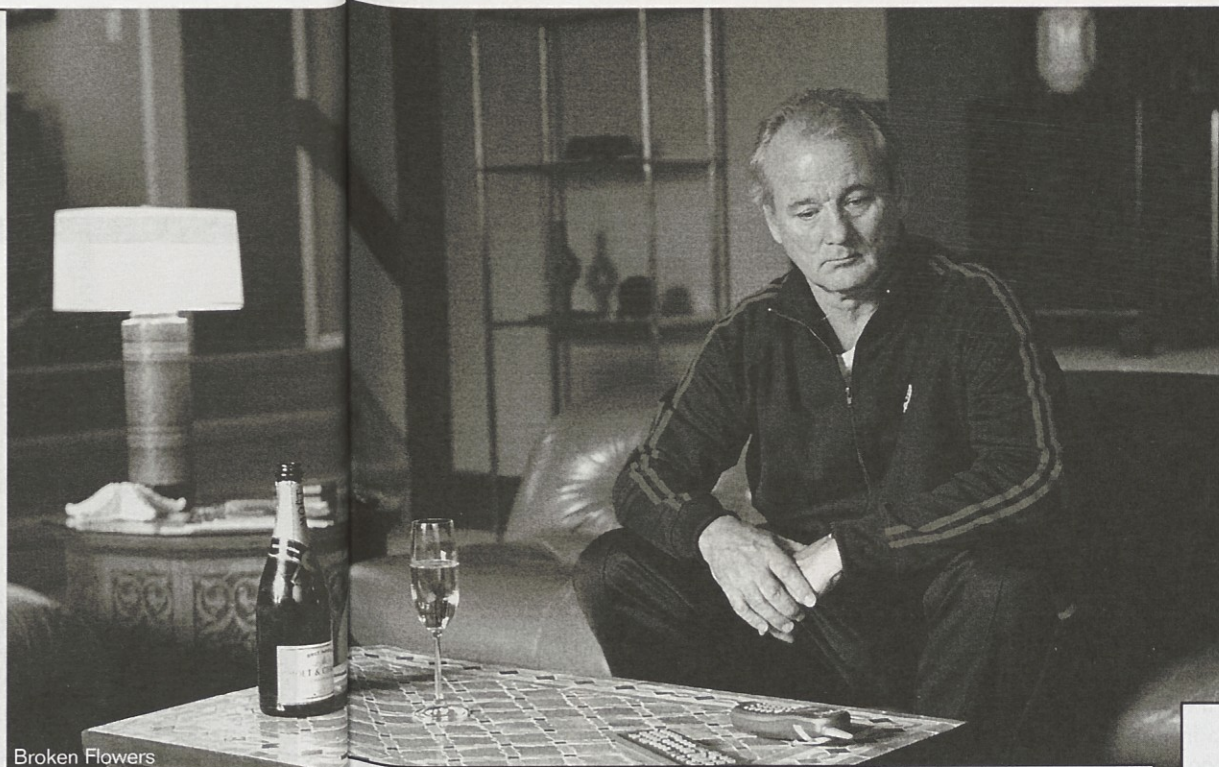
lars von trier

danska

Drugi del von Trierjeve ironične filmske trilogije ZDA – dežela možnosti je v slogovno estetskem smislu nadaljevanje brechtovske konceptualne zasnove *Dogvilla*, čeprav se v idejno tematskem pogledu v *Manderlayu* osredotoča na najbolj črnega med ameriškimi grehi – več kot stoletno tradicijo suženjstva. Von Trierja je navdihnilo branje predgovora k razvpitemu romanu *Histoire d'O* Pauline Reage s pomenljivim naslovom *Sreča v suženjstvu*, v katerem avtor Jean Paulhan opiše resničen dogodek iz leta 1838, ko so osvobojeni sužnji na otoku Barbados ubili svojega osvoboditelja, bivšega lastnika, ker jih ni hotel vzeti nazaj pod streho, kajti na svobodi so kmalu spoznali, da niso nič manj sužnji, le bolj lačni za povrh. Kot pravi hišni služabnik Wilhelm (Danny Glover): “Na Manderleyu mi sužnji večerjamo ob sedmih. Kdaj ljudje jejo, ko so svobodni?”

Grace (Bryce Dallas Howard), ki je zgrožena nad tem, da je sedemdeset let po aboliciji in koncu državljanske vojne, na začetku tridesetih let 20. stoletja v Alabami, naletela na sužnjelastniško farmo, ima v svoji trmoglavi, politično naivni “osvobodiljski” zagnanosti, ki jo lahko uveljavlja zgolj zaradi gangsterskih strojnic svojega očeta, diametralno nasprotno izhodišče: “Pripeljali smo jih sem, zlorabili smo jih in jih spremenili v to, kar so.” Von Trierjev *Manderlay* je kompleksna zgodovinska, psihološka in socialna lekcija o naravi suženjstva, ki pa jo tokrat lahko gledamo tudi kot režiserjevo neposredno kritiko ameriškega intervencionizma v Iraku, absurdnosti abstraktnega humanizma, ki v imenu uveljavljanja demokracije tepta osnovne človekove pravice, vključno s pravico ne le do življenja, temveč do življenja po lastnih merilih. Lars von Trier še enkrat pokaže, da je pot v peklo tlakovana z najboljšimi nameni, ki se običajno obrnejo v svoje lastno nasprotje. Kot v *Dogvillu* se tudi na koncu *Manderlayja* ob Bowiejevem komadu *Young Americans* zvrstijo dokumentarne fotografske podobe “postsužnjelastniške” Amerike – od Ku Klux Klana do Rodneya Kinga, od pogreba Martina Luthra Kinga do molitve Georgea Busha, od Vietnama, zalivske vojne do 11. septembra in tako naprej. Ni čudno, da je von Trier v Cannesu privedel najavil preložitve snemanja *Washingtona*, tretjega dela trilogije, češ da še ni dovolj zrel.

M.V.



Broken Flowers

## broken flowers

jim jarmusch

zda

Kot daje slutiti že naslov, je Jarmuschev zadnji in hkrati tudi najbolj *mainstreamovski* film, podobno kot lanskoletni žanrski biserček Sofie Coppola *Zgubljeno s prevodom* (Lost in Translation), očarljiva, izjemno dobro napisana melanholična romantična komedija, v kateri s svojim emocionalno nepredirnim obrazom Bustra Keatona znova blesti v izraznem minimalizmu nenadkriljivi Bill Murray, ob njem pa v epizodnih vlogah še štiri odlične igralkе veteranke – Sharon Stone, Frances Conroy, Jessica Lange in Tilda Swinton. Jarmusch je to komedijo značaje v nerodnih situacij, ki v gledalcu ne vzbujajo huronskega smeha, temveč le blage, (samo)ironične nasmeške, pisal prav z mislijo na Murraya kot ostarelega, apatičnega, izpraznjene Don Juana, ki na dan, ko ga zapusti mlada ljubica (Julie Delpy), prejme nepodpisano pismo v roza ovojnici, da ima devetnajstletnega sina, trenutno na poti iskanja očeta. Po zaslugi prepričevanja in v organizaciji hiperaktivnega sosedja z detektivskimi nagnjenji in petimi otroki, se Don Johnston (ne Don Johnson, kot vsakič popravi) odpravi po sledih prelite sperme oziroma starih ljubezni, ki bi hipotetično lahko bile matere njegovega sina. Srečanja z ženskami so različna, od pristrčnega, celo seksualnega, do napeto zapetega, prek čustveno hladnega do histerično pretepaškega, a vsa so polna grenkosladkega humorja, ki ga naš “junak” ganljivo strne v svojo edino filozofsko izjavo o življenju: “Preteklost je mimo, prihodnost še ni tu, ne morem je nadzorovati in to je najbrž vse.” Lepota *Zlomljenih cvetov* je v počasnem spreminjanju komične naravnosti filma v občutek hrepenenja, saj Don skozi serijo obiskov spozna in si potihoma prizna, da je v preteklosti nekaj zamudil, da mu v sedanjosti nekaj manjka, medtem ko ga Jarmusch še pravočasno samega zapusti na življenjskem razpotju. Jarmusch je film posvetil Jeanu Eustachu.

M.V.

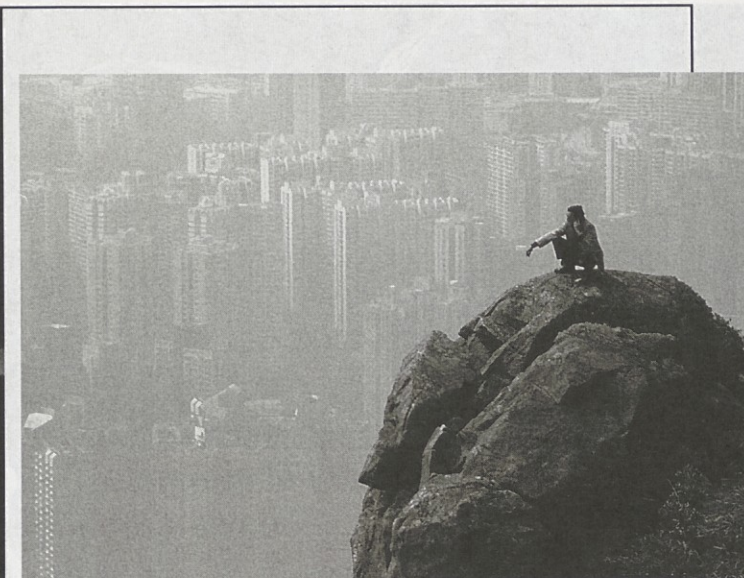
## match point

woody allen

zda

Želja vsakega festivalskega popotnika je močan otvoritveni film. Še lepši občutki se porajajo, kadar festivalsko srenjo na otvoritveni dan preseneti veteran, čigar pozno ustvarjalno obdobje so zaznamovali porazni filmi. Od Allena sem potihem resda še pričakoval manjša presenečenja, takšne bombe, ki jo je pripravil z zadnjim filmom *Match Point*, pa vendarle ne. Ironično, toda *Match Point* skorajda ni videti kot film Woodyja Allena; prvič, v celoti se odvija v Londonu, drugič, po ritmu in videzu spominja na angleške televizijske kriminalke, in tretjič, Allen film prvič v štiridesetletni karieri odpre z vizualno metaforo, žogico za tenis, ki v odločilnem trenutku zadane rob mrežice, se dvigne, nakar se slika zamrzne, naratorjev *off-glas* pa gledalca pušča v negotovosti, ali bo “žoga odločitve” padla na “pravo” stran ali ne. Pričujoči vizualni *teaser* vzpostavi oziroma stimulira suspenzivni ton krasne komične kriminalke, ki se prične kot viktorijanska ljubezenska drama, prenesena iz 19. stoletja v sodobno Anglijo, vključno z motivom “nekompatibilnega” ljubezskega razmerja med pripadnikoma dveh socialnih klas, ter sklence kot tipična (nikakor ne v slabšalnem smislu) televizijska kriminalka. In kdo so protagonisti te slatne Allenove bravure? Najprej je tu Chris Wilton (Jonathan Rhys-Meyers), mladi Irec, čeden in uspešen trener tenisa, ki se spričo okoliščin znajde v krogu premožne londonske družine Hewett. Chris hitro postane osebni trener sina Toma, zaročenega z Nolo Rice (Scarlett Johansson). Kmalu se zaljubi v Tomovo sestro Chloe (Emily Mortimer) in se z njo poroči. Medtem se Tomovo razmerje z Nolo, neuspešno ameriško igralko, konča, zato se Chrisova čustvena pozornost od žene hitro preusmeri k Noli, saj mu je bila simpatična od prvega trenutka. Chris in Nola postaneta ljubimca, toda kljub njenemu nagovarjanju, naj se loči od žene in v celoti posveti njej, Chris omahuje, saj se zaveda, da mu poroka s Chloe prinaša finančno neodvisnost, dobro službo in družbeni status. Stvari se še dodatno zapletejo, ko Nola zanosi. “Zločin iz strasti” v Allenovem primeru dobi povsem nove, ironične konture, ki jih na tem mestu na kanim razkrivati. Film je kljub generalnem odobravanju naletel na goreče nasprotovanje angleškega tiska, ki Allenu očita predvsem nepoznavanje in banaliziranje britanskih navad in običajev. Kakor koli, *Match Point* je Allenov najboljši film zadnjega desetletja in pol, odličen partner *Zločinom in prekrškom* (Crimes and Misdemeanors, 1989), najbolj ambicioznemu režiserjevemu filmu, ki je enako uspešno združeval principa komičnega in tragičnega.

S.P.



Election

## election

johnnie to

hongkong/kitajska

Cannesa 2005 se bom spominjal s posebno radostjo; po lanskoletnem premiernem gostovanju v glavnem sporedu, a izven konkurence za nagrade (s filmom *Breaking News*), je Johnnie To, človek, ki je v kriznem obdobju med 1997 in 2002 hongkonškemu žanrskemu filmu skoraj lastnoročno držal *rejting* in mu ohranjal spoštovanje, končno stopil tudi v tekmovalni spored. Po eni strani zavoljo mučnega nasilja, ki zaznamuje zadnjo tretjino filma in ki je od nekdaj imponiralo canneskim selektorjem, po drugi zaradi močne dramske strukture in trdnih likov, ki film vendarle dviga nad klasično podobo žanrskega (sploh hongkonškega) filma.

Staroste najstarejše hongkonške triade, The Wo Shing Society, vsaki dve leti volijo novega vodjo. Za oblast se borita na prvi pogled enakovredna rivala, zmerni, spoštljivi, a učinkoviti Lok (Simon Yam), ter malce mlajši, divji in impulzivni Big D (Tony Leung Kar-fai), ki dela vse za svojo izvolitev; na široko poudarja svojo podobo trdega, nepopustljivega vodje, člane volilnega telesa ščuva proti “mehkemu” Loku in jim ponuja podkupnino. Staroste se vendarle odločijo za Loka, kar povzroči razkol v triadi. Oblast bo prevzel tisti, ki bo prvi našel srednjeveški simbol vodstva triade, kipec z zmajevo glavo, skrit nekje v celinski Kitajski. V interni spor se vmeša še hongkonška policija, ki aretira vse ključne može triade, vključno z Lokom in Big D-jem, ki akcijo iskanja kipca nadzorujeta kar iz zaporniške celice ...

*Election* lepo pokaže stroj hongkonškega podzemlja, njihovo metodologijo dela, historično relevantnost in simboliko internih pravil. V tem smislu je prva polovica filma maestralna, sploh ker To suspenz dviga z lepo orkestrirano akcijo med zaprtimi gangsterskimi *mastermindi* in razparceliranimi operativci na terenu. V zadnji tretjini z brutalnim nasiljem (kar ni Tojeva specialnost) in obračunavanjem s konkurenco (ki evocira Coppolovega *Botra*) ritem malce popusti, a ugotovitev, ki gledalca zadane šele kasneje, je enako presenetljiva kot šokantna: v trdi gangsterski drami ne vidimo niti enega revolverja, izstreljen ni niti en strel!

S.P.





## a history of violence david cronenberg

zda

Cronenbergu so se v Cannesu mnogi posmehovali že med novinarsko projekcijo, kar je posameznike napeljalo na divje reakcije ("Stop laughing your fucking piece of shit critics and take this film serious!"). Očitki nasprotnikov so leteli predvsem na nesprejemljivo mešanje burkaštva in resnih, družbeno žgočih tem (enotnost družine, nasilje, odgovornost posameznika ...), toda kot nemalokrat doslej je Cronenberg iz "dvoboja" stopil kot moralni zmagovalec. Njegova svobodna ekranizacija stripov Johna Wagnerja in Vinca Lockeja se odvija v idiličnem malomeščanskem okolju ameriškega srednjega zahoda. Tom Stall (Viggo Mortensen) z ženo Edie (Maria Bello) in sinom Jackom živi mirno življenje v majhnem mestecu v Indiani. Nekega dne družino zaznamujeta nasilna dogodka; Jack se v šoli upre večnima provokatorjema, medtem ko Tom s spretnim manevrom razoroži in ubije napadalca, ki po naključju obiščeta njegovo restavracijo. V majhni skupnosti Tomovo junaštvo takoj pride na naslovnice časopisov in televizijske ekrane, kar pa Stallovim ne prinese dobrih novic. Čez nekaj dni Toma s pomočnikoma obišče gangster Carl Fogarty (Ed Harris), ki trdi, da Tom ni Tom Stall, temveč Joey Cusack, nekdanji poklicni morilec iz Philadelphije.

Cronenberg je preveč samozavesten, prefinjen in provokativen avtor, da bi delal konvencionalen akcijski triler ali konvencionalno družbeno kritično moralko. *Zgodovina nasilja*, trd, atmosferski krimič, ki evocira paranoične politične drame petdesetih let, je klasičen primer meta-trilerja; malo skupnost pretrese nasilen dogodek, realnost se meša z imaginarnim, zasebno z javnim, preteklost s sedanostjo. Je Tom res zgolj umirjeni, stoični Tom, ali je res philadelphijski plačanec, morilska mašina izpred dvajsetih let? Drži, "resni" aspekti se mešajo s komičnim (predvsem v finalu, za kar poskrbi prezenca Williama Hurta), česar režiser sploh ni skrival, rekoč, da njegov namen ni bil neposrednost za vsako ceno, temveč tudi humor. Nam je všeč.

S.P.

## moartea domnului lazarescu

smrt gospoda lazarescuja

crisi puiu

romunija

Zmagovalec v sekciji *Poseben pogled* je vrhunsko umetniško delo, vredno rezila Kafkovega eksistencialnega uvida in pretanjenega, nepretencioznega, *low-budget* realizma *Desetih zapovedi* (Dekalog, 1988) Krzysztofa Kieslowskega. Kamera iz roke spremlja dveinpolurno odisejajo umirajočega gospoda Lazarescuja skozi labirint zaradi prometne nesreče avtobusa tisto noč prenapolnjenih bukareških bolnišnic in skozi vrsto diagnoz preutrujenih, zajedljivih ali pač arogantnih zdravnikov, ki odrezavega pacienta, umazanega starca, smrdečega po alkoholu, niti ne jemljejo preveč resno. Fascinanten verizem bolnišničnega miljeja, ki so ga z igralci in snemalcem naštudirali v treh tednih pred snemanjem, je Cristi Puiu tako kot tipično romunsko "tranzicijsko" počasnost vokaliziral v napeto, razosebljeno dramaturgijo zadnjih ur življenja Danteja Remusa Lazarescuja, čigar ime mu žal ni pomagalo pri dostojanstvenem dvigu iz pekla mizerne, pritlehne človeške komedije v duhovne višave

72



Shanghai Dreams

*Božanske komedije* njegovega soimenjaka, italijanskega renesančnega pesnika. Ko je Dante Remus Lazarescu, gol, pobrit in nezavesten zaradi izlitja krvi v možgane po šestih urah administrativnih zapletov in prevažanja iz ene bolnišnice v drugo, končno le pripravljen za nujno operacijo, lahko počaka le še na Dr. Anghela. Dante Remus Lazarescu ne bo nikoli vstal od mrtvih, le njegova usoda se bo v času vsesplošne brezbrizičnosti do sočloveka ponavljala v nedogled. Edini resnični angel iz mesa in krvi je v filmu medicinska sestra, ki ga, vsega navajena po tridesetih letih dela, povsem brez predsodkov v rešilcu prevaža skozi noč in se z zdravniki prepira o njegovem vse slabšem zdravstvenem stanju. Puiiu, velik zagovornik minimalizma, pravi, da mu je blizu dokumentaristični slog socialno občutljivega Raymonda Depardona, pa tudi Johna Cassavetes, ter etika, lahkotnost in ekonomičnost pripovedovanja Erica Rohmerja. *Smrt gospoda Lazarescuja*, kafkavska parabola o osamljenosti kot *condition humaine*, polna črnega humorja, ironije, a prav tako sočutja, usmiljenja in razumevanja človeške nemoči in krhkosti, je prvi del na temo ljubezni do bližnjega iz napovedane serije šestih zgodb iz predmestja Bukarešte, v katerih bo obdelal še ljubezen med moškim in žensko, starševsko ljubezen, ljubezen do uspeha, prijateljsko in meseno ljubezen.

M.V.

## shanghai dreams

wang xiaoshuai

kitajska

Wang se je doslej ukvarjal tako s kritiko sodobne oziroma polpretekle Kitajske (*Frozen*, 1997) kot z alienacijo mladih v tranzicijski kitajski družbi (*Drifters*, 2003). V *Šanghajskih sanjah*, ki mestoma spominjajo na *Peron* (Zhantai, 2000) Jia Zhangkeja, je oboje združil in ustvaril lep, elegičen primer družinskega filma, ki riše posledice kulturne revolucije in odstira pogled v osemdeseta leta, čas postopne liberalizacije tamkajšnje družbe.

Izhodišče filma je postavljeno v šestdeseta leta 20. stoletja, ko je kitajska oblast prebivalce urbanih predelov motivirala (oz. silila), da so se pričeli izseljevati v odročne, ruralne predele, da bi s tem podpirali revnejše, industrijske regije Kitajske. Zgodba se odvija leta 1983 v provinci Guizhou, za časa liberalnih sprememb, ko so se ideali starejših dokončno porušili, ko so pričeli aktivno razmišljati o vrnitvi v velika mesta. V ospredju sta devetnajstletna Hong Qing in njega družina; oče jo vzgaja s trdo roko, prepoveduje ji stike s fanti in jo povečini drži doma. Njena edina prijateljica odkrito flirta z vrstniki in celo razmišlja o begu iz vasi, podobno kot Hong Qingin oče razmišlja o dokončni selitvi v Šanghaj. Film pokaže tragično povezanost dveh generacij, očetov in sinov (oziroma očetov in hčera), ki navkljub globokemu prepadu v dojemanju moderne sveta, neprestanim preprirom in represivnim prijemom hlepijo po isti stvari, odhodu in brezperspektivnega okolja, znotraj katerega niso nazadovali le v ekonomskem smislu, temveč tudi spiritualnem.

S.P.



nova knjiga slovenske kinoteke iz zbirke

slovenski film

# OSVOBAJANJE POGLEDA

Andrej Šprah

eseji o sodobnem slovenskem filmu

slovenski film

“Knjiga je pionirska v svojih uspehlih težnjah, da o domačem filmu spregovori v jeziku, ki – za razliko od domala vsega, zlasti dnevniškega pisanja o slovenskem filmu – domačnosti filma ne jemlje za nikakršno izhodišče vrednotenja, temveč se pogumno opre “zgolj” na posamezen film kot tak in o njem spregovori v širokem kontekstu sodobnih svetovnih razmišljanj o filmu.”

Jurij Meden, *Kinotečnik*, oktober 2004

slovenski film

kinoteka

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