# INTERDISCIPLINARY DESCRIPTION OF COMPLEX SYSTEMS

Scientific Journal

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Goran Pavlić, Sibila Petlevski and Saša Vojković

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NARRATOLOGY AND ITS DISCONTENTS: NARRATING BEYOND NARRATION. EDITORIAL*

The present thematic issue of INDECS is dedicated to interdisciplinary narratology. The interdisciplinary study of narratology is very much significant for a wide range of discussions in the 20th century, but also for the contemporary humanities (in literary studies, cinema studies, history, etc.), with heavy repercussions and influences in other fields (such as pedagogy, political science, information studies etc.). Some of the contributions were presented in shortened versions at the international conference “Narratology and Its Discontents: Narrating beyond Narration”, organised as a part of prof. dr. Sibila Petlevski’s scientific project “How Practice-led Research in Artistic Performance Can Contribute to Croatian Science” (IP-2014-09-6963), supported by Croatian Science Foundation. The conference was held at the Academy of Dramatic Art, University of Zagreb, from 6th to 8th April, 2017. The Conference was co-organized by prof. dr. Saša Vojković (the Sub-department of Theory, History and Analytics/Dramaturgy Department, Academy of Dramatic Art).

The scope of the Conference was intended to represent a wide range of topics related to the study of logic and principles of narrative production, but also to narratological ways to go beyond its structuralist background, focusing on the ways that narrative structures our perception of social and cultural phenomena and helps us construct meaning in general. Zagreb conference focused on the contextuality of the modes of narrative representation, its historicity, and its pragmatic and artistic functions across different media. Our special guest was a Dutch cultural theorist, critic, narratologist, video artist and filmmaker, Mieke Bal. Hence, the motto of our conference was taken from Mieke Bal’s thesis on the use of narratology for cultural analysis where she defined narrative as a cultural attitude, and narratology as a perspective on culture.

“What I propose we are best off with in the age of cultural studies is a conception of narratology that implicates text and reading, subject and object, production and analysis, in the act of understanding. In other words, I advocate a narrative theory that enables the differentiation of the place of narrative in any cultural expression without privileging any medium, mode, or use; that differentiates its relative importance and the effect of the narrative (segments) on the remainder of the object as well as on the reader, listener, viewer. A theory, that is, which defines and describes narrativity, not narrative; not a genre or object but a cultural mode of expression.” (Bal, M.: Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative. 2nd Edition, p.222, 1997).

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All the conference papers collected in this special issue are selected case studies original in their reimagining of the analytical procedures of narratology. Spanning contributions from literary studies to film studies, from performance studies to psychanalysis, with clear philosophical ramifications in certain articles, this collection of papers gives valuable insights into methods and trends of modern and contemporary narratology.

Zagreb, 11th June 2019

Guest editors:
Goran Pavlić
Sibila Petlevski
Saša Vojković
THE POINT OF NARRATOLOGY: PART 2*

Mieke Bal**

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ABSTRACT

Resisting the current fashion of calling everything, and ourselves as scholars, “post-” something, as well as the unnoticed scholarly privileging of the present, or “presentism” that comes with it, I return in this article to an age-old novel, written by someone who was severely traumatized. Miguel de Cervantes Savedra wrote his world-famous novel Don Quijote after having been held as a slave in Algiers. “Trauma” is a state of stagnation and the impossibility of subjective remembrance that result from traumatogenic events; not the events themselves; the distortion of time and its forms that result, rather than the violence that causes the trauma. This implies that the traumatic state challenges narratological concepts such as event, development, and other temporal categories. Therefore, I will concentrate my discussion on focalisation and temporality as both problematic as well as indispensable, and end up arguing that the traditional interpretation can also be reversed: the hero did not go mad because he read too much, but escaped in reading to evade the traumatizing reality.

In this article I revisit the concept of focalisation, in its tight connection, but not identity, to related concepts such as the gaze, looking, and imagining. The hypothesis that readers envision, that is, create, images from textual stimuli, cuts right through semantic theory, grammar, and rhetoric, to foreground the presence and crucial importance of images in reading; of imaging as part of that activity.

KEY WORDS

narrative, trauma, focalisation, imagination, envisioning

CLASSIFICATION

JEL: D83, D84

*The added number (part 2) after my title refers to the fact that 29 years ago, I published an article with the same title: The Point of Narratology. Poetics Today 11(4), 727-753, 1990. The ongoing need to make that point is the point of this article.

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INTRODUCTION

Narratology is an interdisciplinary field that offers concepts for analysing and understanding cultural utterances across media, cultures, and times. If only for that reason, it is important to keep furthering it. This is not always obvious. The collective endeavor of academic thinking is steeped in attempts to move forward; to discover new ideas. This is, of course, useful. But one important drawback threatens. Current trends in academic thought frequently contain a “post-” attitude. Terms such as “postcolonial”, “poststructuralist”, “postmodern” and most clearly the disingenuous term “posthuman” testify to this inclination. In all these cases, the risk is to disavow and no longer know that which came before. This evolutionist ideology considers the present as “beyond”, “after” and of course, “better” than what came before. Unfortunately, the tendency to jump over the hurdle to actually have to first get to know, understand, and deploy that which one seeks to overcome, leads to regress, not progress. For the nuances of the theory too easily rejected remain hidden, their point, unseen. History is annulled, and concepts meant to help specification and detailed analysis become diluted. As a result, the word “narrative” has become as vague as, and equivalent to, “message” or “prose”; no specific conception of what narrative is, seems to be called for.

Also, what I call the “anthropomorphic imagination”, the reading attitude that considers characters and figures as people, which plays such an activating role in reading narrative, is looked down on as naive rather than explained and taken on board as an element of reading as interactive process; and from that inside insight, criticised where necessary. Hence, the concept of reading or viewing itself has lost much of its important interactive thrust, which earns it a place in narratology. A more productive attitude is to respond to, instead of disavowing, what came before. To make that point, I will recall once again my own primary concern, the concept of focalisation.

Due to the unnoticed scholarly privileging of the present, or “presentism”, I have frequently discussed and felt compelled to return to focalisation in fiction, for example as a seemingly but never quite absent focaliser; in academic writing that invites “critical intimacy” \[1\]; and in visual narrative, not only cinematic but also photographic, drawn and painted. These examples all raise issues of focalisation; notably of further differentiating it, so as to adapt itself to intercultural situations. Neither narrative, nor its backbone focalisation is bound to literature, or textuality for that matter. Moreover, by rejecting the relevance of concepts, the absence or negative of narrative functions remains unnoticed, whereas that is as telling as their presence or explicit invocation. There is an elective affinity, although not an identification, between focalisation and seeing. Reading focalisation and practicing counterfocalization where needed is an activity with political relevance\[2\].

In this contribution I will make an emphatic historicizing gesture, and invoke one of the monuments of the cultural legacy of the Western world, one of its primary best-sellers, *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha* by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547-1616). To foreground the political relevance of this novel for today, it matters that he wrote it after experiencing five years of captivity as a slave in Algiers (1575-1580). The novel, in two parts – the first published in 1605, the second in 1615 – at first sight reads like a parody of medieval epics and romances, and that is how it has been mostly interpreted. The famous chapter I, vi where the Priest and the Barber destroy the majority of the books in Don Quixote’s library, is also a treatise of literary criticism, but based on the clichés of the time. Given the shady role these characters play, their literary insights must be met with suspicion within the fictional universe of the novel. It seems odd to me that the large majority of interpretations of the novel go along with it, and with the medically highly dubious statement that due to reading “his brain dried up and he lost his wits” (I, i)\[3\].
The most illuminating analyses of this novel confront it with interdisciplinary approaches. A good example is Bruhn’s article [2] that places it in the context of ritual, popular culture, and the Bakhtinian carnivalesque. This leads him to considerations of the narratological key question “who speaks?” and concludes from the failure to come up with clear answers that this is in fact the first modern novel [2; pp.203-205]. He calls this novel’s enunciation “theatrical and labyrinthine” – which is, in fact, an answer to the key question. Integrating the issues of place and time, in other words, of the chronotope in a characterization of important places, such as the inn, and the poetics of characterization of the figures, he ends up with a fine analysis, also, of the ethical and political points [2; pp.206-207]. Bruhn’s analysis stays far away from the repetitions of the cliché judgments of the Priest and the Barber, the Housekeeper and the Niece in chapters V and VI.

The standard reading makes it only too easy to consider Don Quixote mad, without inquiring into the kind and causes of that alleged madness. In view of the more dynamic sense of history I have termed “preposterous” [3], Don Quixote can also be seen as a precursor of later novels that mock adventure stories, such as eighteenth-century Jacques the Fatalist and his Master (Denis Diderot, 1765-1770) and The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman (Lawrence Sterne, 1759). But it also resonates with postmodern novels of the twentieth century. In view of this temporal reversal, the standard interpretation may be challenged. Most importantly, Don Quixote stands out in its intensity and creative expression of prolonged hopelessness. This leads to what is termed trauma, a notion over-used and hence, in danger of losing its specific meaning. In my view, “trauma” is a state of stagnation and the impossibility of subjective remembrance that result from traumatogenic events; not the events themselves; the distortion of time and its forms that result, rather than the violence that causes the trauma. This implies that the traumatic state challenges narratological concepts such as event, development, and other temporal categories. Therefore, I will concentrate my discussion on focalisation and temporality as both problematic as well as indispensable, and end up arguing that the traditional interpretation can also be reversed: the hero did not go mad because he read too much, but escaped in reading to evade the traumatizing reality⁴.

SEEING IT

In order for a theoretical point to be useful, it must be seen. To avoid over-generalisation of focalisation (diluting the concept) this calls for some unpacking. I will do that first through a close look at two neighbouring concepts that touch but are not equivalent to visuality, both as sense perception and as insight. These concepts are the “gaze” and “focalisation”, different but affiliated. They are often conflated, with disastrous results, or, alternatively, kept separate, with impoverishing results. They are all three “travelling concepts” – concepts taken from one domain to another, with changes in use, meaning and analytic value along the way. In Don Quixote, two systematically opposed focalizers are the knight himself, when Don Quixhote makes his erroneous (“mad”) interpretations of what he sees, and his squire Sancho Pança, whose down-to-earth vision of the world counters his master’s. The ironic battle between these two visions is an emphatic demonstration of the importance of focalisation. It is the motor of the narrative, which, mired in the timelessness of trauma, cannot really have a sequence of events as its backbone⁵.

In order to see the relevance of such concept-probing for an inclusive narratology that has wider relevance than just for the modern Western literary tradition, I also briefly invoke work by Indian artist Nalini Malani, whose shadow plays stage acts of memory that I would qualify as Palimpsestic. Malani has been working with the diffuse, repressed or otherwise distorted memories of religious-political violence in the wake partition (1947), superimposed by the
violence of Hindus committed against Muslims (1992-1993) and the violence in Gujarat in 2002. Note that these three waves of violence seem acts of repeating, and thus constitute together a non-evenemential palimpsest of collective trauma.

The “gaze” is a key concept in visual studies, one I find important enough to fuss about, to avoid conceptual fuzziness. It is widely used in fields whose practitioners participate in cultural studies, both as a common word and as a concept. Norman Bryson’s analysis of the life of this concept of the gaze, in art history and in feminist and gender studies, amply demonstrates why it is worth reflecting on. He rightly insists that feminism has had a decisive impact on visual studies; film studies would be nowhere near where it is today without it. In turn, film studies, especially in its extended form, which includes television and the new media, is a key area in cultural studies, but also, given that film is a time-based, sequential medium, a field enmeshed in narratology. The itinerary Bryson sketches is largely informed by the centrality of the concept of the gaze in all the participating disciplines. One of these is literature.

The concept of the gaze is sometimes used as an equivalent of the look, indicating the position of the subject doing the looking. As such, it points to a subject position, real or represented. We can allege the classical example of Don Quixote’s seeing giants where Sancho warns him that these are simple windmills to understand the decidedly subjective nature of looking (I, viii), and its consequences for the narrative action. Sancho worries about the expense of destroying windmills, whereas Don Quixote is concerned with the sticky notion of “enemy”. This staging of two distinct and incompatible views determines the action to follow, Don Quixote’s first heroic/failed action after he has hired Sancho. The gaze is also used in distinction from the look, as a fixed and fixating, colonising, mode of looking – a look that objectifies, appropriates, disempowers, and even, possibly, violates. This makes it an important concept for a critique of colonialism – and of the remnants of it, or renewed forms, in so-called postcolonial literature and art. It increases the difficulty of looking at Malani’s 2012 installation In Search of Vanished Blood. As its title indicates, this work solicits an interactive viewer willing to search for what has vanished; the trauma of violence.

In its Lacanian sense, the gaze is very different from – if not opposed to – its more common usage as the equivalent of the look or a specific version of it. The Lacanian gaze is the visual order (equivalent to the symbolic order, or the visual part of that order) in which the subject is caught and by which the possibility of seeing is limited. The gaze is the world looking (back) at the subject. Nothing makes this clearer than a Malanian shadow play based on slowly turning cylindrical shapes that cast on the surrounding walls evocations of figures from Indian epic and mythology, popular painting, Greek mythology and recent literary texts – artefacts that all have in common that they represent, evoke or resist violence in and for the present. This is how, in this work, the world and its history look back at us. Significantly, the viewer is trapped between the cylinders and the shadows on the walls, and cannot help being caught “in” the shadows. This artwork can shed a retrospective light on what seems the madness of Don Quixote, but can also be seen as a reflection of his being caught in the author’s traumatic state without a sense of an ending of captivity.

Don Quixote chapter I, xiv, offers a different but congenial reflection on women’s lot, including the blame they get for men’s obsessions in a mirroring play of projection. This chapter has been prepared by a goatherd’s rather sympathetic account of the event in chapters xii and xiii, where the character of the central woman figure is focalised as “objectively” as possible, a pre-empting of the nasty responses to her in the following chapter. This questions the hysterical reaction to amorous rejection – the idea that some men won’t take “no” for an answer.Positing again a firm oppositional pair of focalisations, the woman opposes a firm “‘no’ means ‘no’” to this. In addition to the beginning of Don Quixote’s pointless (“mad”) altruism, this scene expresses the idea, which might seem contemporary but is already
expressed in Cervantes’s novel, that the young woman Marcela does not need Don Quixote’s help, and that men such as Don Quixote who try to be “good guys” still reproduce some of the masculinist pitfalls in their interactions with women. The occasion is the suicide of a young man who could not abide Marcela’s refusal to become his.

The narratological reason why this account by necessity takes the form of a scenario for a theatrical-cinematic intermedial translation is the need to oppose two visions more clearly. The following is a succinct staging of that scene, in order to posit the different focalisations.

A small group of men dressed in black make gestures and sounds of mourning. This must go on for some time before the poem is being read. Someone finds a piece of paper, blown away by the wind. This is a fragment of a manuscript Grisóstomo left behind when he killed himself.

A male voice reads fragments from it, in which the deceased writer attributes action to focalisation:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Disdain doeth kill; and whether false or sound} \\
\text{Suspicions will all patience overthrow;} \\
\text{But jealousy with greater rigour slays} \\
\text{A lengthy absence doth our life confound;} \\
\text{Against fear of oblivion to ensue} \\
\text{Firm hope of best success gives little ease.} \\
\text{Inevitable death lurks in all these.} \\
\text{But I – amazing miracle! – still live,} \\
\text{Jealous, absent, disdained, and certain too} \\
\text{Of the suspicions that my life undo.} \\
\text{‘At one same time can hope and fear exist?} \\
\text{Or is it reason that they should do so,} \\
\text{Seeing how much more cause there is for fears? ...} \\
\text{O tyrant of love’s state, fierce jealousy!} \\
\text{With cruel chains these hands together tie,} \\
\text{With twisted rope couple them, rough disdain!}
\end{align*}
\]

Suddenly, while we hear his droning voice, Marcela appears, from the top of a hill. There are some men who seem to be reading from loose sheets of paper, then look up and their jaws drop when they see Marcela’s beauty. This is the confrontation between the sympathetic account in the two previous chapters and the hatred expressed by one of them, who becomes agitated and shakes his fist at her, and aggressively challenges her:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Have you come here, perhaps, fiery basilisk of these mountains, to see if the} \\
\text{wounds of this wretch, whom your cruelty killed, will bleed afresh at the} \\
\text{sight of you?}
\end{align*}
\]

Seeing is central. The man alludes to the potential power of the look as a motor of events. Marcela, now near the men, defends herself, looking at the viewer:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Those whom I have attracted with my looks I have undeceived with my words.} \\
\text{I, as you know, have riches of my own, and covet no one else’s. I have a taste} \\
\text{for freedom and no wish for subjection. I neither love nor hate any man. I do} \\
\text{not deceive one man and encourage another. I do not trifle with one nor keep} \\
\text{another in hope. I enjoy the modest company of the village shepherdesses and} \\
\text{the care of my goats. My desires are bounded by these mountains.}
\end{align*}
\]

In other words: no means no. Meanwhile, Don Quixote comes racing to help Marcela, looking silently into the camera in close-up, while French psychoanalyst Françoise Davoine, who participates in the project, comments in voice-over [6]:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{In other words: no means no. Meanwhile, Don Quixote comes racing to help Marcela,} \\
\text{looking silently into the camera in close-up, while French psychoanalyst Françoise Davoine,} \\
\text{who participates in the project, comments in voice-over [6]:}
\end{align*}
\]
Marcelle affirms forcefully that she won’t let herself be trapped by ideologies that seek to make her feel politically guilty. She refuses complicity with death-discourses pretending to be utopian, and she stands up against the political weapon of inducing guilt.

Don Quixote pushes Marcela away and talks to the men. He threatens them:

*Let no man, of whatever state or condition, dare to follow the fair Marcela, under pain of incurring my most furious indignation! She has shown with clear and sufficient argument that she bears little or no blame for Chrysostomo’s death.*

The nuance “little or no blame” betrays the ambivalence in the focalisation of the knight who seeks to help but remains caught in his masculinist vision. Marcela looks at him with surprise and annoyance, then pushes him aside. This conflict of gender-bound focalisations is here inter-medially translated from narrative to theatrical video.

Marcela’s remnant of guilt is in her beauty as perceived – focalized – by the men. In its more common use – perhaps between ordinary word and analytical concept – the gaze is the look that the subject casts on other people, and other things. Feminism initiated the scrutiny of the gaze’s objectifying thrust, especially in film studies, where the specific Lacanian sense remains important [5]. More broadly, the meaning-producing effects of images, including textual-rhetorical ones, have been recognised. In this type of analysis, the gaze is also obviously central. Using the shadows of cultural memories as her medium, Malani makes an appropriating gaze impossible. The figures are fugitive, moving, ungraspable; whereas the viewer is caught between subject and object position. Thus her work seems to provide a direction of reading the scene of Marcela narratologically, in order to notice the ambiguities the conflict of the focalisations entails.

The objectification and the disempowering exotisation of others further flesh out the issues of power inequity that the concept helps to lay bare. This is its relevance for “postcolonial” theory. Indeed, the affiliated concepts of the other and alterity have been scrutinised for their own collusion with the imperialist forces that hold the gaze in this photographic and cinematic material. Merging in her work the mythologies of India as well as Greece, Malani makes any distinction between self and other, already precluded by the form and medium of the work, also impossible on the level of content. And this is precisely what the Marcela scene demonstrates.

Enabling the analysis of non-canonical objects, such as snapshots and Bruhn’s carnivalesque [2], the concept is also helpful in allowing the boundaries between elite and larger culture to be overcome. Between all these usages, an examination of the concept itself is appropriate. Not to police it, or to prescribe a purified use for it, but to gauge its possibilities, and to either delimit or link the objects on which it has been brought to bear. Only with such examination can it prove its usefulness for an inclusive narratology. Considering the theory in terms like “post-classical”, then, discourages such an important intellectual activity.

So far, in its development in the cultural community, the concept of the gaze has demonstrated its flexibility and inclination to social critique. But it also has a more hands-on kind of relevance. For it has an affiliation with – although is not identical to – the concept of focalisation. In narrative theory, the concept of focalisation, although clearly visual in background, has been deployed to overcome visual strictures and the subsequent metaphorical floundering of concepts such as “perspective” and “point of view”. It is precisely because the concept of focalisation is not identical to that of the gaze or the look (although it has some persistent affiliation with both of these visual concepts) that it can help to clarify a vexed issue in the relationship between looking and language, between art history and literary studies, but also, between mainstream and inclusive narratology. The common
The question for all three of these concepts is what the look of a represented (narrated or depicted) figure does to the imagination of the reader or the look of the viewer. The scene of Marcela demonstrates this.

Retrospectively, my interest in developing a more workable concept to replace what literary scholars called perspective or point of view was rooted in a sense of the cultural importance of vision, even in the most language-based of the arts. My long-term argument with Gérard Genette, for example, turned out entirely based on cultural-political disagreement [7]. Hence, vision must not be understood exclusively in the technical-visual sense. In the slightly metaphorical but indispensable sense of imaginary – akin but not identical to imagination – vision tends to involve both actual looking and interpreting, including in literary reading. And, while this is a reason to recommend the verb “reading” for the analysis of visual images, it is also a reason not to cast the visual out of the concept of focalisation. The danger of dilution here must be carefully balanced against the impoverishment caused by the excess of conceptual essentialism that goes by the proud name of “rigour” [17].

The term focalisation also helped overcome the limitations of the linguistically inspired tools inherited from structuralism. These were based on the structure of the sentence and failed to help account for what happens between characters in narrative, figures in image, and the readers of both. The great emphasis on conveyable and generalizable content in structuralist semantics hampered attempts to understand how such contents were conveyed – to what effects and ends – through what can be termed “subjectivity networks”. But to make that point, it is necessary to test the theory, and analyse where and why it fails to deliver [18].

The hypothesis that readers envision, that is, create, images from textual stimuli, cuts right through semantic theory, grammar, and rhetoric, to foreground the presence and crucial importance of images in reading; of imaging as part of that activity. The fact that Malani makes her viewers come to terms with being caught in images that evoke past violence – especially against women – in the present, demonstrates that the importance of images lies in their rigorous present tense. This temporality is key to the analysis of how reading includes imaging, not only as a visual activity but also as occurring in the present. Let me call this first phase of the dynamic of the concept-in-use, the gaze-as-focalisor [19].

The second phase goes in the opposite direction. Take “Rembrandt”, for example. The name stands for a text – “Rembrandt” as the cultural ensemble of images, dis- and re-attributed according to an expansive or purifying cultural mood – and for the discourses about the real and imaginary figure indicated by the name. The images called “Rembrandt” are notoriously disinterested in linear perspective and also highly narrative. Moreover, as I have analysed in my book Reading “Rembrandt” [8], many of these images are replete with issues relevant for a gender perspective – such as the nude, scenes related to rape, and myth-based history paintings in which women are being framed. For these reasons combined, focalisation imposes itself as an operative concept. But, while narrativity may be medium-independent, the transfer of a specific concept from narrative theory – in this case, focalisation – to visual texts, requires the probing of its realm, its productivity, and its potential for propagation versus the risk of dilution [20].

This probing is all the more important because of the double ambiguity that threatens here. Firstly, focalisation is a narrative inflection of imagining, interpreting, and perception that can, but need not, be visual imaging. This would allow disparaging presentations of “others” through actions, for example, to pass unnoticed. To conflate focalisation with the gaze would be to undo the work of differentiation between two different modes of semiotic expression, and obliterating the critical potential of a subtler narrative analysis. Secondly, and conversely, the projection of narrativity on visual images is an analytic move that has great potential but
is also highly specific. To put it simply: not all images are narrative, any more than all narrative acts of focalisation are visual. Yet narratives and images have *envisioning* as their common form of reception. The differences and the common elements between the two concepts are equally important. This is also why Malani’s shadowy images move, turn, appear and disappear. This is how they hold us: as Huyssen has it, by their “visual lure and aesthetic fascination” that keep the present tense active beyond a mere, because powerless, lament about gendered violence [9; p.52].

In my own work, the examination of the concept of focalisation for use in the analysis of visual images was all the more urgent because the new area of visual imagery appears to carry traces of the same word by which the concept is known. This was a moment of truth: is focalisation in narratology “only a metaphor” borrowed from the visual domain? If so, does its deployment in visual analysis fall back on its literal meaning? Instead, and supported by Malani’s images and Cervantes’s story-telling, I claim that the concept of focalisation helps to articulate the look precisely through its movement. After travelling, first from the visual domain to narratology, then to the more specific analysis of visual images, focalisation has received a meaning in visual analysis that overlaps neither with the old visual one – focusing with a lens – nor simply with the new narratological one – the cluster of perception and interpretation that guides the attention through the narrative. Or, as in Malani’s work, the multiple narratives brought in to facilitates “acts of memory”. It now indicates neither a *location* of the gaze on the picture plane, nor a *subject* of it, such as either the figure or the viewer. What becomes visible is the *movement* of the look – a movement Malani makes so inevitable on all levels that nothing can offer a more convincing, because experiential argument than this artwork. This movement can help us understand the “madness” of Don Quixote’s barely sustainable story-telling.

In that movement, the look encounters the limitations imposed by the gaze, the visual order. For the gaze dictates the limits of the figures’ respective positions as holder of the objectifying and colonising look, and the disempowered object of that look. The tension between the focalisor’s movement and these limitations is the true object of analysis. For it is here that structural, formal aspects of the object become meaningful, dynamic, and culturally operative: through the time-bound, changing effect of the culture that frames them. Thanks to its narratological background, the concept of focalisation imported mobility into the visual domain that usefully and productively complemented the potential to structure envisioning that had been carried over from visual to narrative in the first phase.

For all these reasons combined, I privilege focalization as the most important concept in an inclusive, or “concurrent” narratology. Its potential to not only facilitate precise and hence teachable interpretations but also to entice interactive reading with empathy, to facilitate experiential participation in the movement inherent in representation, is key for a deployment of narratology in contexts where readers lack specific knowledge and might therefore be tempted to judge prematurely, to cast aside a book, or to look down on an action. This holds especially for the memories of colonial but also “post”-colonial violence, and exposed to the hilt in Malani’s shadow play that makes all of us participants in that violence in the present tense. A consistent attention to focalisation, instead, promotes an exciting discovery of new visions, imaginative and enriching. If we want our students to be politically aware and ethically sensitive while developing their artistic sensitivity, this is the best breeding ground for such attitudes.

**CRYSTALS OF TIME**

An inclusive narratology must demonstrate a surplus value, insights not otherwise gained, for the intercultural, intermedial, and interdisciplinary encounter. This relevance must be demonstrable for both popular narratives and the kind of complicated ones we tend to
consider “literary” or “artistic”. The intercultural situation of migration has been a central
topic in much of my film and curatorial work. This has sensitized me even more to the
importance of focalization: the representation of all forms of the perception of narrative
content, regardless of who does the actual narrating.

One important form of focalization in the fields connected by that very important preposition
“inter”, is memory. This involves time, another concept from narratology that needs more
precision and density. Keeping the attention on memory as a specific form of focalization,
through systematic attention to focalisation we can grasp how multi-temporality and multi-
directionality join forces in complicating the sense of history as a series of events. The string of
events we call history now becomes a constellation from which rays go out in all directions.
Futurality itself, then, is multidirectional, encompassing the past as well as the times of
others. If subjectivity is porous, however, then memory and history are inseparable. Memory
must be understood as a cultural phenomenon as well as an individual and social one. Although
the term “cultural memory” has been quite popular for a few decades now, my
assumption for this paper is that these three “kinds” of memory cannot be separated. The
distinction is only a matter of emphasis, of perspective and interest on the part of the
researcher, analyst, or memorizing subject. All memories have an individual, a social and a
cultural aspect. This is only logical, since the subjects that remember are also participants in
all three of these domains. Moreover, memories have a three-partite temporality. Memory is a
connection between the three times of human temporal awareness: the past, in which things
happened that the memory engages – or not; the present, in which the act of memorizing
takes place and into which the remembered content is, so to speak, “retrieved”; and the
future, which will be influenced by what the subjects in the present, together and embedded
in their cultural environment, remember and do with those memories. I focus on “cultural
memory” – as I said, this is a focus only; one that brings forward political aspects, and the
plurality of the subjects involved.

The most insightful description of historical time is a perfectly adequate description of
memory. In “Theses on the Philosophy of History” Benjamin imaginatively speculates on the
arrest of thought. This arrest constitutes a break with linearity, with “homogeneous, empty time”, a kind of de-automatization and “filling” or embodiment of time. This can serve
as a characterization of Don Quixote’s relentless, ongoing and invariably failed attempts to
do politically useful work. The failure of an adequate narratological analysis is just as
productive, or more, than a successful one. This arrest puts the present forward, making that
present both subjective and political. Moreover, it results in a great force, causing a “shock”
that, in turn, leads to a crystallization of time into a constellation.

Like crystals of snow, crystals of time offer a model for thought that eludes the straitjacket of
linearity that leaves both historical contradiction and subjective experience by the wayside.
Searching for a linear string of events in narratological analysis is productive, precisely
because the failure of the attempt characterizes the narrative as multitemporal. Instead, the
Benjaminian idea of shock, or choc en retour of arrested thought allows us “to grasp time as
dense with overlapping possibilities and dangers – an understanding of the present as ... the
site of multidirectional memory” [11; p.80]. In such a conception of memory time and
direction merge, or freeze, in the merging of focalisation and the image; hence the relevance of
the concept for visual analysis. Deleuze puts it thus, in a key passage that gives density to
memory as a form of focalisation:

*What constitutes the crystal-image is the most fundamental operation of time: since the past is constituted not after the present that it was but at the same
time, time has split itself in two at each moment as present and past, which differ from each other in nature, or ... it has to split the present in two*
heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past. Time has to split at the same time as it sets itself out or unrolls itself: it splits in two dissymmetrical jets, one of which makes all the present pass on, while the other preserves all the past. Time consists of this split, and it is this, it is time, that we see in the crystal.

The “emanation of past reality” that Barthes marveled at in photography [13; p.88] is compounded by an emanation of another’s (past or present) reality. In Cervantes’s novel, the author and the character (the Prologue calls them father and the son) are as “other” to each other as possible. Memory mediates to turn this novel into a document of “migratory aesthetics”, an encounter not based on alterity – a vexed concept that implies an unmentioned “self” – but on groping towards affective understanding, against all odds of circumstance and history. This is how Davoine rewrites [14] the novel as an account of a training analysis, mutually set up between Don Quixote and Sancho Pança. If such a literary work has achieved and retained the world-wide status as a masterpiece it has, it is first of all because it has not lost any of its actuality. Not coincidentally, the novel is based on what the great specialist of Cervantes, María Antonia Garcés, has called, in the subtitle of her edition of a contemporary witness statement [15], “an early modern dialogue with Islam”. Formerly, in deep history, things happened that still happen, or happen again, today. Hence, “formerly is today”. With the research group at the Linnaeus University in Växjö, Sweden, we could call it “concurrences”, temporal as well as geographical – a crystal of time moving in the opposite, centripetal direction.

Every epoch knows of such situations that push human beings out of humanity. The novel carries not only the traces of the absurdity and madness that suggest the inevitably traumatic state in which its creator must have been locked, upon his return to Spain, as transpires symptomatically in the stories told. But it also foregrounds this consequence of war and captivity in the madness of its literary form. It takes a firm narratological analysis to notice how it does and does not comply with the structural characteristics. Chapter I, viii ends on a cliff-hanger: who will win this battle, Don Quixote or the Basque? Leaving that question hanging as irrelevant, the next chapter reflects on the question of history and truthfulness, and only after this part that stages a first-person narrator, can the battle continue and be more or less concluded. The sheer-endless stream of “adventures” makes all film adaptations more or less hopeless endeavours. One can barely read, let alone watch all those pointless attempts to help others, the repercussions of which involve cruelty and pain. If I nevertheless seek to make an audio-visual work based on this novel, it is because the aftermath of violence, of hopeless stagnation in situations of which the end is not in sight, needs and deserves exploration. Thus, through being touched by the installation’s form, viewers can learn from it for dealing with their own experiences of the violence contemporary society can generate, their own as well as those hinted at by others in their surroundings, in order to repair what Cervantes called in the Prologue to Persiles the “broken thread” of memory, and I add following Davoine [14], social connectivity23.

This project pertains to what is today most frequently called “artistic research” – a search and analysis through artmaking. We have called the specific genre of video production in other works, “theoretical fictions”; and this is the genre here as well. This is the deployment of fiction to understand difficult theoretical issues, and even to develop theory through what fiction enables us to imagine. The challenge to make a video project based on Don Quixote appeals to two ambitions. First, the current situation of the world makes a deeper, creative reflection on trauma and its assault on human subjectivity, an urgent task for art. The insights the novel harbours uniquely connect to other experiences of war, violence, and captivity. Second, a well-thought-through video project can explore and transgress the limits of what
can be seen, shown, narrated, and witnessed, specifically in relation to trauma, which is itself notoriously un-representable. This exposes the limitations of narratology, but precisely for that reason, makes that theory indispensably illuminating.

As a mostly narrative medium, film seems the least apt to do justice to the turbulent incoherence, repetitiveness, and incongruous “adventures” told in the novel. All films, including Terry Gilliam’s recent one (2018), remain within the classical interpretation, leaning on ridiculing the mad knight. Yet thanks to its capacity for audio-visualization, a video installation consisting of different, non-linear episodes may instead be more effective in showing, rather than representing, not the moment trauma occurs but violence-generated traumatic states. Wittgenstein’s ending of his Tractatus (1921), “Of what one cannot speak, one should keep silent” was modified later into “Of what one cannot speak, one can still show”. The importance of showing is to enable witnessing as an engaged activity against the indifference of the world.

In order to do justice to the peculiar, cyclic, perhaps even “hysterical” form of the novel while pursuing these two goals, only an equally “incoherent”, episodic artwork can be effective. But this artwork must exceed a plain similarity of form. In view of the need for witnessing, such a form enables and activates viewers to construct their own story, and connect it to what they have seen around them. This is where focalisation and temporality can join forces to compel active witnessing as a mode of reading. Thus, we aim to turn the hysteria of endless story-telling into a reflection on communication beyond the boundaries that madness draws around its captive subjects, and instead, open up their subjectivity.

To achieve this, we expect that the creation and production of singular installation pieces facilitates experimenting with the episodic nature of the literary masterpiece. These pieces, presenting “scenes”, will be presentations of situations. The scene of Marcela is an example of this (non-)structure. To give insight into the stagnation that characterises the adventures, these pieces are predominantly descriptive – that stepchild of narratology, yet imperative part of all narrative. Any attempt at narrative will be “stuttering”, recurring, without any sense of development, and often, the images will not match the dialogues.

What French psychoanalyst and theorist of madness, Françoise Davoine, calls, citing historian Fernand Braudel: “dust of events” (“poussières d’événements”) [6: pp.43-44] adequately characterises this work’s form: sprinkling situations, moments, over the stage or throughout the gallery space. Thus, the tenuous line of a single narrative yields to an installation that will put the visitors in the position of making their own narrative out of what is there, on the basis of their own baggage, while witnessing events without a pre-established chronological linearity. This is adequate to the state of trauma presented in the pieces and in the juxtapositions among them, and to the need to stretch out a hand to, instead of turning away from people hurt so deeply. The trauma incurred by Cervantes after being held in captivity as a slave without any sense of an ending to his disempowered state and his suffering, has been beautifully traced, narrated, and explained by Colombian literary historian scholar María Antonia Garcés [16]. This traumatic state looms over the entire project, and determines its form. Therefore, we want to try something we never do: completely merging the author’s biography, the main character’s ostensive and much commented-upon madness, and the main character of the one narrative unit we select for a narrative element, “The Captive’s Story”, as three incarnations of the desperate attempt to recover from the world’s most horrid crime: to destroy the subjectivity of others by captivity [16].

The form of these pieces will be experimental in many different ways, so that a contemporary aesthetic can reach out to, and touch, a situation of long ago that, as befits the stilled temporality of trauma, persists in the present. Where possible, long, enduring shots will
predominate. Sound-wise, some are quiet, some loud. This allows the simultaneity, the proximity, and even the superposition of different scenes. But as in the novel, reading is the beginning. This is Don Quixote’s primary transgression, defect, or seduction; not necessarily the cause of his madness. As Flaubert implied in Madame Bovary, the novel constantly insinuates that reading is maddening, without demonstrating it without reasonable doubt. Although reading is not usually seen as an action, especially not compared to Don Quixote’s hectic adventures, here, in this “primal scene”, reading consists of (tiny) actions. These infra-actions hint at another aspect of reading: captivating, it captures, confines, holds the reader. Thus, it becomes a discreet, barely visible metaphor of captivity. The act of reading is the birth of the character and, according to traditional interpretations, of his particular kind of madness. But this remains ambiguous. Is it reading that drives him mad, or is he hiding in reading to at least imagine himself free? Captivity generates the desperate need to free oneself.

The scene will show how Don Quixote changes during reading, his facial expressions and body language displaying how he transforms from sane but passive to mad and back; from mad to sad, and reviving. Without uttering a word, he enacts horror, relief, loneliness, and the desire to be heard; announcing or recalling the situations of the other pieces. The scene is not suggesting to limit this transformation to reading alone – the suggestion is, instead, that there is an impossibility to remain the same when one is surrounded by the snippets of cultural and political “noise”. In a second sequence, reading has become much more intense. Sometimes bursting out laughing, he fights with the books, destroys part of his environment, before he leaves. The duration of this scene, which is endless, is enacted by subtle changes of light, from daylight to dark; from candle light to daylight. The figure will be invoking another person, who fails to appear. In an armchair and in bed, he is surrounded by, that is, drowning in books. Mumbling some words, sometimes screaming, laughing out loud, he responds to worlds described to which visitors have no access. The scene ends with Don Quixote slowly getting up, falling back into his chair. Then, quite suddenly, he interrupts his reading, closes the book, shuffles aside the other books, and gets up to go out.

While the reading is going on, behind, somewhat blurred, an action continues, mainly done by the priest and the housekeeper. It is a pantomime between them, worrying about Don Quixote’s sanity; an embedded focalisation. Looking at the books, roughly taking out anything that seems dangerous, they fill a shopping bag with an ironic slogan of emotional capitalism: “Your life has never been so well filled”. But, asks the housekeeper, books of entertainment can do no harm, can they? On the contrary – what if he decides to become a shepherd, or worse, a poet, which is contagious and incurable?

Another experimental form concerns the dynamic relationship between visibility and invisibility, image and writing. A frequent deployment of voice-off without synchronicity with the images – also a novelty in our work – will foreground this tension. The actor Mathieu Montanier will be visible, but so will, sometimes, the letters of inscriptions, in association with other texts, to foreground the nature of video-graphy as a form of writing. We will also experiment with different combinations of sequences, including mounting multiple images on a screen; this, also, for the practical purpose of facilitating the project to travel and to be combined with other artworks. Hence, through experimenting with possible forms of the art of video, we seek to invent new forms for the formlessness of trauma, confronting these with the classical narratological structures.

In order to include, while questioning it, the narrativity that is, after all, the novel’s primary mode, “The Captive’s Tale” (I, 39-41) is developed in three scenes. It is the one “captivating” story of captivity; an embedded novella, with a plot of sorts, of a soldier taken in slavery, clearly based on autobiography, supplemented with dreams of wish fulfilment. The Captive is
played by the same actor who plays Don Quixote. This allows viewers to reflect on, and decide, how they consider narrative itself. The research question of this project touches on the point of narratology: how can museums and theatre together help in the current situation of the world – mass migration, dictatorships, religious and nationalistic strife – to counteract violence and its assault on human subjectivity, resulting in trauma? The question will be researched on the basis of video installations and their theatrical display as an interdisciplinary case study, anchored in critical reflection and experimental art-making (“Artistic Research”). The project seeks to deploy art in museum practice to affect spectators with the otherness of a socio-cultural state of violence-induced “madness”. Empathy: “the capability to ‘think in the mind of another’, to anticipate the reactions of another human being” [17] is not easy when that other is strange to us because “mad”. Through empathy, though, the figure of Don Quixote, the classical “mad knight” will be transformed into a “sad knight”.

This project is part of a larger one, which comprises three museum exhibitions in 2020-2023, in the Jan Cunen Museum in Oss, Netherlands, curated by dr. Jeroen Lutters, who conceived the educational method called “art-based learning”. The exhibitions will cohere together as presenting three elements of the state of the world subjected to violence.

The exhibitions focus on the three related issues that, together, refine narratological categories:

- **violence** – an event (that happens),
- **trauma** – a state (that results),
- **empathy** – an attitude (that enables).

It is to the extent that trauma stirs the fixity of such categories that narratology can remain useful and culturally productive. These exhibitions emerge from a project that shifts form from *activist* to *activating* art.

Images of violent events conducive to trauma are considered informative (“the news”). The rationale of this shift is the insight that the trauma and the powerlessness that result are not inherent in the violent events. As analytical psychiatry has diagnosed and cultural analysis has studied, it is the impossibility to process, even experience extreme violence that generates the trauma and obstructs its representation [6, 18-21]. Violence is an *event* inflicted on people; trauma a resulting *state*, in the victims.

To avoid confusion between event and state, and doer and victim, we make the non-evenemential, enduring situation of *captivity* central. But what happens to us, the beholders of images that stage such situations? This question is also inherent in narratology. Through their graphic explicitness and their recurrent appearance, these pictures of the news are confined to historical insignificance, even oblivion. The abundance of representations of traumatogenic events in the electronic media generate forgetting of their historical and psychological impact. The far-too-many, the surplus, is produced by, and produces *consumption*. Our project designs an intervention in that cultural attitude, by inflecting “activist” art, addressing specific issues and events, into “activating” art, public-oriented, for a more general change of attitude.

If narratology continues to have a point, purpose, or academic as well as social usefulness, it is because it reminds us that its primary concepts cannot be wished away simply because we think we have moved beyond them. The assumption that we have betrays an attitude towards time as naively linear, and a denial of the complexity Deleuze so adequately expressed in his concept of “crystals of time” [12], Rothberg in his concept of multi-directional memory [11], and Cervantes and Davoine together in that moving metaphor of repairing the broken thread of the social bond. This bond is, in the end, what matters.
REMARKS

1 I find “posthuman” objectionable in its imprecision. What is mostly meant is “post-humanist” and “post-anthropocentric”, two different alternatives that at least do not disavow the fact that the speakers are human, after all.

2 Much of this discussion was present in my paper at the conference in Zagreb, a text that has since been published [22].

3 “se le secó el cerebro de tal manera, que acabó perdiendo el juicio” [23; pp. 40-41]. I quote from the most widely used English translation by J.M. Cohen [23], and given the many editions of this, I refer to part I or II and chapter only. For the Spanish I use the excellent modernized edition by Andrés Trapiello [24].

4 More on trauma below. The best backdrop for a discussion of trauma is Ernst van Alphen’s article [21].

5 The following paragraphs revise some segments from my book in interdisciplinary methodology [25].

6 The factual violence on three historical moments is not the issue here; the memory of it, or its forgetting, is the impulse Malani brings to making her shadow plays. See my book on these works [26].

7 See Bryson’s introduction to Looking In: The Art of Viewing [27]. This text, in fact, was one of the reasons that I became more acutely aware of the importance of concepts. Silverman offers an excellent, indeed, indispensable, discussion of the gaze in Lacanian theory [5].

8 See [4] for a distinction between the “gaze” and the “glance” as two versions of the look. On Malani’s shadow plays, see also [9]. The title of her 2012 work, shown at Documenta that year, resonates with the subtitle of Spivak’s book [1].

9 Ernst van Alphen’s analysis of Charlotte Delbo’s writings is suggestively titled “Caught by Images” [28]. The phrase “the sense of an ending” alludes to Frank Kermode’s book on the subject [29].

10 I am currently beginning a video project on Don Quixote, of which this episode is one element.

11 Mata un desdén, aterra la paciencia, / O verdadera, o falsa, una sospecha; / Matan los celos con rigor más fuerte / Desconcierta la vida larga ausencia; / Contra un temor de olvido no aprovecha / Firme esperanza de dichosa suerte./ En todo hay cierta, inevitable muerte;/ Mas yo, ¡milagro nunca visto! Vivo/ Celoso, ausente, desdénado y cierto/ De las sospechas que me tienen muerto .../ ¿Se puede, por ventures, en un instante/ esperar y temer, o es bien hacerlo,/ siendo las causas del temor más ciertas? .../ Celos, ponedme un arma en estas manos./ Dame, desdén, una torcida soga.

12 ¿Vienes a ver, por ventura, o hiero basilisco de estas montañas, si con tu presencia vierten sangre las heridas de este misero a quien tu crudelidad quitó la vida?

13 ‘A los que he enamorado con la vista, he desengañado con las palabras. [...] ‘Yo, como sabéis, tengo riquezas propias, y no codicio la ajenas; soy de naturaleza libre, y no gusto de sujetarme; no quiero ni aborrezco a nadie; no engaño a este ni solicito a aquel; ni tonto con uno ni me entretengo con el otro. La conversación honesta con las zagalas de estas aldeas y el cuidado de mis cabras me entretienen. ‘pero no me llame cruel ni homicida aquel a quien yo no prometo, engañó, llamo ni admito’ [124]. Tienen mis deseos por confín estas montañas ...’

14 Marcelle affirme avec force n’offrir aucune prise aux idéologies politiquement culpabilisant. ... Elle refuse d’être complice de discours de mort maquillés en discours utopiques, et s’érige contre l’arme politique de la culpabilisation Davoine [6; pp. 147-149].

15 Nadie, de ningún estado ni condición, se atreva a seguir a la hermosa Marcela, so pena de caer en mi furiosa indignación. Ella ha mostrado con claras y suficientes razones la poca o ninguna culpa que ha tenido en la muerte de Grisóstomo [...] (emphasis added).
The scare quotes around the word express my protest against the use of the vexed preposition “post-”. The research centre “Concurrences” for colonial and postcolonial studies, dir. Johan Høglund, at Linnaeus University in Växjö, Sweden, has developed a different concept. A recent volume begins with this idea: “Concurrence offers a way of thinking about similarity and difference together, without necessarily privileging the priority of one over the other and without assuming the parameters of relationality in advance. To look for concurrences is not to assume either full equivalence across systems or the inferiority of one to another. These two options for comparative understanding have dominated much criticism to date, but alternative ways of thinking are now emerging, within which the idea of reading for concurrences is gaining ground” [30; p.3].

I have been greatly inspired by Genette’s three volumes of Figures, especially the third volume translated into English as Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method [31]. When his response to criticism appeared, I understood how deep the cleft was between our conceptions of literature. The unsurmountable obstacle was that his view was a-political and mine political.

For an elaboration of subjectivity networks, I must refer to my book Death and Dissymmetry [32].

A key text in the background of this discussion remains W.J.T. Mitchell’s opening chapter “What is an Image?” in Iconology [33]. The word “envision” yields a tentative concept in Schwenger [34].

In Chapter 1 of Travelling Concepts I have discussed these two possible risks of interdisciplinary analysis, following Stengers [35].


I use the phrase “act of memory” to foreground the active nature and present tense of memory, see [38]. On multidirectional memory, see Rothberg’s seminal study [11].

See esp. Davoine [14], a book on which Michelle Williams Gamaker and I based the video project A LONG HISTORY OF MADNESS (2012). This project was initiated by French actor Mathieu Montanier, who also co-wrote the first draft of the synopsis. In what follows, my use of the pronoun “we” indicates this collaboration, not a problematic universalizing plural.

I first saw the commercial slogan of “emotional capitalism” [39] quoted here, “votre vie n’a jamais été aussi bien remplie”, which is printed on shopping bags of the French chain Monoprix, on the bag filled with his meagre belongings of a beggar in a Parisian subway station.

The preceding paragraph is a paraphrase of Röttger [40].

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THE DEATH OF THE NARRATOR IN THE NOVEL
THE DEATH OF ARTEMIO CRUZ

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ABSTRACT

In this article we analysed the construction of the narrative voice(s) in the novel The Death of Artemio Cruz by Carlos Fuentes. Although this novel revolves around the last moments of the protagonist Artemio Cruz, it offers an innovative versatility of narrative personas which contributes to the modernity of this novel, part of the Latin American boom opus.

In the first part of this work we analysed the trifurcation of the narrative instance into three parts – the narrator’s I, the You and the omniscient narrator, to show that Fuentes aim was not imitating the Freudian three-part model of the psyche but offering the lector a complete vision of the narrator’s universe, obstructed usually by the opacity of the language. In the second part we discussed about the moment of agony that offers the author an opportunity to use simultaneously all three of his narrative personas. In the third and final part we stated the fact that the death of the narrator is in fact at the cost of the birth of the novel. The protagonist is dead, and so is the narrator; we are aware of it from the moment we read this novel’s title. Their death is postponed in order to leave place to the language to create its own reality.

KEY WORDS

narratology, death of the narrator, stream of consciousness, Latin American boom

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INTRODUCTION

Discourse about death and the afterlife has always held a special place in literature. Since the very beginning, death as a theme has aroused curiosity among readers and authors and has always had a touch of mysticism about it. The modern novel however, firmly directed towards elevating the simple human fate and a detailed description of everyday topics, has contributed to the demystification of death.

In the novel *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, the main and the omnipresent motive is the death of a fictional character. The novel recounts the life of Artemio Cruz, a corrupt war profiteer, from his birth to his final moments, linking life to death as an inseparable whole. The novel does not mystify death itself, but the moment prior to death, when the “I” of the main character, and of the narrator, separate; his consciousness is fragmented into several parts that will be reunited in death. This article analyses the figure of the narrator within this novel and explains his death from the perspective of contemporary narrative theories.

THE DEATH OF ARTEMIO CRUZ AS A PART OF LATIN AMERICAN BOOM

Novel *The Death of Artemio Cruz* was published in 1961 in Mexico and gained incredible popularity almost immediately. Critics recognized in it numerous innovative narrative techniques for that time, and readers followed with interest the life of a thrilling media magnate, often compared to that of the legendary Citizen Kane.

However, Fuentes’ main goal was to show Mexico in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution which left people with bitter-sweet taste of countless losses and hard-won victories. With the same intention he reminded us to think of the future in order not to forget the past. The novel *The Death of Artemio Cruz* was very easily included into the “poetics” of the boom and literary critics recognized literary methods that could easily be incorporated into the theory of the “new Hispanic-American novel”.

The first lines of *The Death of Artemio Cruz* pose a great challenge on the reader: “I wake… (...) I did not know that at times one can urinate without knowing it. I keep my eyes closed. The nearest voices cannot be heard: if I opened my eyes, would I hear them? But my eyelids are heavy, they are lead, and there are brass coins on my tongue and iron hammers in my ears and something, something, something like tarnish silver in my breathing; metal, everything is metal; or again, mineral. (...) I tighten the muscles of my face and open my right eye and see it reflectes in the squares of silvered glass that encrust a woman’s purse. I am this, this am I: old man with his face reflected in pieces by different-sized squares of glass: I am this eye, this eye I am: eye furrowed by roots of accumulated choler, old and forgotten and always present; eye green and swollen between its lids: lids, eyelids, oily eyelids” [1; p.9].

The intermittent inner monologue with the technique of focusing on details, similar to the cinematic one, serves as an introduction to the entangled game of various types of focalization, narrative personas and tenses. Fuentes requires maximum engagement from his readers, but in turn offers the rarely accomplished fullness of the narrative universe.

Even at first glance, it is clear that *The Death of Artemio Cruz* does not fit into a common concept of the novel, which is largely based on the tradition of realism. The chapters as such do
not exist in this novel; a somewhat bigger gap between rows marks the beginning of a new chapter, which uses a different focalization. Some of the fragments are also marked by a date, but there is no classical chronological sequencing. The only existing orientation is the end of the novel, i.e. the death of the fictional character, for which the reader recognizes the rest of the novel as a gradual progression towards the “grand finale”.

In the novel, we can easily distinguish three groups of fragments: the first, in which the narrator is the first person, the second, in which the narrator narrates in the second person (the time and the place of the action are the same as in the first group of fragments, but the narrator separates himself from his own body and address himself) and the third, in which the storyteller is omniscient and narrates in the third person the most important moments from the life of the fictional character. The novel’s opening sequence depicts a moment in which Artemio Cruz, the main character in the novel, is unconscious and tries to collect himself while lying in bed in a hospital room. A multitude of decontextualized sentences, repetitions, anticipation of motives that will only later prove to be more or less important and dialogues which make it difficult to identify who the speakers are, introduce the reader to a chaotic vision of a simple image – a man in his death bed.

Instead of the explanations, the following “you” sequence raises further doubts; the narrator is now double, he addresses himself to his other “I” and leads him through the process of perceiving and points, just like conscience, to his own wrongful acts.

For the reader accustomed to novels of realistic type, the usual literary experience starts with the sequences told in the third person where the narrator describes the events from Cruz’s near or distant past. However, these reminiscences (always dated, to be easily found) are not chronological, but mixed by importance given to them by the narrator himself. This section invokes the classical Christian motif of the last confession, whose purpose is to “question history, exhume the past, consider the flow of time, and give importance to the present moment” [2; p.3]. It is also important to note that the last narrated reminiscence is the one about Artemio’s birth. By using this motif, Fuentes reminds us of a cyclical vision of the time and Mexican popular beliefs in the eternal return.

As the narrator’s consciousness is split into three parts, two of which are mutually communicating, and the third is exterior and untouchable, we could conclude that Fuentes shapes his narrators by using the generalized Freudian division of the consciousness in ego, superego, and id. But in this novel, the unconscious, or at least semi-conscious is the narrator’s very ego. Fuentes uses a range of innovative techniques such as simultaneous scenes, anticipations and “film framing” to describe Cruz’s psychic world more realistically. This process is, however, twofold because, although Fuentes uses it to make the narrator more connected to the Here and Now in the novel, the lack of external descriptions causes the narrator’s perception to assume the characteristics of something sublime, otherworldly. The narrator in the second person could be interpreted as a conscience, and the omniscient one in the third person as a short glimpses of the past, something like the shredded pages of a journal.

Literary critics have attempted to describe this kind of narrative and structuring of the literary work as the syntagm of “auto reflexive monologue”. This name is suitable for the fragments narrated in the first and second person in which Cruz dissects his own psyche with no regard for the external stimuli. That part of the testimony does not presuppose the public; the narrator exists just because he thinks. However, parts narrated in the third person are, in our opinion, not only used to illuminate the narrators, but also to lighten up the identification of Fuentes’ novel with
the popular “novel of the current of consciousness”. Fuentes’ goal is to show the fullness of the narrator’s universe, rather than to minutely describe the parts of his psyche. We will discuss this further a little later.

MAURICE BLANCHOT AND CARLOS FUENTES

In the essay entitled *Demeure* (*Dwelling*), Jacques Derrida offers a narrative analysis of the novel *L’instant de ma mort* (*The instant of my death*) by Maurice Blanchot. In it, the narrator recalls the moment in which he saw death, but managed to avoid it by chance or by the providence of God. Fuentes’ novel however, *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, recounts the life of the main character, and the death itself occupies only the last few lines: “Artemio Cruz… Name… hopeless… heart massage… hopeless… You will not know now. I carry you inside and with you I die. The three, we… will die. You… die, have died… I will die” [1; p.254]. The similarities between these two novels are immediately noticeable; they both occur between two deaths. “Imminence, the instance of what will already have taken the place, will be in question in *The instant of My Death*. Death will come, there is a suspension, a last suspensive delay, an interruption of the death sentence. But what will come, what is coming at me, this is what already have taken place: death has already taken place. I can testify to it, because it has already taken place. Yet this past, to which I testify, namely, my death itself, has never been present. (…) Already from the incipit there is a division of the subject. And more than one age. Aside from the presumed author, there are two, and number, two instances: the narrator declaring that he remembers another, and the other; until the end, the story announces itself as the narrative of what happened to the third person, as what happens to him, “he”, the third party. Until the end, until the “I” returns at the end, and the “you” [3; pp.49-53].

Cruz dies the very moment we take the book into our hands; his death is announced on the very cover of the novel. The moment we start reading the novel, we already know how it ends; Fuentes’ discourse is placed between the virtual, postponed, but at the same time inevitable death of the main character and his “real” death.

Cruz’s final confession could be perfectly described by the Derrida term of indecision (l’indécidabilité). The twisting of “the ego” into three separate, independent parts converts the text into the inconsistent sequence of reflections of consciousness to which the reader himself associates the meaning, and the dialogues into a tangled coil of voices whose source is difficult to determine. Fuentes’ text exists on the vague border between the automatic writing, the confession and the chronicle.

This moment of indecision is precisely the decisive factor in the ability to write a novel such as *The Death of Artemio Cruz*; the novel is possible thanks to the process of trifurcation of the narrative instance, which causes imprecision and uncertainty in the narration. “Nothing is certain in this testimony, nothing is described, nothing is observable: everything only may be. A random virtuality that is less than ever opposed to the actuality of the act or presence” [3, p.69].

The narrator’s three “I”s finally reach peace in the moment of death. Before Artemio’s illness, these three “I”s could not come to the fore because the ego, the id and the superego, as in the mind of every normal person, were uncontrollably intertwined. The agony, i.e., the period between the two deaths, is the only moment in which all three “Artemios” receive a “gift of speech”. After death, the narrators disappear; the death of Artemio Cruz is actually the destruction of the narrative voice and the logos. The rest is silence.
By the technique of dissolving the “I” Fuentes wants to achieve a kind of “mental realism”; his goal is to show the comprehensiveness of a man’s mental processes, the fullness of his mental life. Because of the nature of literature as art, it is impossible to put into paper the coexistence, the intertwining and the randomness of processes in the human psyche. Fragmentation is the only way in which the simultaneity can be expressed in literature. By choosing a narrator in the first, second, or third person, the author directs his attention to only one part of the narrator’s psyche, to only one part of the testimony, to one-third of the narrator’s voice and thus abandons the attempt to represent the human psyche in its entirety. Regardless of whether the work has several narrative voices or just one, it will never be able to perfectly mimic human nature; the language is once more shown as an inadequate and discouraging means of expression. Consequently, we conclude that every literary work actually represents the death of narrators themselves; the narrator must break away from a part of his “I” and ignore all the other parts if he ever wants to exist.

THE DEATH OF THE NARRATOR

In the previous chapter, we spoke of the instance of the narrator, to whom readers and literary theory attach human traits such as voice and the ability to think. Having emphasized the inability of narrators to credibly imitate human nature, it is time to ask ourselves whether the narrator as such even exists in the text.

Barthes murdered the author by proclaiming him “a modern phenomenon, a product of our society which, having emerged from the Middle Ages, with English empiricism, French rationalism and personal faith of reformation, discovered the prestige of an individual or, as it is more noble to say, “human person”. The general readership tendency is to attribute a multitude of narrative voices to the literary work to a single, anthropomorphic entity called the narrator. But why do narrators appear as one of the sources of texts, and not just as a means to help shape it? [4; p.143].

By adapting Barthes’ text to our arguments, we could say that the narrator is, just like the modern sceptor, “born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written here and now” [4; p.145]. Fuentes’ mischief in the perfect, comprehensive representation of human psyche is yet another proof that trying to find the source of the text and its fitting into the dimensions of our world is completely impossible. The text is a vivid, unstable creation that is impossible to fit into categories known by the reader, such as a category of time and place, or to graduate that text accordingly. The text is a mixture of countless multitudes of narrative voices that unite in the instance of the reader. “… writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing. (…) 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. (…) Let us come back to the Balzac sentence. No one, no ‘person’, says it: its source, its voice, is not the true place of the writing, which is reading. “The death of the narrator is the re-birth of Barthes Reader as the ultimate instance that, at each reading, shapes the text in an unprecedented way” [4; pp.142-147]. The death of the narrator is the re-birth of Barthes Reader as the ultimate instance that, at each reading, shapes the text in an unprecedented way.
CONCLUSION

This article, inspired by Derrida’s essay of *Demeure. Maurice Blanchot* on the possibility of the testimony in literature, and Barthes’ essay "Death of the Author", is an attempt to analyse the function of the narrator in the literary text. By studying the most famous novel of the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes, *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, we analysed his complex narrative technique, which is denominated in the theory of literature as the auto reflexive monologue. Fuentes’ technique consists of the separation of the narrator’s ego into three independent, coexisting parts, each of them presenting its version of the narrators (auto) biography. Yet, even such a complex narrative technique proved inadequate in the presentation of the human psyche, which once again rejected the possibility of a perfect artistic mimesis. The narrator will never be able to imitate a human person, because every literary work actually implies its splitting.

Accordingly, we cannot attribute human traits to the Narrator. Numerous narrative voices, present in every literary work, come from a multitude of different narrative sources, and are therefore impossible to attribute to one instance in the text. The pluralism of the aforementioned voices can only be united in the instances of the reader who, by the act of reading creates each time again the text.

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SKIPPING BETWEEN TEXT AND PERFORMANCE: SOME QUESTIONS OF “REALISM”

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ABSTRACT

Following Gérard Genette’s explorations of “transtextuality”, the article addresses the afterlife of Franz Kafka’s Report to an Academy in examples offered by John Maxwell Coetzee and Oliver Frljić. These construct a palimpsest for considering the dynamic relation between “text and performance”, as broaching questions of ethics in narrative practices that cannot be limited to those of narratology. The article attempts to maintain a sense of itself offering an example of its own understanding, echoing a sense of the “propositional” to be found in Alfred North Whitehead.

KEY WORDS
Kafka, Coetzee, Frljić, empathy, realism

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“There is, first of all, the problem of the opening...” [1; p.1]. In this very example of an opening, the problem referred to concerns how narrative might build a bridge from our understanding of where we are to where we want to be. Indeed, the narrator reflects on the paradox of such a beginning, that “where we are” is already in the middle of things, if not (as yet) “nowhere”. At least, so it appears when the experience of reading is admitted without it having been already explained. Although a narrative has begun – with this example of displacement (which is of the definition of quotation) – it will only have transformed such a nowhere into the desired somewhere after the opening has, as it were, been closed. For the understanding of what appeared “first” comes afterwards, in the end that a beginning implies – when the story told and the telling of it appear to have coalesced; or when the page is no longer blank.

The latter is a familiar metaphor for life – where the blank page offers recognition of the inscription of time in the making of meaning, playing with the gap between experience and explanation. In the story whose opening sentence is quoted here, this metaphor of the blank page is given to a character; and then given by him to the reader, so that the described scene appears to be understood through someone else’s thoughts [1; p.4]. With this process of focalisation, it is as if propositions – or even metaphors – require a fictive consciousness to be told (the lack of which makes a reading difficult to “follow”). While this seeming requirement is explicit in imaginative or literary narrative, it remains implicit in academic prose (whether in an article or a lecture), especially when it is deemed “inappropriate” to acknowledge it (skipping between, or monkeying with, disciplinary conventions).

By contrast, such an acknowledgement is part of the very sense of a “proposition” in the view of Alfred North Whitehead, for whom it attests to modes of consciousness to which it is not, however, reducible. For Whitehead, this acknowledgement obviates the entrenched distinction through which narrative, or propositional, claims are traditionally assigned their “appropriate” extension, as between “subjective experience” and “objective reality”, for instance. In her reading of Whitehead, Isabelle Stengers poses the question underlying this critical recognition: “How can we approach the difference between a statement corresponding to a perception or to a judgement, and a statement exhibiting propositional efficacy?” [2; p.397].

The narrator of my opening example, for instance, likes to highlight the attempt to make bridges between performance and text (or between énonciation and énoncé) by announcing that he is “skipping” things. Fracturing a narrative sequence (a fracture set out here in quotation marks), it is not only the “first of all” that is “the problem”. Without skipping, without such narrative ellipses (as a mode, paradoxically, of connecting thoughts), “we will [as the narrator says] be here all afternoon” – getting nowhere, perhaps – for all that this also “plays havoc with the realist illusion” [1; p.16]. That the question of consciousness is elided here in a fictive “we” – whether of listeners or readers – offers the possibility of narrative “efficacy” and broaches the fraught question of a relation between empathy and ethics (or what the author here calls “the problem of evil”).

The introductory “problem”, concerning the “illusions of realism”, is conceived of by the narrator in disciplinary terms, as a relation between the claims of “writers and thinkers” [1; p.10]; that is, in the “quarrel” between the disciplines of literature and philosophy, between the literary and the theoretical, which inflects the self-defining tradition of European “humanities” from the ancient Greeks to the present. This segregation in “the spectrum of human thought” – as if between “reason” and “emotion” (or even between human and animal) – is not the least of what turns out to be in question here in the name of “realism”. Between “performance and text”, this traditional “disputation” is even staged by the author himself, as he offers a lecture in the form of a fiction and, conversely, that very fiction in the form of a lecture.
All of this discussion is engaged with the afterlives of Franz Kafka’s text *A Report to an Academy* – which the fictional author introduces to her audience with the suggestion that, “perhaps you know it” [1; p.18]. In Kafka’s story, she tells us: “an ape, dressed up for the occasion, makes a speech to a learned society. It is a speech, but a text too, an examination, a viva voce. The ape has to show not only that he can speak his audience’s language but that he has mastered their manners and conventions, is fit to enter their society” [1; p.18].

This example of the transtextual [3], like the opening “problem”, is taken from John Maxwell Coetzee’s *Elizabeth Costello*; a re-citation of which introduces a current stage production by Oliver Frljic at the Gorki Theatre in Berlin (2019) [4]. These palimpsests of “performance and text” concern not so much a question of genre, however, as of transformation; ciphering the relation between reading and writing (identified by “skipping” connections) within claims to narrative “realism”. Indeed, this is literally announced by Coetzee’s narrator in terms, firstly, of a skip in the performance [1; p.16] and, secondly, a skip in the text [1; p.24]. These ellipses concern not so much what it is that we are attending to (whether as “a lecture”, “a story”, or “a play”), as how it is that a narrative form solicits or realises our attention, including through its re-citation.

How, after all, does the “reading” of a novel or of a stage production become an instance of writing that understands itself as an example of what it is trying to understand? What makes for a “realistic” narrative in this example concerning *A Report to an Academy*? Of course, the “problem” of the “opening” – foregrounding, precisely, the mutual conditionality of the mimetic and the diegetic, the performance and the text – refers simultaneously to itself and to what it is not; as if hoping to find (paratextually) its own writing in what has been read. Even the opening citation here – the narrative possibility of “there is” – is split between the performance (the “opening”) and the text (as the masquerade of Coetzee and Frljic).

Does “realism”, in this example, draw attention to its own narration (or performance) – to the work of writing (as that of “skipping” and of “quoting”)? Or, on the contrary, does it occlude its construction, as is usually assumed – where, as the quoted narrative suggests, “the time and space of the real world fade away, superseded by the time and space of the fiction” [1; p.16]? (In the case of theatre, of course, this work of “supercession” – in which “the notion of embodying turns out to be pivotal” [1; p.9] – offers a new set of questions that are related, but not reducible, to the text.) Is the fictively “realistic” narrator one who plays with the refractions of the “broken word mirror” [1; p.19] of Elizabeth Costello’s humanist tropes? Or one who offers a complete reflection, as if the fractures and fissures of the metaphorical glass could be separated from what is imagined by its means? Indeed, how does the work of citation – in the standard academic appropriation of “examples” – operate between refraction and reflection, as in its very example here as a question of “realism”?

Curiously, however, between the performance (as an actual lecture, entitled “what is realism?”), which Coetzee gave at Bennington College in November 1996) and the text (in its appearance as the first chapter, or “lesson”, of a novel in 2003, entitled simply “realism”), the title topic has lost its question mark. But returning to the “blank page”, for example, this question – “if we are being realistic” [1; p.20] – concerns the very nature of the subject, indexing the different ambitions of (or hopes for) life and literature to the unconditional mortality of the former and the conditional immortality of the latter. Indeed, these relations to death gloss the expectations of what is meaningful in each case, as a relation between beginning and ending.

The tension or fragility of such expectations in modernity comes into particular focus when associated with twentieth century European history (as refracted, or reflected, in literature). This is especially the case concerning the limitations of “being realistic”, or of what admits of the “illusions of realism”, with respect to knowledge of the Shoah. The possibility of making
meaning when confronted with the social understanding of life manifested in the historical "reality" of the Nazi regime is succinctly addressed by Adorno, for instance, in his Notes on Kafka: “In the concentration camps, the boundary between life and death was eradicated. A middle ground was created, inhabited by living skeletons and putrefying bodies, victims unable to take their own lives... As in Kafka’s twisted epics, what perished there was that which had provided the criterion of experience – life lived out to its end…” [5; p.260].

Here the relation between life and literature finds its “witness” in an example that, in its critical appropriation, remains profoundly disturbing. Between empathy and proposition, witness and reality, consciousness and realism, the narrative relation (between the opening “there is” and the fictional “we” in Coetzee) exposes an ethical complexity that has no “closure”. We might reflect also on another transtextual instance, with the opening “scene” of Claude Lanzmann’s film Shoah and its attempt to disclose something concerning the “reality” of Chelmno at the time of the filming (albeit transformed into the time of – and by – the editing). In this sequence, we hear Szymon Srebnik (one of only two survivors) broach the time of the witness – in a voice that expresses both disbelief and affirmation (or, rather, disbelief at the possibility of affirmation) in the “there is” that the film begins with. “Yes, this is the place,” he says. “No one can describe it... Even I, here, now. I can’t believe I’m here” [6]. Lanzmann takes a decided position with respect to “realism” and its “illusions” – attempting to eschew any fictionalised consciousness, even as he demonstrates that propositions do not simply speak for themselves.

As Whitehead insists, the descriptive and the demonstrative are not – in any meaningful sense – reducible to each other. The testimony as to what does not exist (looking at or for the site of the Chelmno death camp today) offers a testimony concerning the existence of the survivor – as he speaks to and for himself, and thereby to and for Lanzmann’s film. The truth of the proposition that “this is the place” is contained in the reflection “I can’t believe I’m here”. The ostensible focalisation (simultaneously withdrawn) is necessary since without it the camera sees “nothing”. Lanzmann’s montage is devoted to the attempt to engage with this condition (or impossibility even) of narrative “knowledge” in the example of a relation between film and the Shoah. The survivor’s testimony – in its “unbelievable” affirmation – presents one side of the “broken mirror”; while the other side presents the testimony of those whose lives – with the possibility of being “lived out to their end” – are also related to this same landscape. In contrast to a testimony as if from the dead, however, the narrative of knowledge from the living touches upon disavowal rather than disbelief; as if a complete reflection could be found in each shard of the broken glass.

With the mirror metaphor, we are re-citing familiar narrative questions concerning “being realistic” [1; p.20], which are not simply posed to the texts referenced here but are, of course, already posed by them. As Mieke Bal remarks, the relevance of “theory”, after all, speaks to that of its subject – working from and with the narrative example it has chosen, rather than offering abstract narratological categories or typologies along with their “illustrations” [7]. For Bal, the issue is not so much about disciplinary knowledge as a critical practice, one that is engaged with the field of cultural practices which it cites. The aim is not to demonstrate that an example is questionable in narratological terms, but to explore the work that such terms do in thinking through how and why such questions arise “first of all”. As Whitehead observes: “Consciousness requires more than the mere entertainment of theory. It is the feeling of the contrast of theory, as mere theory, with fact, as mere fact. This contrast holds whether or no the theory be correct” [8; p.188].

In the present case, these propositions (exploring the opening sense of what “there is”) are offered in Whitehead’s sense of not simply stating that which “is”, but of evoking the potential of what is felt. “The primary mode of realisation of a proposition in an actual entity
is not by judgement, but by entertainment. A proposition is entertained when it is admitted into feeling. Horror, relief, purpose, are primarily feelings involving the entertainment of propositions” [8; p.188]. As an inscription on the tomb of all that “might be”, the “there is” concerns not only what is said, but also what is not said; in the sense of both what is not sayable (Wittgenstein) and what is unspeakable (Adorno). In this regard, it is curious that the question (or the “realism”) of empathy hardly appears in the indexes of standard narratological text books, as if its disciplinary claims cannot “entertain” such matters of consciousness. Indeed, this suggests that, perhaps, any cosmopolitical (or ethical) concern with questions of narrative might go beyond the “merely” narratological.

To be able to acknowledge the existence of (if not to identify with) another’s point of view – as embodied (or “lived”) – invites questions, following Kafka’s Report, that offer a play not only of understanding (or “mimicry”) between male and female [1; p.23], for example; but also between human and animal, generating metaphors of the “bestial” and the “ humane”. As Costello explores, these attributes speak of and to limitations in the understanding of human being and action. Beyond the humanist cosmopolitanism of “entering into others’ lives” (or their “thoughts”), there is (to follow Bruno Latour [9]) a question of cosmopolitics here, where Costello’s “broken mirror” fractures the image that Humanist culture has of itself as distinct from “nature”. The understanding that the very nature of “culture”, in its self-reflection, is fractured requires a cosmopolitics in which the question of animal consciousness is not so “fictional” as is often still supposed. The difference between having or not having a soul, for instance, is not reducible to the difference of species; at least, not when conceived of in pluriversal rather than universal terms. The idea that the intersubjective could include interspecies relations without being limited to (or by) suppositions of “anthropomorphism” (or, what Frans de Waal calls, “anthropodenial” [10]) is a marker for ethical questions in narratology. After all, the experience of empathy evidently fails, historically, to “explain” the claims of ethics (despite those of literature).

“‘Ladies and Gentlemen’, she begins. ‘It is two years since I last spoke in the United States. In the lecture I then gave, I had reason to refer to the great fabulist Franz Kafka, and in particular to his story Report to an Academy, about an educated ape, Red Peter…”’ [1; p.62]. Referring to the lecture given (“two years ago”) in chapter one, on “realism”, this second lecture by Elizabeth Costello (in chapter 3) will itself be a point of reference in a later lecture (in chapter 6), where it is described as “a talk for which she was attacked in the pages of Commentary (belittling the Holocaust, that was the charge) and defended by people whose support for the most part embarrased her: covert anti-Semites, animal-rights sentimentalists” [1; p.156]. Citing Kafka’s Report (in relation to Wolfgang Köhler’s experiments, particularly with an ape named Sultan [1; pp.71-75]), the second lecture – which was given by Coetzee at Princeton in October 1997 – elaborates the traditional “literary” (or Humanistic) question of empathy in the context of historical “reality”. Here Costello makes a comparison between public knowledge (or, rather, its disavowal) of the mass murder of Jews and of the industrial slaughter of animals.

The question of narrative is now implicitly folded into that of rhetoric, as the enlivening of what – as tropes – are themselves essentially modes of citation. The paradox of empathy – as an understanding that acknowledges subjectivity and, indeed, complicity – is evoked. But what is supposed here to be the epitome of the personal – a sense or feeling of responsibility implied by knowledge (despite knowing that one is not directly responsible for the actions about which one knows) – is often addressed philosophically as if it were without a subject. The evocation of this sense of responsibility is a matter of narrative efficacy, of an interweaving of fiction and reality, performance and text; or, indeed, philosophy and literature (as Stephen Mulhall has explored so well [11]). This is evidenced especially when Costello’s lecture is
adopted in performance – no longer that of its “speech giving” author, Coetzee, but of actors re-citing (or “embodying”) the words of the fictional Costello to an audience in a production that uses this text for its opening. Returning to “the problem of the opening”, then, the narrative questions (working through propositions, reality, embodiment, the fictional and the historical) become charged in new ways. The “there is” supposed of the narrative confronts what is supposed of “being realistic”, precisely, in the evocation of the “unspeakable”.

In the opening gesture of Oliver Frljić’s Berlin production “of” or “with” Kafka’s Report to an Academy, the Costello lecture appears not only as a didactic introduction for the audience; it seems, implicitly, to offer an accusation. The role of an audience – whether at the gathering of a “learned society” or at a theatre; in a fiction or in reality (where the supercession of the one by the other is forestalled) – is compared to that of bystanders to a crime. Was this crime socially sanctioned with the complicity of narrative “culture”, as much as through the force of terror? In its very enactment, however, Costello’s speech (in contrast to Coetzee’s own example) seems to mistake the proposition, as if it were a matter of performance or text rather than their mutual implication (in what Brecht would call its Gestus). “What” is said as the problem of the opening overwhelms “how” it is said – as if what was at stake occluded the very occasion of and for saying it (or, indeed, the question of its “realism”).

The problem of the opening in this case is that the transtextual is presented as if it were its own “source” (as if Costello was being cited in the name of Kafka). The play of citation is in tension with the “facts” being narrated, beginning with the fact of the narration or “lecture” itself. The speech’s historical reference to Treblinka does not build a bridge between where we are and where the speaker wants us to be, between what we know and what we do not want to know. Crucially, an understanding of the citation (of the transtextuality operating in Frljić’s dramaturgy) is realised only afterwards, when it turns out that the beginning was already a repetition of the ending. As a marker of its construction, the production concludes by returning to the same speech, starting all over again, as if because of (rather than despite) all that had occurred on stage in between. Paradoxically, this implies an “unending” cycle in German (or European) politics, where the ethical (or cosmopolitical) question of such “knowledge” (as also that of its narration) is not posed in a way that might interrupt or displace the conditions of and for its repetition. This exposes the political vacuity of intoning “never again”, as Costello’s speech serves as a reflection of the end in the beginning, rather than its refraction into alternatives.

It is with such examples of the “illusions of realism” – exposed by skipping here between performance and text – that the following observation from Whitehead comes into focus, pointing to the complexity of what “we” suppose of narrative: “No verbal sentence merely enunciates a proposition. It always includes some incitement for the productio

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ABSTRACT

In this article my aim is to suggest the move from the discussions regarding the immobile gaze in terms of film theory and editing towards the discussion on wandering or mobile spectator enabled by the mobility of filmic means such as narration and camera. I claim that mobility of the viewer is not necessarily a corporeal condition, but a political and emancipatory potential arising from a certain aspect of film attributes that allow for spectator’s engagement with what is being seen on the screen. I will look for at least four sets of what I consider prerequisites for the emancipatory engagement of the spectator. I focus on specific case studies of Harun Farocki’s films: mobility of the gaze, visibility of narrative agency, visibility of film language and the visibility of the spectator himself.

I claim that the procedures described in this analysis can nullify Baudryan view of film as a product of the ideological effects of cinematograph as manipulative apparatus. Hence, standard model of film theory described by Bordwell and Burch in form of IMR is not applicable to Farocki’s model. Instead of the image as a final product, Farocki is constantly presenting the viewer the whole procedure of the production (apparatus, narration, camera and the work needed to produce an image). In doing so, he does not render reality banal, but positions it as a starting point for viewers’ intellectual emancipation.

KEY WORDS

visual culture, Harun Farocki, emancipation, narration, spectator

CLASSIFICATION

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INTRODUCTION

How can we describe spectators and their relation to the film image without being forced to succumb to individual analysis of individual storylines? One of the grounding concepts that considered subjectivity of characters on screen as well as those in front of it is focalization. I am referring to the theories of Mieke Bal and consequently Saša Vojković. Vojković claims that focalisation makes us “perceive the events a certain way” [1; p.26]. Even further, she claims that it “conditions identification not only with the characters on the screen, but also with the worldview” [1; p.26]. Identification is a process of importance not only for psychoanalysis, but also for cognitive film studies. Thomas Elsaesser in the book The Film Spectator: From Sign to Mind aims at understanding the condition of spectator in film: “the spectator, understood as the instance that the text addresses, as well as the locus of the text’s intelligibility, emerged as the producer of both meaning and subjectivity” [2; p.10]. In the short historic account of narration in film, he points to the Metz’s adaptation of Benveniste’s enunciation theory towards psychoanalysis and Baudry’s theory of ideological effects of the cinematographic apparatus. In doing so, he was able to suggest that every visual representation “implies a subject” [2; p.10]. In other words, every act of telling a story (including editing) is inseparable from the analysis of subjectivity. Although my research is not interested in psychoanalytical account of subject-theories, separating film processes such as editing or single-shot cinema from the spectator theory cannot hope to account for all the possibilities of political agency in film.

The focal point of my analysis will be a case study of two films by German director and theorist Harun Farocki. His films rely on the form of film essay in which the author aims at “preserving thought process”, as described by Laura Rascaroli [3]. The subject in such film can be difficult to detect or describe. For example, Edward Brannigan defined subjectivity in relation to narration as a “specific instance or level of narration where telling is attributed to a character in the narrative and received by us as if we were in the situation of the character” [4; p.73]. The reach of his theory is constrained by the framework inside which he was working. Vojković critiques his approach: “Brannigan defines focalization based on character’s point of view, and contrasts it with not-viewing, or the absence of focalization by which it seems that the film is narrating itself […]. The spectator has the primary role in this process […]” [1; p.44]. My analysis will aim at framing the subject theory in cases in which there is no clear narrator, or when the subject of the film seems to be missing.

In the chapter The Mobilized and Virtual Gaze in Modernity: Flaneur/Flaneuse Anne Frieberg analysed the relation between the spectator’s immobilization by the early visual instruments such as diorama and the immobilization of the contemporary spectator. She claims that the spectator can be described by the epistemes of surveillance in Foucauldian fashion (Bentham’s Panopticon). In her account, power and knowledge are dependent on the gaze and on the power that can be exerted by that which is shown and surveilled [5]. Today, the question seems to be not so much related to the so called “vision machine” [6] and its techno-deterministic and eschatological critique1. What seems important today – besides the economic and political critique of the so called “surveillance capitalism” – is the subjectivity of the spectator in front of the (moving) image. Frieberg recognizes that Foucault’s “panoptic model emphasizes the subjective effects of imagined scrutiny and ‘permanent visibility’ on the observed, but does not explore the subjectivity of the observer” [5; p.399]. Nevertheless, when she discusses the gaze produced by the prefilmic apparatus such as diorama or panorama, she remains in the paradigm of the immobile viewer, whose immobility is a prerequisite for its epistemic position as the one who is able to see (usually more than is naturally possible – for example, panoramic shots). Although she provides an
important reading of the immobilization (corporeal and mental) as a means of control, my research looks at ways in which the viewer can become a mobile agent. Such proposal sees him or her not as a flaneur, aimless wanderer though the landscape of hypertrophied visual culture, but as a political and emancipated agent looking for clues in the images.

In this article my aim is to suggest the move from the discussions regarding the immobile gaze in terms of film theory and editing towards the discussion on wandering or mobile spectator enabled by the mobility of filmic means such as narration and camera. I claim that mobility of the viewer is not necessarily a corporeal condition, but a political and emancipatory potential arises from certain film attributes that allow for spectator’s engagement with what is being seen on screen. I will look for at least four sets of what I consider prerequisites for the emancipatory engagement of the spectator in my specific case studies: mobility of the gaze, visibility of narrative agency, visibility of film language and the visibility of the spectator himself.

THE TRANSPARENT NARRATOR

For the explanation of emancipatory engagement of the spectator, the transparency of the narrator in film seeks clarifying. I argue that German cineaste Harun Farocki in his films (especially early works) sketched a pedagogical form of visual culture that relates directly to the viewer/audience of his films. The act of storytelling he employs in his films I call “transparent narrating”, leaning on the two-fold meaning of the word. The transparent narrator at the same time indicates the visible agent in the film text (storyteller visible for the viewers) and at the same time invisible force in film, allowing the spectators to see through the narrator, deconstructing film language themselves. The perceived dichotomy in the meaning I claim as complementary in establishing the role of the viewer as participatory in the filmic text. I will explain on specific case studies.

EMANCIPATED AND MOBILE VIEWER

On the other hand, what is the form of emancipated agent I envision when speaking about the productive look? Jacques Rancière developed a theory of participatory role of the spectator in contrast to the simplistic model of active and passive audience participation, based on a Brechtian model. He understands visuality as the process and dialectics of looking, and aesthetics as a field that needs to take into account the spectator as active interpreter, a subject that translates signs into his own cultural codes. For him, therefore, intellectual emancipation:

“Begins with challenging oppositions between active and passive, appearance and reality, viewing and knowing. Cinema, precisely because it is not an established language, because it escapes any systematic order of knowledge, as the living art of the democratic age, particularly lends itself to the method of emancipation: looking always also means acting.”

In his book The Emancipated Spectator he furthers the concept of emancipation which he started developing in an earlier study The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation. In the earlier work, he claimed that the hierarchy between the scholar and his pupil is established reciprocally on the lines of a scholar that knows and explains that knowledge precisely because the pupil is de jure the one that yet needs to learn. Building on the proposed emancipation of the pupil, in The Emancipated Spectator he discusses the role of the spectator, drawing parallels with the pupils’ position. Being a spectator is traditionally seen as something bad, Rancière claims: “First, viewing is the opposite of knowing […] Second, it is the opposite of acting: the spectator remains immobile in her seat, passive. To be
a spectator is to be separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act” [9: p.2]. In what way do the passive obtain their agency? He answers: “There is no hidden secret of the machine that keeps them trapped in their place […] What there is are simply scenes of dissensus, capable of surfacing in any place, and at any time” [9: p.48]. Dissensus, as opposed to consensus is not something to be discarded. Every situation can be opened, interpreted and discussed. In other words, “emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting […]. The spectator also acts, like the pupil or scholar. She observes, selects, compares, interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages, in other kinds of place” [9; p.13].

I contend that Rancière’s discussion on emancipation can be used as a methodological tool in analysing films that feature no clear narratorial authority. Multivocality and the dissensus that occur while looking at the “incomplete” images can produce the political and emancipatory subjectivity that does not correspond to Baudry’s fears of film being by nature (and technology) a manipulative apparatus as famously described in his essay Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus [11].

Let us take for example films that do not belong to documentary film or film-essays. Even fiction film Shirin (2008) directed by famous Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami uses the transparency of the narrator to negate the supposed ideological effects by the “manipulative nature” of film. In the aesthetic sense, the film is almost a direct visual representation of Baudry’s clash between the spectator and film screen, mediated by the camera/apparatus. Without any diegetic information, the film starts with shots of faces in a movie theatre en face, looking at film we as spectators are unable to see. During the whole course of film, we as spectators of the first level (extradiegetic) are prohibited from seeing what the characters (diegetic spectators) in the film see (movie on a screen). At work is a prohibition of representation and identification: extradiegetic spectators are unable to see the film’s story with which the diegetic spectators are identifying, thus being unable to complete the identification process with the characters in the film.

Baudry’s fears of spectator’s identification with ideological effects of the apparatus stem from psychoanalytical theory that should not be omitted. Nevertheless, his reading cannot account for the process of non-identification with the characters on the screen,. The Reason for this is that we lack the context or the narrator explaining the reactions we are witnessing (laughter, sorrow, boredom etc.) Therefore, we are not traditional spectators: what the extradiegetic spectator spectates is not the film itself, but the process of character identification in film within film, on the metatextual level. By doing so we become aware of our own traditional immobility as spectators because we cannot seem to “move” enough to see what the narrator in film is creating. In Rancière’s terms, Kiarostami is deriding the division between viewing and knowing, thus challenging our perceived passivity as spectators. In The Emancipated Spectator his critique of that perceived passivity extends
even to television: “What we see above all in the news on our TV screens are the faces of the rulers, experts and journalists who comment on the images, who tell us what they show and what should we make of them” [9; p.96]. Antidote to that form of narration Rancière finds in the so called “pensive image” which Shirin mirrors: an image which not only extends duration of the scene, omits clear narratorial presence, but also delays firm conclusions on what is represented on the screen, calling for a productive dissensus.

MOBILE CAMERA

In the previous section I introduced and analysed the process of a “provoked” spectator in situations when the narrator is not clearly present, and when a viewer cannot clearly interpret/identify with the moving image on the screen. I offered a reading of emancipated spectator reading Rancière as a means of empowering the spectator in the fiction film by seeing through the film language. The spectator is mobilizing his agency instead of narratorial diegetic agency. Although I will offer further arguments for this position, for now I would like to turn to the second level of mobilisation, that of the camera. Expanding on what Seymour Chatman names the “wandering camera” in Michelangelo Antonioni’s films, Kenneth Johnson calls to attention “those moments when the camera as a narrating entity wanders on its own, detached from supporting the story through a character’s point of view. [...] This camera movement calls attention to itself as an ‘independent presence’, independent of its conventional function in cinematic discourse” [12; p.49].

Johnson claims that although such film procedures are not a dominant force in film style in the west, they nevertheless reveal a transition from one level of narration to another. He suggests that such free camera movements reveal “traces of authorial activity” [12; p.49], or more precisely, the author as enunciator in the film: “What we witness with wandering camera is a momentary shift in emphasis from the story as something understood to be already complete, to the story in the process of being created” [12; p.50]. If the narrative is understood to be a history of events in a discourse, wandering camera then seems as an instance of underlining that process, or the creation of that story as it is displayed. In other words, the gaze is detached from the main character and at the same time detached from the spectator and his expected diegetic immersion, in favour of revelation of the narrator itself. André Gaudreault in his study From Plato to Lumière: Narration and Monstration in Literature and Cinema [13] postulated the invention of contemporary film as a result of two separate language systems. Film language, he writes is the product both of the invention of a procedure (the camera that creates the shots) and the development of the process (the assembling and editing of different shots, with the idea of creating a single entity, a film).

In other words, Gaudreault differentiates between narration and monstration. Gaudreault claims that early film (broadly between 1900 and 1915) contained a tension between two forms of spectatorship: exhibition of spectatorship and the diegetic absorption. The first is based on monstration – an early film style of showing, and not telling, while the latter is closer to today’s film, in which the role of the image is to explain (narrate) to the viewer what is being shown. As the first films did not employ montage but were created in a single shot, there was not any means of employing fabula and syuzhet. He calls those procedures micro-narratives (communication by each shot). The higher level of narration is generated from the micro-narrative (diegetic absorption) and is enabled by montage as a means of narrating the story by editing single shots into a continuous stream of shots that become scenes. The key to understanding Gaudreault’s dichotomy is not to focus only on technical description of early film development. His framework puts the spectator in the centre of examining. If the film style (what Burch would call IMR [14]) aims to unify film elements such as editing and acting. It does that in order to create the effect of unobtrusive film spectatorship. But on a
micro-narrative level of monstration, the viewer of a *tableau* is aware of his own position in front of the image. The space between the image and its viewer is thus larger on the level of “showing” than on the level of “telling”. The mobility of the camera here at first seems like it immobilizes the viewer. In the next section I aim to show the way Harun Farocki in his early work builds upon monstration and narration to create the wandering camera and the mobile spectator as agents of productive and emancipatory reading of documentary images.

**FAROCKI’S MOBILITY OF THE GAZE**

Harun Farocki is a German cineaste whose work ranges from documentary, experimental and fiction film, multimedia art to new media theory and practice. His oeuvre culturally is related to New German Cinema and the directors such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Werner Herzog and Wim Wenders, directors who worked in the sixties and the seventies of 20th century. Building on socio-critical topics attributed to the wave, Farocki’s films and installations spanned throughout decades. Counting more than 120 works he featured themes ranging from documentary films on prison systems and surveillance, shopping malls and consumer culture, factory culture, revolutions etc. Up until his death in 2014 he was researching digital culture and its relation to the culture of war. His films are mostly connected with “relations between film techniques as instruments of social seeing” [15; p.275]. Farocki is systematic in his questioning of the camera’s objectivity. As Brecht and Godard he believed that to be involved in a documentary film does not entail objectivity. He denaturalizes the filmic image, shows errors during the shooting, makes visible the technical stitches needed to make a film, employs and revokes montage, mocks narration and yet again, places the narrator as a centrepiece of a film. In short, his role is at the same time opposite and similar to Grierson’s idea by which he sees a documentary as an engaged film striving towards good propaganda more than aesthetics. Farocki on the contrary sees film as both, albeit different from Grierson: as propaganda (in presenting the codes of film visible to the spectators instead of concealing them) and as aesthetics (in making seen what is usually hidden in plain sight for the spectator).

Building on Rancière’s argumentation of emancipated spectator, I claim that Farocki’s documentary films and film essays are not designed to educate the viewer at any cost. On the contrary, the idea is first to displace the position of the spectator from the passive viewer to the active archaeologist of filmic meaning. Secondly, the intention is to encourage distrust of the image, or as Thomas Elsaesser puts it, Farocki “more explicitly than almost any other filmmaker began to examine the complex reality of images and the subject positions they implied” [16]. For example, his film *Between Two Wars* (*Zwischen Zwei Kriegen*, 1978) is a compilation film: a mix of found footage or simply technical scenes showing industrial production in a factory. Those shots are contrasted with fictionalized narrative of protagonists pondering the nature of production and consumerism, as well as the relation between Marxism and capitalism. The industrialization of Germany between two (world) wars is not only seen in relation to technology (industrial development). Using film language and distinct narrative style, Farocki engages in the dialogue with the spectator, describing the cold “technical image” as more than just an image of a machine. In the 55th minute of the film, Farocki makes himself visible as the narrator of his film in which the images he displays are not his by creation, but by montage:

“When one has no money for cars, gunfights, nice clothes ... When one has no funds for films, that allow the film-time, the life of the film, to allow themselves to elapse, then one has to put one's strength into the intelligence of the link between individual elements. The assembly of ideas. The assembly of ideas.”
The assembly, or montage of ideas which the film uses to question the relation between the man and the machine Farocki relates to film language, juxtaposing two forms of representation: documentary archive footage and fictional narrative. By showing us the form of industrial production in the time of war, he also makes visible the form of industrial production of film on one level and a narrative on the other. Elucidating film as an industry of speech, editing, politics, he makes possible the intertextual and emancipatory engagement with what is seen. For Farocki, the role of the film is one of constant production: not one that subjugates its viewer, but the production of emancipatory dialogue with what is seen on the screen (the spectators seeing moving images being produced in situ), and what is made visible (the enunciator in dialogue with the spectators). Therefore, he is framing the film as a technical (micro-narrative for Gaudreault) and linguistic (macro-narrative for Gaudreault) medium aimed to demythologize itself before the viewer.

Treating film language as capable of showing (and therefore producing) the spectators on the one side and narrative agents on the other is one of his most important additions in film art and theory. In his first notable film from 1969 *The Inextinguishable Fire* (*Nicht löschbares Feuer*), the author himself is shown to the spectator, sitting behind the table and reading the film script out loud. In technocratic language, he is reading the chemical report on the effects on napalm.

![Figure 2. The Inextinguishable Fire (*Nicht löschbares Feuer*, Farocki, 1969).](image)

The duration of the report he is reading is approximately three minutes: it consists of an account of the survivor of the napalm bombing Thai Bihn Dahn during the Vietnam war. Farocki is performing the act of narration in front of the spectators, nullifying his position as a traditionally hidden omnipotent agent of the story. In other words, if for Rancière emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting, Farocki challenges that opposition precisely by showing the process of film being made. Farocki turns to us, the audience, and asks: “How can we show you the injuries caused by napalm? If we show you pictures of napalm burns, you’ll close your eyes. First, you’ll close your eyes to the images. Then you’ll close your eyes to the memory. Then you’ll close your eyes to the facts. Then you’ll close your eyes to the entire context.” Although the entirety of the film is about napalm, most of it consists of a documentary technical image – workers, engineers and PR experts seen developing more efficient napalm. “Acting” therefore for Farocki first means exposing the artificiality of film by rejecting the representative nature of its language. We cannot see the fire of napalm, nor its victims. As spectators, all we can see is what precedes the representation (factory production), and what comes after it (witness accounts). Framing us as powerless and immobile spectators Farocki challenges his position as narrator who can represent our position as passive viewers as well.
VISIBILITY OF THE SPECTATOR

Can a spectator engage with the mediated image? David Montero claims that Farocki produces a counterimage with his work. Choosing not to be a hidden storyteller for the image, he is exposing the lack of description and the lack of narrative authority, offering himself as a collateral damage of the film’s inability to provide “truthful” representation. By counterimage, Montero asserts that usual representational practices “might reinforce the distance between the suffering victim and the viewer. Farocki’s gesture, on the contrary, aims to annihilate such distance, inviting us to escape the repetitive loop that ultimately deactivates these images so that they can be reassessed critically” [17; p.106]. In other words, by offering himself as a visible and powerless enunciator, he is positioning himself at the same time on the level of the spectator. Considering both Montero and Rancière, Farocki’s film essays communicate the following: where film narration ends, the dialogue commences. In other words, where the main enunciator is rendered incapable of speaking in place of the agency he is made to represent, the spectator becomes involved in the creation of the story. By making clear that every representation is always also a narrative, his aim is not to render it useless or obsolete, but to make narration a visible process of constructing a story as well as constructing a spectator by means of storytelling. By denigrating both the representational power of the image, as well as the epistemological high-ground of the enunciator, Farocki questions the process of communication described by the Shannon-Weaver model of communication [18]. Moving himself closer to Stuart Hall’s idea of negotiated audience, Farocki refuses, in linguistic terms, the position of enunciator in favour of interlocutor [19].

In some of his other works, like Videograms of a Revolution (Videogramme einer Revolution 1992), the narrator is not positioned above the characters on screen or the spectators in front of it. On the contrary, Farocki’s narrator sometimes knows less than the image itself, bringing the already mentioned dissensus in the foreplay. Being able to look at images productively for him means to be placed as constitutive to the process of representation. One of the lines in The Inextinguishable Fire (Nicht löschbares Feuer, 1969) delineates that: “When the napalms starts burning, it is already too late to start extinguishing it. You need to fight napalm there where it is produced: in the factories”. The sentence echoes the very structure of the film. By combining montage-film and documentary style single shot aesthetics, he produces a twofold formulation of political and social dispositif of the Vietnam War. Farocki is not concerned with the visual effects of the war, but the structure of its production. Both on the level of content and form, Farocki thematizes war without ever showing it, and seldomly by mentioning it. By saying that the napalm is fought against in the factories, he is not taking away the power of filmic image and its narrator. On the contrary, he goes one step further in underlining the strength of film in showing the production of the image, the narrator and the film language to the spectator. He thus involves the viewer in the process of production, inviting him to the “factory” itself.

Although Farocki is not a stranger to using complex editing techniques as well as scripted and narrated scenes, he often uses those techniques to produce the dialectics of images and not to conceal the traces of their production. The Inextinguishable Fire on the level of content displays industrial distancing from the effects of production (napalm victims). On the structural level, this distancing is produced by alienating it from the ideal viewer. I claim that the procedures described in this analysis can nullify Baudryian view of film as a product of the ideological effects of cinematograph as manipulative apparatus. Hence, standard model of film theory described by Bordwell and Burch [14] in form of IMR is not applicable to Farocki’s model. Instead of the image as a final product, Farocki is constantly presenting the viewer the whole procedure of the production (apparatus, narration, camera and the work needed to produce an image). In doing so, he does not render reality banal, but positions it as a starting point for the intellectual emancipation of the viewers.
CONCLUSION

Fundamental position of a narrator in analysed films is one of transparency, meaning both the visibility and invisibility of the narratorial authority. Farocki’s films show us their strength not through the closedness of their stories, but by their incompleteness or openness. My aim was to provide the theoretical argumentation for the notion of emancipated spectator as one that can be thought of as an agent invited to include itself in the filmic text as a constitutive part of the image. Moving images, visible film processes, disputing editing techniques as well as transparent narrators in Farocki’s films (but not limited to him) serve as a warning that politically emancipated film needs its viewer and his engagement. In the contemporary social and technological challenges we face in terms of industrialisation of vision, Farocki serves as a reminder that every image needs its viewer and interpreter, but also, that every spectator needs to doubt the image seen. The productive look is able to challenge the manipulative ideologies of fake news and populist agendas. It is not the one that nostalgically calls for the “analogue times” of dominant and hegemonic media production, but the one that thrives precisely in the visual abundance today, ready to inspect, dissect, argue and denigrate the authorial figures that once stood as the sole producers of our visual everyday culture.

REMARKS

1 Even the most contemporary discussions on surveillance today (Shoshana Zuboff [7]) look at the apparatus as a consequence of economic and political relations in society, and not as a consequence of the “machine ideology”. In other words, if we live in a completely visible world, it is not because of the technological advancement per se, but because of the development of neoliberal corporative economies that are allowed not only to trace our very lives, but to monetize our existence through the choices we make or are forced to make.

2 At the same time, those are the limits of this specific analysis. Although I aim to provide methodologically pervasive argument regarding the political potential of film image, universalist account would only limit the scope of this analysis, which is relying on case to case studies, having in mind various cultural factors between them.

3 At one point in film Farocki extinguishes a cigarette on his arm as a metaphor for napalm burns.

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Lost in narration: transparent storyteller and mobile spectator in early Harun Farocki


THE HUMANIST VISION IN NEOREALIST FILMS: THE CIRCULARITY OF INFLUENCES IN WORLD CINEMA

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ABSTRACT

When we observe the influence of neorealism, in the first instance we need to consider its humanist vision which implies that we cannot rely on elements and aspects of the narrative but we have to rely on extratextual information – i.e., information which surpasses the narrative text. I will discuss examples of world cinema that have appropriated the humanist vision of neorealism and the ways in which this vision affects the structuring of the fabula. This can be seen most prominently in Chinese, Iranian, Indian, African, Mexican and Taiwanese films (especially the films of Hou Hsiao Hsien).

The point of departure (and I am following Mieke Bal here) is that the fabula, even more generally than the syuzhet makes describable a segment of reality that is broader than that of narrative texts only. Fabulas always make describable segments of reality that are broader than that of narrative texts only, but in the case of neorealist films this is more pronounced. The specificity of the fabula in neorealist films is its reliance on extratextual information as well as its reliance on the focalized world view.

The relation between the subject that perceives and that which is perceived invests the story with subjectivity. By the same token focalization cannot take place without the act of narrating. Considering that the narrational process presupposes a text, or rather a medium such as film through which the story is narrated, it is impossible that the viewers perceive the narrated content directly. That content is subjectivized, represented, framed, filtered through a specific vision. In this concrete text we can speak of the humanist vision.

KEY WORDS
humanist vision, narrative, world cinema, fabula, focalization

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary cinema there is an intensification of intercultural influences, of the circularity of agents, subjectivity, style, and genre. An increasing number of films generate intercultural, discursive, and analytical spaces which need to be explored. At stake is the continuous displacement of filmic styles, which inspires us to create new ideas about filmic worlds, about ourselves, and about others. The emphasis is placed on stylistic specificities, iconography, and narrative representation. This enables us to recognize a double or even triple exchange between different film cultures, traditions, and national cinemas. When it comes to circularity of influences, the film movement that proves to be the most influential is Italian neorealism. Here I will discuss the notion of “world cinema”, providing examples of world cinema that have appropriated the humanist vision of neorealism and the ways in which this vision affects the structuring of the fabula. It is important to note that this essay is an interdisciplinary endevour, it involves both filmology and narratology.

THE FILM’S FABULA AND THE HUMANIST VISION

When we observe the influence of neorealism, in the first instance we need to consider its humanist vision, which implies that we cannot rely only on elements and aspects of the narrative, but that we have to rely on extratextual information – that is, on information that surpasses the narrative text. The point of departure (and I am following Mieke Bal here) is that the fabula, even more generally than the syuzhet, makes describable a segment of reality that is broader than that of narrative texts [1]. This segment of reality applies especially to neorealist films – the aesthetic-moral agenda of neorealism includes a political engagement, a social conscience, and most importantly, a humanist vision. Themes such as post-war unemployment were part of what made neorealism a “realist” cinema, while the fact that it did not use professional actors but faces from the crowd made it a “poetic” cinema as well [2]. Fabulas always make describable segments of reality that are broader than that of narrative texts only, but in the case of neorealist films this is more pronounced.

The essence of original neorealism is typically presented through the work of Vittorio De Sica and Cesare Zavattini. Zavattini believed that the most important achievement of neorealism was the fact that it brought the lives of ordinary people to the cinema screen. According to Zavattini, the aim of neorealism is to discover the “everydayness” of human lives. Here we can recognize the influence of Zavattini’s humanist vision on De Sica’s films. Zavattini’s ideal film was one that lasts 90 minutes and revolved around life of one man to whom nothing happens. For Zavattini, this was neorealism. This also means that the preferred narrative mode was realistic in the sense that fictional events are treated as real and without dramatization that would draw attention to their fictional character. The use of existing light resulted in naturalistic photography, implying that neorealist films can be compared to documentaries rather than to films produced in the studio. Film critic and theorist André Bazin praised the neorealist movement based on the films of Rossellini – he praised the eliptic narrative structure, the discarding of plot, the emphasis of details, the unpredictability of characters’ motivations, the use of long takes, the preference of medium shots, and the avoidance of close ups [3].

EXTERNAL FOCALIZATION

What is relevant here is the concept of focalization, particularly external focalization. Bal states that focalization has implications which surpass the field of vision limited only to the characters. She emphasizes the relation between the vision of the external focalizor and the particular world view which prevails in the story [4].
A specificity, then, of the fabula in neorealist films is its reliance on extratextual information and segments of reality that are broader than that of narrative texts, as well as its reliance on the focalized world view. In this paper I will discuss examples of world cinema that have appropriated the humanist vision of neorealism and the ways in which this vision affects the structuring of the fabula. I will also consider the influence of narrative form and the fact that neorealist films tend to loosen up narrative relations. This can be noticed in the films of other cultures, most prominently in Chinese, Iranian, Indian, African, Mexican and Taiwanese cinema (especially the films of Hou Hsiao Hsien).

Apart from internal and intermedial focalization, what is crucial for the critical narratological approach is external focalization, which is on a higher level than internal focalization because it does not condition identification through the characters alone, but through a certain world view, as well. External focalization is relevant for the examples of films I have mentioned, because it urges us in the first place to identify with a concrete world view. Just as the subject has an advantage over the object, and the one who is the external focalizor has an additional advantage, the external focalizor is always the one that remains hidden and has a greater advantage. In the narratological sense, this is a question of narrational authority, a narrational instance which is hierarchically on a higher level, higher than the narrational instances which function as internal focalizors. In principle, the events are represented by the vision of the world that pertains to the external focalizor; in other words, a certain world is represented through this vision. This vision encompasses all other visions. The vision at stake here is the humanist vision.

**WORLD CINEMA**

First of all, it is useful to consider the implications of the notion “world cinema”; if we consider the existing studies of “world cinema”, we will see that there are three approaches in question. In the first instance, world cinema refers to “third-world” and postcolonial cinema, which was previously called “third film”; at the same time, this means that Hollywood film can be taken as the first cinema, and European films fit into the category of “second cinema”.

Some critics, such as Roy Armes, define the cinema of the third world in a wider sense, as a group of films produced in the countries of the third world. Paul Willeman talks about the films of the third world as an ideological project – films that relate to a concrete political and aesthetic program [5], regardless of whether they were produced in third-world countries. This film current emerges directly out of the Cuban revolution, Peronism in Argentina, and film movements such as cinema novo in Brazil. Third-world films and third cinema deal with politically colored cultural practice. In the late 1960s and the 1970s, which is marked by the victory of Vietnam over the French, the Cuban revolution, and the establishment of Algerian independence, the ideology of third-world films is crystalized in a wave of militant essays; Rocha spoke of the hungry cinema of sad and ugly films, Solanas-Getino focused on militant guerilla documentaries, and Espinoza called for imperfect films inspired by “low” forms of popular culture [6]. If on one level, the new cinemas of the third world overlapped with the new European movements, their politics were more left-oriented. The authors of third cinema valued alternative independent anti-imperialist films focused more on provocations and militanism than on authorial expression and viewer pleasure. New films were juxtaposed not only with Hollywood films but also with commercial traditions that were thought of as bourgeois, alien, or colonized. Just as the authors of the French new wave rebelled against le cinéma de papa, Brazilian directors of the cinema novo movement, for example, rejected chanchadas oriented toward entertainment or epic films in the style of Hollywood costume dramas such as Vera Cruz. The young Egyptian authors rejected the “Hollywood on the Nile” tradition, while the directors of new Indian cinema, such as Satyajit Ray, rejected the
Hollywood and commercial tradition of Bombay musicals, choosing instead the European art cinema model, especially neorealism.

With the help of new media, national borders can be transgressed, and this enables the people to acquire information and ideas which were formerly suppressed by those who had power in national societies. The production of subjectivity becomes dependent on the development of communication networks, new technologies, and the movement of globalization. Discursive borders of different societies that constitute a non-Western world are constantly broadening, and the notion of “third world” has entered a new stage in which cultural and political critique develops in alternative ways. Concretely, a trajectory can be seen from anticolonialism to postcoloniality; inside this theoretical frame, the emphasis is on deterritorialization rather than on territorial aspirations and the artificial and constructed nature of nationalism and national borders. Cultural contradictions and syncretisms that are generated by the global circulation of people and cultural goods in the mediatized and globalized world have changed the status of the notion “third world.” There are two more books on world cinema that need to be taken into consideration. One, The Oxford History of World Cinema [7], includes Hollywood Cinema and non-Hollywood cinemas, the latter implying national cinemas of the entire world. These are most often grouped together in relation to their political and cultural similarities. The premise of another book that deals with world cinema, A World Cinema: Critical Approaches [8.] is that American cinema enjoys a dominant position in film studies, and therefore, the editors direct their study of world cinema toward non-Hollywood cinemas. This orientation is twofold: the non-Hollywood films in question include those produced geographically outside of Hollywood, as well as films which took a different aesthetic model from the one that rules in Hollywood. Different approaches to world cinema confirm the instability of this term – the way this term will be defined depends on the historical conditions, but it depends also on personal vision and one’s subject position. In the West (implying North America and Europe), world cinema refers to films produced outside of Hollywood and Europe. In Hong Kong, for example, the term “world cinema” is used for films which are neither Hollywood films nor Chinese. Therefore, if we are browsing through the films in famous shops such as His Master’s Voice or Hong Kong Records, the term “world” includes for example, Iranian, but also French, German, Spanish, Italian, or other European films. According to my own experience, Hong Kong students begin to show personal interest in the movements of world cinemas, which in this case refers to German expressionism, Italian neorealism, or the French new wave, at the moment when they can position themselves on the cultural map of the “world.” This concretely implies that a discussion on Nosferatu, for example, begins with a discussion about vampires in Hong Kong films, whose specificity is that the vampires do not walk but hop and jump instead.

WORLD CINEMA AND ITALIAN NEOREALISM

Each of the national cinemas I address here as examples of world cinema comparable to Italian neorealism, and in the first instance, this concerns the film’s fabula; Bal emphasizes the interdependency between the fabulas of narrative texts and the critical issues, norms, and laws that come from the outer world. This also works for films: the way a storytelling subject is expressed in the filmic text is closely related to the way in which the story is told, but the subject is also connected with a certain understanding of the world. It is important to keep in mind the connection between the formal aspects of the filmic image in the process of narration, and the film’s fabula. An examination of the relations between filmic signifiers and the structuring of the narrative text discloses a type of character and implicitly the subject that is generated in filmic narrative texts.
BICYCLE THIEF

One film that is extremely relevant is De Sica’s Bicycle Thief (Ladri di biciclette, 1948); the main character is unemployed, and to get a job he needs a bicycle. He acquires a bicycle, but it is stolen, and this has tragic consequences. He searches for his stolen bike without success; in the end, he tries to steal a bicycle but is caught and humiliated. Our main preoccupation again is poverty, unemployment, and specific historical conditions. This is the segment of reality that is broader than that of the diegetic world. Beijing Bicycle (Shiqi sui de dan che, Wang Xiao Shuai, 2001) is a film that dovetails with Ladri di biciclette. In Ladri di biciclette, after a long search, Antonio Ricci finally gets a long-awaited job, but for this job he needs a bicycle—he cannot execute his tasks if he doesn’t own a bicycle. He has a bicycle, but he has pawned it, and in order to retrieve it, his wife has to pawn their sheets, even the sheets they sleep on. When he acquires the bicycle, he happily goes to work; his task is to put up billboards particularly billboards that advertise films. While he is pasting a billboard, he has to get off his bicycle and put it on the side, and as expected, something happens that has tragic consequences for Ricci—his bicycle is stolen. The Bicycle Thief is a typical example of Italian neorealism, which in this particular case presupposes dealing with everyday events and a story in which the theft of a bicycle has tragic consequences. It means the loss of a job and the endangered existence of a family. Regardless of the actual hardship of the postwar era, Italian neorealism was closely related with the striving of its initiators (the most prominent of whom was Zavattini, the scriptwriter of De Sica’s films) to show the world in a different way, possibly completely different from the world offered by Hollywood. In her analysis of this film, Kristin Thompson insists that the film relies on the devices of the classical Hollywood style; she mentions the scene from the pawnshop in which a crane shot is used and the camera descends across piles of bedding revealing the state of things: the fact that a great number of unfortunate people like Antonio and his wife had to pawn their sheets [9]. Regardless of the fact that neorealism in principle relies on realistic spaces, back projection is used in The Bicycle Thief, which means that the action is played out in the studio in front of a projection of a concrete space. Another device is the tracking of the camera, a typical device of the classical Hollywood style. In addition, the voice of the main character was dubbed, and the voice of an actor was used. Thompson also mentions narrative elements such as ironic quotations or last-moment appointments.

BEIJING BICYCLE

For Wang Xiao Shuai, the independent director of the Sixth Generation, a bicycle means freedom and social progress. Guei, the main character in the film, is a young man who has come to Beijing from a village. He finds a job, but just as Antonio in The Bicycle Thief, he needs to have a bicycle. In this case, the company secures a bicycle, a super modern mountain bike. Guei’s happiness doesn’t last long; after exiting the bath house where he had to make a delivery, Guei realizes his bicycle has been stolen. Just as Antonio in The Bicycle Thief, Guei is desperate and immediately goes in search of the bicycle. Poverty and unemployment are again at the center of our interest – this is the segment of reality that is broader than that of the diegetic world. The fabula is again very simple – the boy acquires a bicycle, but it is stolen, and for him this has tragic consequences. He searches for the bicycle, and he steals back his own bike. In the Chinese film, just as in The Bicycle Thief, the humanist vision is at work. In The Bicycle Thief, the child is the witness of his father’s search for the bicycle and his ultimate shame, Figure 1. There is no child in the Chinese film, but the film refers to Italian neorealism, which in this case implies engaging with everyday events and that kind of fabula in which the disappearance of the bicycle has tragic consequences. For both Antonio Ricci and Guei, the disappearance of the bicycle means losing a much-needed job.
The humanist vision in neorealist films: the circularity of influences in world cinema

Figure 1. Vittorio de Sica, *The Bicycle Thief* (*Ladri di Biciclette*, 1948).

In *Beijing Bicycle*, another narrative line is opened up. A schoolboy named Jian secretly takes his father’s money and buys the stolen bike. Jian is in love with a girl with whom he rides to school every day, while Guei becomes interested in a girl who lives nearby and who works as a maid. No one knows this because she wears the dresses and shoes of her employer. This is the part where *Bicycle Thief* and *Beijing Bicycle* differ: Guei is juxtaposed with Jian; to both of them, the bicycle is the most important thing in the world. Guei recognizes his bike and steals it from Jian. In *Ladri di biciclette*, Antonio’s theft presents the move of a desperate man; he is immediately caught and slapped in front of his own son, Bruno. The relationship between father and son becomes central and confirms the tragic dimension of this story. Regardless of the horror and shame related to the theft of the bicycle, the boy forgives his father; this is confirmed with a simple gesture: walking alongside his father, he takes his hand, and both of them have tears in their eyes.

Jian hangs out with a gang of guys who perform wild exhibitions on their bikes; they take Jian’s side and attack Guei for stealing his bike back. They abuse Guei and take his bicycle. Guei is desperate, he throws himself on the bike and his body becomes the body of the bicycle, he is completely immersed in the bike. A solution is found for Jian and Guei: they will share the bicycle. Finally, Jian and Guei become friends and Jian tells Guei he can keep the bike. Although the gang does not accept this and decides to destroy the bike. In the end, Guei walks the streets of Beijing carrying his bike, which he cannot ride any more. Both films have an open ending, as is typical of art films.

Filmmakers such as Vittorio De Sica, the author of the films *The Bicycle Thief*, *Umberto D*, and *Shoe Shine*, tried to make humanist films full of sensitivity and realism. In a world that is tortured with fear and hate, in which no one likes reality for itself, Italian cinema is the only cinema that portrays revolutionary humanism. In film, all the characters’ lives are truthful. We recognize their humanity. According to André Bazin, the humanism of Italian neorealism is its greatest value. We recognize De Sica’s pessimism, which is related to the notion that a person does what he or she can, as evidence of his or her humanity.

**NEOREALISM AND AFRICAN FILM**

Ousmane Sembene directed the satire *Mandabi* in 1968. The majority of early African films were produced in the traditional mode of social realism, inspired partly by the aesthetic mode and political concerns of Soviet social realism, but it can also be compared to Italian neorealism – Sembene relied on Italian neorealism especially in *Mandabi* (Money Order). *Mandabi* seems almost like a documentary or an ethnographic film. It is about a man who receives a money order from his nephew who lives in Paris, but he cannot confirm his identity, which would enable him to claim the money at the post office. Again, we are faced
with poverty and unemployment. His two wives know that he has received a money order, so they buy rice with a promise to the merchant to pay when the money order arrives. The two wives act as servants to their husband while he eats and communicates, according to the local customs. At the post office, a man whose job is to read to the illiterate reads the nephew’s letter. Here, we recognize the oral tradition: off screen, the nephew tells us about his life in Paris and how much he misses his home in Africa. The recipient of the money order encounters problems: he needs to have his picture taken in order to acquire his identity card, and there are constantly people approaching him who ask him to give them or lend them money.

In his earlier films, Sembene dealt with exploitation of the colonizers, but when Senegal won its independence, he turned to the postcolonial African leaders who abused their power. *Xala* is an adaptation of Sembene’s novel. The central character is El Hadji, a successful businessman, a father and husband who already has two wives. In order to celebrate his new position in the chamber of commerce, he decides to marry for the third time. On the first night with his new wife, he discovers that someone has cursed him with *xala*, the curse of impotence. He does all he can to remove the curse but without success. Sembene uses this curse as a metaphor for incapable African leaders. El Hadji criticizes African tradition, but he says that polygamy is part of his tradition.

**SHOE SHINE AND SALAAM BOMBAY**

In the Indian film *Salaam Bombay*, directed by Mira Nair (1988), most of the children are actual children from the streets, which gives authenticity to this film. This is emphasized by real locations. The emphasis on the children who live in poverty and are fighting for their existence enables us to draw a connection between *Slumdog Millionaire* and *Salaam Bombay*. Mira Nair dedicates this film to the children that live on the streets of Bombay, today’s Mumbai.

The main character in the film is Krishna, a boy who first works for a circus. When the circus leaves, he is left with nothing and no one and buys a train ticket to the closest large city, which is Bombay, Figure 2. He finds a job delivering tea with the aim to save 500 rupees, which he has to pay back to his brother because only then can he return home.

Krishna lives in the red-light district, and is friends with a little girl named Manju, the daughter of a prostitute and Babu, a pimp and drug dealer. Krishna is in love with an older girl, Sola Saal, who was bought by the brothel with the intention of selling her virginity. One evening, when they are coming home from work, the police pick up Krishna and Manju and take them to an orphanage.

Manju’s mother comes to the orphanage to claim Manju, but she cannot take her home because she is a prostitute, so the girl has to stay in the orphanage. Krishna runs away from the orphanage and returns to the red-light district, where he asks Sola Saal to run away with him. She refuses to do this because she is attracted to Baba and not Krishna. A client takes away Sola Saal, and the enraged Krishna kills Baba.

The film reminds us of neorealist films, which are also filmed on authentic locations, and especially because of the presence of children who live on the streets. Such is the film *Shoe Shine* (*Sciuscia*), directed by Vittorio De Sica in 1946, Figure 3. In this film, two friends, Giuseppe and Pasquale, earn their living shining shoes on the streets of Rome. A dream of the main character in the Indian film is to earn enough money to return to his family. The boys in *Shoe Shine* are obsessed with the idea of buying a horse, but for this they need an amount of money that they cannot earn by shining shoes. Poverty and children who take care of themselves are the main concerns of this film. Here too, a humanist vision is at work. In the
aesthetic sense “realism” in the neorealist movement consisted of a dedication to the representation of human reality.

In most of the film *Slumdog Millionaire*, the main protagonists are children who are on their own, who live in great poverty, and whose lives are endangered in every moment. The first episode with the main character Jamal is a situation in which he ends up stuck in an improvised toilet. In order to get out of the toilet and get an autograph from his beloved actor Amitabh Bachchan, he had to jump into the hole of the toilet, that is into the faeces, Figure 4. The memory of that event contains the answer to a question in a game show (Jamal participates in) regarding the famous actor. The fact that the lives of the children are endangered in every moment is most clearly confirmed in the episode in which despotic

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**Figure 2.** *Salaam Bombay* (Mira Nair, 1988).

**Figure 3.** *Shoe Shine* (Sciu Scia) Vittorio De Sica, 1946.

**Figure 4.** *Slumdog Millionaire* (Danny Boyle, 2008).
characters are blinding children so they can use them as blind singers. Aware of what awaits Jamal, his brother Salim saves him from the criminals.

NEW NEOREALISM AS NEW ORIENTALISM

When it comes to Iranian cinema, as in the films of Majid Majidi, that object is constructed as innocent, wonderous, simple. Iranian new wave can be compared to a certain extent to European art film, and this is another cinema which can be compared to Italian neorealism. Iranian films have a documentary immediacy, an authentic mise-en-scene. They engage non-professional actors and very often they deal with children. When we speak of Iranian cinema and the circularity of influences, in the first instance there are films in which children play the main role. One of the most famous films in which children are in focus is the film Children of Heaven by Majid Majidi, Figure 5.

![Figure 5. Majid Majidi, Children of Heaven, Bacheha-Ye aseman, 1997.](image)

This is another fabula where there is a preoccupation with poverty, and that enables a construction of the “human” story and relations among the characters whose intensity is comparable to the films of Italian neorealism. The important difference is that, in the new context, new neorealism becomes new orientalism.

The fact that the West plays an important role here, that the West indirectly conditions the ways the “East” will be represented, inevitably evokes a discourse about orientalism. In short, the discussion on orientalism is founded on the relations of power and domination between the one who sees (i.e., subject) and the one who is seen (i.e., object). This notion includes a series of images and classifications which constructed the East/Orient as an object as it is viewed by the West (which primarily refers to the European colonizers). The West could keep the desired image of itself if the images that come from the East (in its first definition, all that is not Europe) offer an appropriate counter-balance to Western modernism, rationalism, and pragmatism. In the new, allegedly postcolonial world order, the West continues to control the global cultural market, but unlike the colonial era, we are confronted with a new kind of orientalism – today the subject is offering itself to the eyes of the West as an object. The East is constructing an image of itself – exotic and bewildering, and by the same token primitive and cruel – exactly opposite to the image that the West is promoting about itself. In this film, too, the humanist vision is at work, and this is a vision from the outside. Earlier, I mentioned external focalization – the children are in focus, the fabula is seen from their point of view, and this is what makes this vision humanist and related to Italian neorealism – poverty is the segment of reality that surpasses the diegetic world.
HOU HSIAO HSIEN AND ROSSELLINI

In the film The Boys from Fengkuei, directed by Ho Hsiao Hsien, the boys think they have bought tickets for a movie, but they find themselves in an unfinished building from which they have a view of the city, Figure 6. This view reminds us of Roberto Rossellini’s film Germany, Year Zero, Figure 7, which relates the films of Ho Hsiao Hsien with Italian neorealism [10].

Figure 6. Hou Hsiao Hsien, The Boys from Fengkuei (Feng gui lai de ren, 1983).

Figure 7. Roberto Rossellini, Germany, Year Zero (Germania anno zero, 1947).

NEOREALISM AND MEXICAN CINEMA

The introductory scene of the film The Pearl, La Perla, 1947) directed by Emilio Fernández, is definitively related to the modus of art cinema. We find ourselves on a spacious beach, a series of shots of waves and women with their backs turned toward the camera follow; the women are covered with long scarves. The women appear stylized: in the first moment it is not clear that we are looking at women; they appear to be high, undefined objects. They constitute a part of art cinema landscape; they seem to have been on the beach for so long that they have become part of it, Figure 8. The Pearl is an adaptation of the short story by John Steinbeck of the same title, and it reminds us more of Italian neorealism than of the modus of classical cinema. The main character is a little boy named Juanito, who is the son of the fisherman Quino and his wife Juana. Juanito is stung by a scorpio, and they take him to a doctor, who refuses to help them because they have no money.

The next day, while diving, Quino finds a beautiful pearl, and he believes his luck has finally changed. He is no longer poor anymore, and this gives him new opportunities. The people in the village celebrate this happy event: they organize a festival with music and dancing. The doctor now wants to help Juanito because he is interested in the pearl. Everyone wants to see
the pearl, and Quino is soon confronted with many problems. His wife, Juana, believes the pearl has brought them misfortune, and she asks Quino to get rid of it. She even tries to toss the pearl into the sea, but Quino prevents this. Their lives are in danger, and they leave their home. They wander the woods and desolate landscapes. Juana’s feet are bleeding; she does not have the strength to go on. Two men who have been following them get closer, and one of them kills Juanito. In the end, Quino and Juana decide to throw the pearl into the sea. They have nothing except each other. Their poverty and the tragic ending are reminiscent of Italian neorealism.

Figure 8. Emilio Fernández, The Pearl (La Perla, 1947).

CONCLUSION

While Gerard Genette limits focalization to the level of the syuzhet, in the diegetic world, Bal insists that focalization has implications which surpass the visual field, which is limited only to the characters. She asserts that, in a text with external focalization, characters are also focalized, but they are focalized from the outside. Bal emphasizes the relation between the vision of the external focalizor and a specific world view which prevails in the story [3]. At stake is the narrational authority, a narrational instance that works as the internal focalizor. This presupposes that focalization has implications that reach further than the visual field of
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The characters. When external focalization is in question, the character is still at the center of our interest, but the development of that character is seen only from the outside. In the critical narratological sense, there is no unfocalized narration. Even when production practice and technology have supremacy (as is the case with classical Hollywood cinema), we need to be aware that, behind the “unfocalized” content, there is always a certain world view.

The difference between the subjectivized first person and the so-called objective third person includes different levels of narration because, in the technical sense, the “invisible” external narrator delegates narration to the characters, or rather to the internal narrators. The structuring of the levels of focalization is closely connected with the structuring of subjectivity, and thereby with the structuring of the narrative text. This works in the opposite case as well: the structuring of the narrative text conditions the dynamics between the characters. The signifiers that constitute the text are specifically filmic, as well as narrative. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind the connection between the formal aspects of the filmic image, the organization of the film itself (in the narrational process), and the fabula. The questioning of the relation between filmic signifiers and the structuring of the narrational representation of the fabula discloses the type of character and implicitly the subject which is generated in filmic narrational texts.

The relation between the subject that perceives and that which is perceived invests the story with subjectivity. By the same token, focalization cannot take place without the act of narrating. Considering that the narrational process presupposes a text, or rather a medium such as film through which the story is narrated, it is impossible that the viewers perceive the narrated content directly. That content is subjectivized, represented, framed, filtered through a specific vision. In this concrete case, we can speak of the humanist vision.

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AMBIGUITY OF THE TRAUMA NARRATIVE IN
CLAUDIA LLOSA’S THE MILK OF SORROW

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ABSTRACT

Claudia Llosa’s seminal work The Milk of Sorrow (La Teta Asustada) is a Peruvian feature from 2009 that has been widely analysed and scrutinized. It deals with very intriguing topic of trauma and self-inflicted oppression of a young indigenous woman in contemporary Peru. The task in this research was to elaborate and display how the personal trauma of the female, a victim of rape committed by the Peruvian guerrilla and paramilitary is transmitted onto her daughter and what are the consequences of that transmission. Another goal was to show case how the narrative structure of the film is overlapped by psychological narration unspoken in film, but evident to the viewer through the over amplified presence of the symbolism and through the protagonist’s inner state of mind. The narrative is built upon an indigenous belief that the evil of the rapist transmits through mother’s milk and that it can only be understood when a subject becomes aware of its own pre-traumatizing experience. This is exemplified by iconological and symbolic usage of the potato, which the protagonist Fausta inserts into her vagina. She does so in order to shield herself from the transmitting of the evil, but the potato inevitably becomes a trigger/safety of her traumatizing existence. The real narrative is thus border by the potato insertion and finally by the potato being removed from the protagonists genitals. Frame and montage analysis of the strategies employed by Llosa reveals that the visual and symbolic content of The Milk of Sorrow narrates the trauma in the unique way that has influenced feminist filmmakers in the Latin America to approach the taboo topics like rape and incest from different perspectives. At the same time, the trauma narrative produces ambiguity that has led the scholars to complete opposition in their analysis, and precisely this ambiguity is the raison d’être of this research.

KEY WORDS

iconology, rape, trauma, transmission, symbolism

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INTRODUCTION

The films of Claudia Llosa have been very influential in the Latin America; especially concerning the breakthrough Golden Bear at 2009 Berlin film festival for The Milk of Sorrow, which opened a space for a wide array of feminist and activist filmmakers in the region. Her first feature Madeinusa from 2007 aroused quite a controversy within the critics circle but also within the mixed and indigenous communities in Peru. It represented a fictive indigenous community called Manayacuna in which the father aims towards incestuous relationship with his adolescent daughter while the daughter aims to escape the indigenous oppression towards urban Lima. The rituals, ceremonies and the indigenous traditions (although fictive) are displayed as corrupted, oppressive, backward and paternalistic. This awkwardness in representing the negative aspects of rituals is uncommon in Latin American cinema, but not unheard of since Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha made the film Barravento in 1962. The narrative structure of Barravento does not resemble the one in Madeinusa, but the context in which the traditional candomblé ritual of Bahia represents a backward and regressive oppression towards free-will individual is similar to the one represented in Madeinusa. The eponymous character in first Llosa’s film is forced to be initiated through the ritual of Virgen dolorosa – the Virgin/child only to be more eligible for the premeditated rape craved by her father. Both Rocha and Llosa were heavily criticized for their debuts on the behalf of negative ethnography representation apparent in both films.

Almost in a way of liberating herself from the guilt of neo-colonial accusations aroused with Madeinusa, Llosa’s subsequent film The Milk of Sorrow (La teta asustada) from 2009 reverses the context in almost every way. The protagonist of the film, Quechan indigenous young woman Fausta is trying to escape from her mother’s oppressive memories of the Peruvian Internal conflict whilst living in the migrant chabola (shanty-town) in the suburb of Lima. While in Madeinusa the eponymous character cunningly emancipates itself by poisoning her incestuous father with rat poison and blaming her gringo/white lover for it, Fausta in The Milk of Sorrow places the potato into her vagina in order to protect herself from the possible rape and desecration by the males around her. She does so in concordance with the indigenous belief that the evil spirit of the perpetrator transmits through the mother’s milk. Since Fausta’s mother was a victim of the multiply rape performed by the members of the Peruvian paramilitary guerrilla Sendero luminoso, Fausta consciously convinces (but arbitrary to some extent) herself that the same would happen to her. Hence, the potato in vagina acts as a trigger for her traumatized existence in the fear of the rape. At the same time, she believes that potato is a safety that can prevent the premeditated rape and that it binds her to the memory of her dead mother [1; p.302].

Curious link between Madeinusa and The Milk of Sorrow does not end only in reversed narratives noted above, but also in the fact that the actress Magaly Solier plays main characters in both films. This fact amplifies the binary opposition of two films, especially in the context elaborated here – the trauma of the indigenous female – since the character of Madeinusa never experiences trauma but rather suffering, while Fausta on the other hand deliberately inflict herself with suffering with potato inserted into her vagina. Fausta goes through suffering but she is overwhelmed by the trauma triggered by the milk of sorrow belief and by her mother’s llakis (mourning song). We can rightly argue that not all suffering is traumatic (evident in Madeinusa) but on the other hand the trauma inevitably causes suffering (psychosomatic, mental or physical). Or does it? It often depends on the context of representation or the narrative positions of/on the subject. In this case it has already been criticized as the false trauma, because the symptom (the inserted potato) satisfies the subject and he does not want to be separated from it [2; p.439]. Curious case of suffering/trauma
interconnection also marks the important Colombian documentary *Los Chircales* (*The Brickmakers*) from 1972 directed by the anthropologists Marta Rodriguez and Jorge Silva which narrates the life and destiny of the poor and oppressed *Castañeda* family who force their small children to work in horrific conditions and to produce brick from mud and clay. What is important in *Los Chircales* is that the position of the extra-diegetic narrator decreases the viewer’s insight into the lives of small children treated as day labourers. While we track the discourse of the narration, we are deprived of meditative time to oversee horror and isolated trauma of the individual. Strategies employed by Rodriguez and Silva aim towards anthropological holism of suffering of the Colombian subalterns and not towards individual trauma. We feel and see the suffering that goes on, but we do not witness the trauma because the narration leads us to determine the socio-political agenda.

The narrative structure of *The Milk of Sorrow* is overwhelmingly indebted to the research of Kimberly Theidon published in her book *Entre prójimos. El conflicto armado interno y la política de la reconciliación en el Perú*. Theidon, a Harvard anthropologist gives an account of various indigenous women, victims of the rape in Peru during the clashes between *Sendero luminoso* and the government. Some of the victims were pregnant during the perpetration and they began to believe that they transmit the evil of their own nemeses through *macarisca ñañu* (Quechuan for the sad breast) principle by feeding the supposed treachery milk to their new-born babies. This triggers the inevitable circle of traumatizing experience within the female community, as the mother feels obliged to relive her horrific experience before dying; she simultaneously inflicts the daughter with the truth and consequently the trauma (again arbitrary to some researchers). There are debates within the scholars whether the individual traumatizing experiences can be seen as the communal or even historical trauma of the indigenous. The mother/daughter trauma chain is often taken as symbolic or historic: “the trauma of these characters is not individual but rather communal and the history of Perpetua and Fausta is determined by a collective historical experience” [3; p.96]. The researchers that overviewed *The Milk of Sorrow* through the feminist agenda of false indigenous or even worse – false activism [4, 5] heavily contest this notion.

The key issue in this research is the question how does the unlived experience (Fausta was not raped, her mother was) produces trauma to the individual, and what are the ambiguities of trauma narrative represented in the film. As noted before, even the cultural heritage like indigenous language and rituals like self-confessional poetry performed by the mother determine how to remember even what has not been lived [6; p.40]. This poetry/songs known to the Quechua community as *llakis* are sources which identify the trauma, they are embodied states of mind of sorrow and pain, private yet collective [7; p.948]. *Llakis* derive from Quechuan *llakisq'a*, meaning sorrow and suffering, and precisely this combination of sorrow and suffering, which emanates from the performance of the pre-mortal confessions by the mothers, triggers the trauma in the daughters.

**THE NARRATIVE CORE: SONGS, DEAD PENIS AND THE POTATO**

The plot of *The Milk of Sorrow* is at first glance very simple. Young Quechuan woman Fausta watches the death of her mother, and finds out the traumatic truth about rape, necro-felatio (mother was forced to put the castrated penis of her husband into her mouth) and consequently inserts the potato into her vagina in order to shield herself from the possible desecration. She lives with her uncle and his family, which seem to abandon the Quechuan traditions and the language in favour of *cholaje* lifestyle in the sub-urban Lima shantytown called Manchay – which in Quechua stands for horrible, and fear. *Cholaje* paradigm is absent in most researches, because it does not fit with indigenist agenda or resilience paradigm offered by Rojas. I think that the iconology of the *cholaje* milieu (weddings, *cholo...
music, chabola etc.) negates the conclusiveness of both approaches concerning the context of The Milk of Sorrow. It is useful to note when depicting the life of migrant Quechuan society in Lima during the 1980s and 1990s one cannot just overlook that the migrants were willingly acculturated towards cholaje lifestyle. They adopted the usage of Spanish even inside their homes, adopted the clothing, ceremonies, and entertainment – and to identify their community as pure indigenous is a false argument. Albites and Gómez [3] mention the cholo paradigm citing Quijano and his important essay Dominación y cultura: Lo cholo y el conflicto cultural en el Perú but they do not go any further with this notion [3; p.103]. So, it is important to note that Fausta lives in cholo community and culture, not the pure indigenous one and that this perspective changes a lot of arguments about the subject.

Fausta gets a job of a servant in a household of the reclusive pianist Aída and befriends her gardener Noé, who also speaks Quechua. She in a way forges a strange friendship with Noé precisely because of the Quechuan context (he uses the Quechua language and is versed in Quechuan botany and traditions). Lillo finds the character of Noé to be a fortunate dramaturgical anagnorisis that reveals the tension of unfulfillment [2; p.445]. Fausta is awarded with pearls for every song she performs for Aída who grows strangely attached to her, being in the creative crisis⁴. All these times Fausta feels the pain produced by the potato expanding in her genitals. Fausta case is interwoven with cholaje⁵ wedding business that her uncle’s family runs and with ambiguous desire of her uncle, (some scholars saw it as an incestuous desire, some as the pater familias infirmity towards trauma). Fausta urges the removal of the potato from her genitals and finally refuses her uncle and decides to bury her mother in the desert sand near the Pacific coastline.

Claudia Llosa wrote the screenplay for The Milk of Sorrow heavily influenced by Entre prójimos. El conflicto armado interno y la política de la reconciliación en el Perú, a book by Kimberly Theidon published in 2004 in Lima. Theidon pretty much sets the scenery for Llosa’s film by going into detail description and accounts of the indigenous women that were raped by the Sendero luminoso guerrilla and by the government military personnel. This includes the life in the suburban Lima in the chabolas (shacks) full of dirt and sand and raising the children in inappropriate sanitary conditions. She also emphasizes the importance of the llakis calling them pensamientos emocionales (emotional statements), as evident in the confession by one of the victims: “the llakis fill the heart, overflowing its capacity to contain so many painful memories” [8; p.64]. When the mother Perpetua (the name literally means perpetual but also life-long – almost invoking the circular trajectory of the trauma giver/taker) finishes her lament she asks Fausta to sing to her as to revive her memory because when the mother can no longer see her memories she is no longer living. This is a debatable point that manifests that the trauma is purposely kept alive only to be transmitted to the daughter. We could argue what would be the purpose of this trauma transmission; it lacks the vitality factor or even the benefit for the community? It seems that the gravity of the crime (mutilation, castration, rape) motivates the mother to keep the memory of a crime alive and that the contemplation about its consequences towards the daughter can be regarded as side-effects. Keeping this fact in mind it’s no wonder that the llakis is obsessed with traumatic memory and the explicit depiction of its horrors. Llakis bear strong resemblance to the early Blues music of the Afro-Americans in the Deep South in the late 19th Century USA that also emphasizes the importance of reviving the memory of sadness, suffering and poverty.

Another aspect that Llosa borrowed from Theidon is the confessions of the mothers done in a form of an interview in Entre prójimos and displayed as the mother/daughter sorrowful llakis dialogue in the film. The very beginning of the narration starts as the dying mother’s llakis over her ill-fated life after the military raped her and massacred her husband. To make the matters worse mother was pregnant while the horrific events occurred and she emphasizes this in her lament:
Perhaps, some day
You will understand
How much I cried
I begged on my knees
To those poor bastards
That night, I screamed
The hills echoed
And people laughed
I fought with my pain
Saying: A bitch with rabies
Must have given birth to you
And that is why you have eaten her breasts
Now, you can swallow me
Now, you can suck me
Like you did to your mother
This woman who sings

was grabbed was raped
That night they didn’t care
About my unborn daughter
They raped me
With their penis and hands
With no pity for my daughter
Watching them from inside
And not satisfied with that
They made me swallow
The dead penis of my husband Josefo
His poor dead penis
Seasoned with gunpowder
With that pain
You better kill me
And bury me with my Josefo
I know nothing here

Horrific scenes depicted by the mother are, perhaps, the most striking account of the atrocities and horrors experienced by the indigenous during the Internal conflict. The thought of “poor dead penis seasoned with gunpowder” highlights the suffering and trauma of the mother but is also a trigger that psychologically persecutes Fausta. In her interesting reading of The milk of sorrow Adriana Rojas offers a curious reading of the mothers lament: “The song becomes a metaphor for mother’s milk, which contains memories and, in this case, a legacy of trauma that the mother does not want to fall into oblivion” [1; p.301]. Rojas, writing from a perspective of a resilience of the indigenous to process, cope and overcome trauma sees the transmission of the trauma from mother to daughter almost as the necessity triggered by the song. Her analysis of the film is oppositional to the ones offered by Lillo [2] and Vich [9] which aim towards political and cultural significance of the identity representation in The Milk of Sorrow. Somewhere in the middle is a work recently published by Albites and Gómez [3], which deals with trauma and isolation context of the film and which is built upon a significance of the embodiment of the trauma – in this case the potato acting as the trauma signifier embodied into subject.

If we go back to the significance of the opening scene starting with a black screen, we can easily justify the visual brilliance of Llosa and her cinematographer Natasha Braier. First seven shots establish the whole context of the trauma and open a debate of the ambiguity we, as the observers witness:

1. Long Black screen with mother’s song/llakis – symbolizing death but also uncertainty.
2. Close-up of the dying mother singing – reviving the traumatic past.
3. Deep focus medium shot with Fausta and the shantytown in the background – establishing the indigenous-cholaje opposition.
4. Jump-cut with black screen and title of the film popping up – going back to uncertainty and ambiguity.
5. Long full shot of the uncle and his family – further elaborating Manchay and the migrant’s acculturation.
6. Medium shot of Fausta approaching the family with the bleeding nose and fainting – this being the first knowledge of the self-inflicted suffering and the nexus for most of the plot.
7. Close-up of awakened Fausta in the hospital bewildered – the key moment in which she trembles immediately but after feeling the potato inside of her relieves the tension.
Rojas sees the following short close-up of the ceiling lamp going on and off as the key symbolic moment of the resilience during trauma, since the light shines bright during the hospital scene in which the potato is finally removed from Fausta [1; p.302].

**Figure 1.** Fausta awakes from fainting in a hospital, and is unaware if the potato has been removed.

**Figure 2.** After finding out that the potato is still inside her she is ready to burden on with it.

The narrative structure of the film is intersected with various forms of songs; starting with the mother’s *ilakis* and moving on with Fausta’ songs performed in Aída’s house and with the corpse of the dead mother in the bed. This lyrical narrative keeps the viewer firmly within the notion of sorrow and performing the songs keeps Fausta interconnected with the memory of her dead mother, but also, as Lillo notes, they help her to rebuild her identity [2; p.443]. Rojas diverges in this matter, never questioning the loss of identity, but rather accents the songs as the tool of resilience. She concludes that the songs are a coping mechanism used to calm the performer in his fright and anguish [1; p.306]. Many scholars dismissed these claims [4, 5, 10] tackling the narrative from the perspective of dialectics between Andean and Western, urban and rural, Spanish and Quechua, master and servant. However, to reduce the narrative to binary opposition and to diminish *The Milk of Sorrow* only to suppose neocolonial discourse does not justify the particularities of the narrative mentioned above.

**THE AMBIGUITY OF THE TRAUMA NARRATIVE: THE TRIGGER AND THE SAFETY DICHOTOMY**

In the contemporary psychiatry, the term trauma is associated with the wound inflicted not to the body but to the mind. The emotional shock produced by this wound is so powerful that it breaches the mind’s experience of time, self and the world [11; p.6]. Medical theory on the trauma has cantered on the individual, on the other hand the contemporary philosophy and cultural theory had put much effort on explaining the cultural trauma, triggered mostly by the World War II and its aftermath. In the case of the representation of the traumatic experiences applied to a collective or even a culture it is a debatable notion, especially evident in the topic of the indigenous trauma, so much depends on the researchers own perspective in finding the
neuralgic points. I have already mentioned the opposite reading of the cultural trauma topic in *The Milk of Sorrow* (see [1, 3] vs. [2, 4, 5]) and precisely this ambivalence of the research opens up a question: What is the reason for this differences? It seems that the answer lies in the ambiguity of the trauma narrative best exemplified by the dichotomy of potato acting as the trigger and the safety.

Previously I have noted the importance of the unlived experience in the self-inflicted oppression. Geoffrey Hartman, writing about traumatic knowledge points out an important notion: “There is an original inner catastrophe whereby/in which an experience that is not experienced and apparently, not ‘real’ has an exceptional presence – is inscribed with a force proportional to the mediations punctured or evaded” [12; p.537]. This is evidently omnipresent in *The Milk of Sorrow* in two distinctive ways. First, there is a cunning congruence between Fausta’s case with the potato and Hartman’s notion. The fear of the rape is in this case the inner catastrophe which has exceptional presence, not only for Fausta, but for her surroundings. The fear is the signified agency of the trauma, and although it cannot be grasped or fully narrated we as the observers can feel its presence. The rape has not been committed on Fausta, but rather on her mother and to sustain the ever growing horror of its possible reoccurrence we witness the inserted potato. The fact that the potato is never explicitly shown makes it an even more present, since the audience cannot forget that it is still in Fausta’s genitals. The markers of its presence also mark the shifts in the plot.

Figure 3. A potato sprout drops off from Fausta’s genitals. It reminds the viewer that the fear and the trauma is still present and not resolved.

After the potato sprout drop off from her genitals on the sand floor it reminds us that the fear is still there, that the trauma has not been resolved. The potato becomes the most potent iconological symbol in the film but with very opposed contextualizing. Being a native plant of Peru it is shown as the fortune telling device in a scene where Maxima tries to peel the skin of a potato in one piece, and which, according to Fausta’s Uncle is a sign of a good fortune and long life. Rojas has made a case of the potato symbolism in her article circling around the Quechuan traditions concerning potato, but she also ventured into explaining how the vaginal entrapment of the potato is in fact the symbol of fear of the lost mother. She further reads the potato trajectory in line with the Derrida’s concepts of incorporation, mourning and interjection. Rojas concludes that: “The potato in her vagina further echoes the Derridean notion that she keeps her dead mother inside (incorporation) of her as if she (Fausta) were a crypt. Then Fausta finally introjects her, meaning that she draws her mother’s memory into her own, but has her own life. This process of mourning, incorporation and introjection I interpret as a necessary part of Fausta’s journey to resilience” [1; p.307]. What I find inconclusive in this curious reading of the film is the context of the potato being a surrogate of the dead mother who has to be incorporated and introjected in order to acquire
Ambiguity of the trauma narrative in Claudia Llosa’s The milk of sorrow

resilience. Final scene in which the blossomed potato in a jar appears in front of Fausta’s doors in an ambiguous one; according to Rojas it can been seen as the spirit of the dead mother that Fausta has introjected, it can also be a hint of a new found union between Noé and Fausta. All of the above signals the ambiguity of the trauma narrative exemplified by the potato question. What is it? I am opting for a trigger/safety dichotomy. Long shots containing only Fausta in the frame offer either the silence interwoven with her suffering from genital pain or her singing to retell her own story. In both cases the viewer is always reminded that the potato acting as the trigger/safety is omnipresent. The potato in fact becomes the narrator of the personal trauma. The fact that is hidden inside the genitals makes it an even more appropriate tool of emphasizing the trouble of the trauma narrative. Writing about trauma Everyman warns us that: “Personal trauma is difficult to narrate as it is lived through. It is formidable, not to say impossible, grasp the meaning of shocking occurrences as they are experienced. It is only after fact that interpretation and real understanding become.” [13; p.49]. What is evident in my view is precisely the fact that the trauma is being experienced and lived through in front of the viewer because of the trigger/safety dichotomy of the potato. The real understanding that Everyman notes comes before the end when a removal of the potato marks the end of the trigger/safety mechanism.

Dichotomy of this simultaneous mechanism appears from the very fact that the trauma is triggered by the fear of rape and the mother’s llakis, hence the potato insertion from the fear of the rape. At the same time a trauma is not resolved because the triggered action also acts as the safety one: to keep the possible perpetrators away. These binaries fall perfectly in the trauma definition offered by Hartman because the force of the traumatic experience – lived and performed by Fausta – is proportional to mediations punctured or evaded. Punctures can be ascribed as the side-effects of the trigger performance: the potato acting as the reminder of the suffering slowly disables Fausta in her everyday life. Visually this is elaborated by the clever usage of the homodiegetic songs performed by Fausta presented as the voice overs of her own scenes of mute isolation and traumatic meditation. On the other hand, evaded actions can be seen as the acts of the safety part of the mechanism which also slowly disables Fausta: the potato acting as the safety for the unperformed rape becomes futile and pointless agency of suffering. There is some truth in Lillo’s mentioned notion of how the symptom satisfies the subject and he does not want to be separated from it, but I think that the method is missing. The potato, if we take it as the trigger/safety mechanism satisfies the subject (Fausta) not because it holds some sacerdotal context (object of desire/pain) but precisely because it shields from the fear of the rape, while at the same time keeps the memory of the unlived experience alive. Finally, the removal of the potato means that the whole mechanism is dismantled and that the dichotomy of its performance is finally cancelled.

CONCLUSION

Claudia Llosa stirred a lot of debates and controversies with her film The Milk of Sorrow, especially in the context of the trauma narrative and its representation. I have displayed the main differences and neuralgic points in the researches done so far. The main argument in my analysis is that the trauma narrative cannot be unilaterally understood because the trauma mechanism, exemplified by the dichotomy of the trigger/safety device of the potato represents an ambiguity of the trauma. Scholars were aiming either to downgrade or dismiss Llosa’s alleged neo-colonialism or false indigenous agenda of the film or to defend, again an alleged resilience and trauma coping mechanism represented through the protagonist Fausta. I opted for an ambivalence of the signified trauma, especially because of the uncertainty that the narration of the trauma displays. Using the symbolism but also the practical and performative nature of the potato, I have marked the potato as the real signifier of the trauma.
The trigger/safety mechanism answers many debateable points in the narration, especially the trauma transmission from the mother to her daughter, which has questionable purpose if we approach it from the solely negative or affirmative perspective. Using the ambiguous nature of the trauma narrative the film opens up as the mediation process which includes both the punctures and evasions, and this trajectory of the narration is only apprehensible through the trigger/safety mechanism. It is curious fact that in The Milk of Sorrow the narration which becomes most important is the one that is un-narrated, the inner state of mind of the protagonist exemplified by the role and significance of the potato. The viewer cannot forget that the potato is inside the protagonist’s genitals almost through the entire film, and this notion highlights the ambiguity of the whole story. In my mind, excluding the identity and indigenous agenda of the film, The Milk of Sorrow represents a cleverly designed dichotomy of the trauma narrative and is thus an important and curious study of the representation of the personal trauma interpolated into cultural, community and feminist context.

REMARKS

1Afro-Brazilian religious tradition that originated in Bahia in the 19th century. Lacking the scripture it is primarily marked by the ritual music and dancing. Rocha represented the candomblé as the obstacle for socialism in Brazil.

2Sorrowful Virgin – in this case a child is represented as the crying Virgin, as to commemorate the Mother and the Virgin duality similar to Child-Woman duality of coming of age.

3Cholaje – standing for a culture of the cholos – an offspring of mestizo and the indigenous – but can be loosely applied for a hybrid culture of the indigenous populations in the urban parts of Peru and Bolivia.

4Manchay – a suburb of Lima was founded by the indigenous migrants fleeing from the rural parts during the Internal conflict in the 1980s.

5The relationship between Fausta and Aída was over-amplified in the previous researches, built upon criollo-indigenous, master and servant, rich and poor, urban and rural binary opposition aiming at the false class representation and neo-colonial incorrectness of Llosa’s approach. I will not go into this direction because the relationship is not crucial for trauma expose.

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