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European Cinema: Legacy of East, West, Ethnicity and History

Abstract: European cinema in the past has been defined as the accumulation of individual national cinema. This essay proposes to invert the perspective, by putting forward the notion that each national film culture is doubly occupied: by the memory of films from other national cinemas and, of course, by Hollywood movies. But such a state of "double occupancy" applies not only to cinema: every part of Europe, and all of our (national) identities are multiply defined, multiply experienced, and can be multiply assigned to us, at every point in our lives. Some of the films of the "New European Cinema" reflect this tension, and via the exploration of double occupancy return us to the historical origins of our present 'post-national' nationalisms.

Key words: identity, ethnicity, cinema, history, Europe

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Evropski film: zapuščina Vzhoda, Zahoda, etničnosti in zgodovine

Abstract: Evropski film so nekoč opredeljevali kot skupek posameznih nacionalnih kinematografij. To perspektivo bomo obrnili na glavo in predstavili misel, da filmsko kulturo vsakega naroda "okupira" dvoje: spomin na filme drugih narodov in seveda na hollywoodsko produkcijo. Takšna "dvojna okupiranost" pa ne velja zgolj za film: sleherni del Evrope, sleherni (nacionalni) identiteta dopušča mnogotere opredelitve in načine doživljanja, v vsakem trenutku življenja nam jo je mogoče pripisati na mnogotere načine. Ta napetost se zrcali v nekaterih izdelkih "novega evropskega filma", ki raziskujejo dvojno okupiranost in nas tako vodijo k zgodovinskemu izvoru sedanjih "postnacionalnih" vrst nacionalizma.

Key words: identiteta, etničnost, film, zgodovina, Evropa

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DOUBLE OCCUPANCY: AN INTERMEDIARY CONCEPT

The famous Strasbourg-born American political cartoonist and writer of children's books, Tomi Ungerer was once asked what it was like to grow up in Alsace (he was born in the 1920s), and he replied: It was like living in the toilet of a rural railway station: *toujours occupé* (always occupied). He was, of course, referring to the fact that for more or less four hundred years, and certainly during the period of 1871 to 1945 Alsace changed nationality many times over, back and forth, between France and Germany, and for most of that time, either country was felt to be an occupying power by the inhabitants.

In a way, this anecdote already is my paper. For the second point I want to make with *toujours occupé* is that I am proposing the idea of permanent occupation, or double occupation as a kind of counter-metaphor to the metaphor of Fortress Europe, by suggesting that there may be no space which can be defended against an "outside" of which "we" are the "inside". There is no European, who is not also diasporic in relation to some marker of difference – be it ethnic, regional, religious, linguistic, and whose identity is not always already hyphenated or doubly occupied. I am not only thinking of the many European sites where the fiction of the fortress, the paranoid dream of *tabula rasa*, of cleansing, of purity and exclusion has led, or still continues to lead to bloody conflict, such as in Kosovo, Northern Ireland, the Basque country, Cyprus, and further afield, Israel and Palestine. To these, Tomy Ungerer's *toujours occupé* may suggest the prospect of a happy ending, insofar as the European Union – founded, let us remember, initially to ensure that France and Germany would never again go to war with each other over Alsace-Lorraine – in this case the EU did actually provide a shift in the terms of reference by which the conflicting claims of nationality, sovereignty, ethnic identity, victim-hood and statehood, solidarity and self-determination could be renegotiated. Indeed, this is the hope of the political elites in the European Union, often enough repeated: that these conflicts can eventually be solved, by being given different frameworks of articulation and eventual settlement.

I shall come back to what I think these frameworks proposed by the European Union might entail as a political, but also symbolic-discursive space. Yet even outside the internationally notorious territories of overlapping identity-claims and inter-ethnic war-zones just mentioned, it is clear that Europe – however one wants to draw either the geographical reach (south: the Mediterranean, east: the

Urals) or the historical boundaries (Mesopotamia, Phoenicia, Greek, Roman, Holy Roman or Soviet Empire) – has always been a continent settled and traversed by very disparate and mostly feuding ethnic entities. We tend to forget how relatively recent are the nation-states of Europe, and how many of them are the result of forcibly tethering together a patchwork quilt of tribes, of clans, of culturally and linguistically distinct groupings. Those identified with a region have seen a belated acknowledgement of their distinctiveness within the European Union under the slogan of “the Europe of the regions”, but even this opening up of different spaces of identity does not cover the current layeredness of ethnic Europe. One need only to think of the Sinti and Romas, the perpetual “others” of Europe, who because they have neither territory nor do they claim one, resist any of the conventional classifications, being inside the territorial boundaries of a dozen or so European countries, but finding themselves outside all these countries’ national imaginaries. Nor does the Europe of the regions convey the historical “depth” of multi-ethnic Europe, a continent whose two or three thousand year history is a relentless catalogue of migrations, invasions, occupations, conquests, pogroms, expulsions and exterminations.

Thus, the state of double occupancy applies to every part of Europe, and to all of us: our identities are multiply defined, multiply experienced, and can be multiply assigned to us, at every point in our lives, and this increasingly so – perhaps to the point where the very notion of national identity will fade from our vocabulary, and be replaced by other kinds of belonging, relating and being. Blood and soil, land and possession, occupation and liberation have to give way to a more symbolic or narrative way of negotiating contested ownership of both place and time, i.e. history and memory, for instance, inventing and maintaining spaces of discourse, as in the metaphoric occupation of Alsace or the increasing prominence achieved by hyphenated European nationals (German-Turkish, Dutch-Moroccan, French-Maghreb, British-Asian) in the spheres of literature, filmmaking, music and popular television shows. This is not to overlook the fact that there are good reasons why in some parts of Europe and especially on its current political borders, the recognition of a distinct national identity is still a prerequisite to being able to talk about belonging at all, as a consequence of one’s country having had to cope with occupation, colonisation either directly or by proxy for too long. This seems true for South East Europe and parts of the former Soviet Empire, such as the Ukraine or Belarus, claimed as their spheres of inf-

luence by Russia, the US, and of course, the European Union. Even in Alsace, matters are far from resolved: despite the fact that Strasbourg is the seat of the European parliament, the European Court of Justice, Alsace is among the *départements* in France where the Fortress Europe populist Jean Marie Le Pen still has a substantial following, and the incidents of anti-Semitism reported from the region are alarmingly high.

These facts notwithstanding, the present insistence on cultural identity, as that which can most peacefully replace the older, more divisive nationalisms as well as reconcile the individual to community, may well have to be re-thought across some other set of concepts, policies or ideas. This is not an easy task, as a quick review of the alternatives suggests. Multiculturalism, the term most readily offering itself, has come increasingly under fire: it underestimates the asymmetrical power-relations of the various constituencies, and ignores the rivalries among different ethnic communities and immigrant generations. Its notions of a rainbow coalition does not answer the thorny question of “integration” and “assimilation” versus “cultural autonomy” and “separate development” that characterises the various policies tried within the European nation states. In the European Union, cultural identity is now being officially replaced by “cultural diversity”. Besides the blandness of the term and its tendency to be a euphemism for the problem rather than its solution, I find “diversity” problematic because it, too, leaves no room for the very real power-structures in play, nor does it take account of the imbrication of inside and out, self and other, the singular and the collective.

Double occupancy wants to be the intermediate terms between cultural identity and cultural diversity, recalling that there is indeed a stake: politics and power, subjectivity and faith, recognition and rejection, that is, conflict, contest, maybe even irreconcilable claims between particular beliefs and universal values, between what is “yours” and “mine”. Philosophically, double occupancy also wants to echo Jacques Derrida’s term of writing “under erasure”,² indicating the provisional nature of a text’s authority, the capacity of textual space to let us see both itself and something else. One can even gloss it with Wittgenstein’s reversible, bi-stable figure of the duck-rabbit picture, sign of the co-extensiveness of two perceptions in a single representational space.³

² Derrida, 1974.

³ Wittgenstein, 1958, 212.

Furthermore, I want the term to be understood as at once tragic, comic and utopian. Tragic, because the reality of feeling oneself invaded, imposed upon, deprived of the space and security, is – whatever one's race, creed or gender, but also whatever one's objective reason or justification – a state of pathos, abjection, disempowerment and self-torment. Comic, in the way one considers mistaken identities as comic, that is, revealing ironies and contradictions in the fabric of language and its performativity. And utopian, insofar as under certain conditions, I shall suggest, it opens up ways of sharing the same space while not infringing on the other's claims.

Perhaps I can illustrate what I mean by the more benign, symbolic and discursive forms that double occupation can take, with a scene from a documentary by Johann van der Keuken, *Amsterdam Global Village* (1996). By following the delivery rounds of a courier on a motorcycle, the director follows the lives of several immigrants who have made their life in Amsterdam: a businessman from Grosny, a young kick boxer from rural Thailand, a musician from Bogota who works as a cleaner, a woman disk-jockey from Iceland, a photographer, and also an elderly Jewish-Dutch lady, Henny Anke who with her 55-year old son is visiting the apartment she lived in during the Occupation, when the Germans came to arrest her husband, deporting him to the Westerbork transit camp, and she had to decide whether to go into hiding with her little boy or to follow her husband to the camp.

The sheer physical contrast of the slight Jewish lady and the stout woman from Surinam, the discovery of the complete re-modelling that the flat has undergone, obliterating all the spatial memories Hennie might have had, is paralleled by the décor of white porcelain figures and lush green foliage, setting up what might have been a tragic-comic encounter of culture clashes. Yet, as Hennie recalls the terrible years, and re-lives the agony of her doubt about the choices she made, we sense the palpable fact of double occupancy of this domestic, physical and moral space, by two generations who have little in common either culturally or ethnically, but whose succession and coexistence in memory and spoken record, gives a truer picture of a national, but also trans-national history of occupation, colonialism, extermination and migration than either of the women could have given on their own. When the Surinamese mother says she now understands what the old lady has suffered, because she too has gone through relocation and exile, we know and Hennie Anke knows that there are important differences and the respective experiences may not be strictly comparable.

But the gesture – even if it is one of mis-prision and mis-cognition – nonetheless sustains the fragile bridge these two women are able to build, establishing an image of transfer and safe-keeping of experience, as they embrace each other for the farewell. In the context of the film’s concern with singular fates, with diaspora communities and the difficulties of a maintaining a multi-cultural Amsterdam, but also following, as it does, a harrowing portrayal of ethnic strife, death and devastation in Grozny, the encounter in the Amsterdam flat up the steep stairs, encourages the viewer to ponder the possibility of putting space, time and place “under erasure”: to see it both yield, erase and keep a memory within a history, while making room for a narrative of double occupancy. But the moment is as fleeting as it is utopian, and appears the more poignant, as one recalls what has happened in the Netherlands since 2001, to its reputation for tolerance and to the consensus model of the social contract, extended to its ethnic communities. After the violent deaths of first Pim Fortuyn and then Theo van Gogh, each in his way a flamboyant provocateur to the notion of consensus and diversity, this tolerant image is now frayed and seemingly in tatters.

If *Amsterdam Global Village* illustrates the utopian dimension, the case of the filmmaker, journalist and television personality van Gogh, who was assassinated as a consequence of making a film deemed by some Muslims to be offensive to their religion, is perhaps more revealing for the tragic dimensions of double occupancy. Van Gogh often argued that his sometimes quite outrageous statements in the media, notably on television and in his newspaper opinion column, was the exact opposite of intolerance, but the expression of his faith in democracy, and his defence of the law and free speech: by testing the limits, he wanted to safeguard its fundamental principles, very much in the spirit of the famous dictum, (mis-)attributed to Voltaire: “I may disagree with what you have to say, but I shall defend, to the death, your right to say it.”⁴ Van Gogh’s provocation was, in this sense, a mimicking, a “staging” and thus an impersonation of racism, of prejudice and sexual othering, by which he wanted to keep alive the emotional reservoir and the very real fund of resentment existing among the population, the better to engage with it. His “activism” sought to expose the sometimes hypocritical lip-service to multi-cultural ideals in the Netherlands, a country which remains

⁴Voltaire, 1779. The paraphrase comes from *The Friends of Voltaire*, written by Evelyn Beatrice Hall and published in 1906 under the pseudonym Stephen G. Tallentyre.

a consensual but deeply conservative society. Perhaps one can think of van Gogh's polemics as a *pharmakon*, a homeopathic cure, by way of inoculation and administered to the deeper feelings of fear of the other, "acting out" the aggression towards every kind of "otherness" associated with traditional forms of nationalism and religious fundamentalism. As an heir to the radical 1960s, but also part of the media-experienced, performative 80s and 90s, van Gogh saw television, film-making and even tabloid journalism as fields of symbolic action, deploying a language of signs, clichés and stereotypes, as the common code of a culture that lives its differences in the realm of discourse, rather than by force. His death at the hands of a self-styled Muslim radical, who grew up in the Netherlands, might indicate that the space for symbolic action had vanished in the aftermath of 9/11 and the so-called "war on terror".

Yet van Gogh's assailant is not only literate, fluent in Dutch, "integrated" in mainstream society and adept at using the modern technologies of communication, such as web-sites and the internet: the murder itself, with its ritualistic overtones and easily decodable symbolism, had the performative dimension of other acts of barbarity deliberately staged in order to produce shocking media images and atrocity events. This would be another meaning of my term "double occupancy" – that semantically, as well as in the performativity deployed, modern media spaces have acquired the force of a first-order reality, by comparison with which the world of flesh and blood risks becoming a second-order realm, subservient to the order of spectacular effects. The media privilege of van Gogh's persona – namely that he had access to the media, where played agent provocateur and could occupy the symbolic space of discourse – became the nemesis of Theo van Gogh the person of flesh and blood, brutally deprived of life for the sake of another symbolic space. Two different symbolic spaces: one vital to our democracy, the other one unacceptable to our democracy.

A comic version of double occupancy is attempted in another Dutch film, *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* (Albert Ter Heerdt, 2004), which looks at a dysfunctional Moroccan family living in the Netherlands from the point of view of one of the sons, fed up with his life of petty crime and wanting to make good. Ab (short for Abdullah), too, is fully integrated as well as fully alienated with respect to Dutch society. A duck-rabbit, as it were, even more to himself than in the eyes of others: he knows the cultural codes of both communities, their sensitivities as well as the narrow limits to their tolerance. Like Tomi Ungerer, the young Moroccans

around Ab direct their best jokes against themselves: “what’s the difference between E.T. and a Moroccan? E.T. had a bicycle . . . , E.T. was good-looking . . . , E.T. actually wanted to go home.” In the film, Ab would like to be an actor, but he realizes that demand for Arabs as romantic leads after 9/11 is low, a joke that would fall flat indeed were it not contradicted by the film itself, which briefly did make Mimoun Oaïssa into a star, since the film became a big hit in the Netherlands. Sparing neither the Dutch nor the Moroccans, *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* uses its subaltern humour and television family sit-com setting to appeal to a complicity of ineptitude (another version of double occupancy), which allows for a democracy of bunglers and losers to emerge as the film’s political ideal, in the absence of – or while waiting for – better options.

TELEVISION AND CINEMA: DIS-ARTICULATING AND RE-BRANDING THE NATION

Double occupancy, as the co-extensiveness of symbolic and ethnic identities, but also the overlap of media representations, racial stereotypes and day-to-day discriminations connect directly with the re-figuration of the nation and the national. The argument would be that the so-called communication revolutions of the past thirty years, together with the media-consciousness and media-skills of diaspora communities, have played a major role in the present resurgence of nationalism and the polarisation of public culture and politics. In some instances, such as militant Islamism, these new technologies, like the internet or the mobile phone, are said to have exacerbated the feeling of people that they belong to quite distinct cultural formations, having to fight for the space of recognition, if necessary by violent means.

But this analysis foreshortens considerably some of the key developments both in the media and around the notion of the nation and the state since the 1970s and 1980s. First of all, it is generally agreed that the role of representing the nation has passed from the cinema (and the idea of national cinema) to television since the 1970s. Yet deregulation, privatisation and the battle for viewer ratings between public service and commercial broadcasters has changed the very terms of this representation as well. In commercial television, viewers are entities to be numerically and demographically quantifiable into A, B and C viewers according to preferences, income, social mobility, location. These groups were thus increasingly imagined by television not as belonging to the same na-

tion, but as consisting of special interest groups, such as women, children, the youth market or ethnic minorities, rather than being addressed as citizen and belonging to the nation-state.

This “break-up” of the nation into segments of consumers, so powerfully pushed by television since the 1980s in every European country including central and eastern Europe, and observed with such despair by those concerned about democracy and the future of civic life, must thus be seen to be a thoroughly double-sided phenomenon. It has created spaces for self-representation, even if only in the form of niche-markets, and it has radically de-hierarchised the social pyramids of visual representation, while clearly neither dissolving stereotypes, nor necessarily contributing to a more equitable, multi-cultural society. It is this paradox of simultaneous dis-articulating the nation as citizen, while re-articulating it as a collection of consumers that, I would argue, has radicalised and compartmentalised European societies, but it has also created new spaces, not all of which need to be seen as socially divisive. Yet the manner in which these spaces henceforth communicate with each other, or take on trans-personal and inter-subjective functions, because no longer following the separation of realms into “private” and “public”, “interior” and “exterior”, has also affected the respective roles played by the cinema and television.

One consequence might well be, for instance, that the cinema, instead of asserting its national identity by opposing the hegemony of Hollywood, has, in truth, national television as its constantly present but never fully articulated “other”. The resulting confusion can be read off any number of European films. In a film like *La Haine*, for instance, television is precisely such a constant ubiquitous presence, the visual catalyst for moving from the *bleu-blanc-rouge* of the tricolor of “white” France (on television, still very much state-controlled), to the *black-blanc-beur* of multicultural France (as lived in the streets). Television is despised by the film’s youthful heroes for its lies and distortions, and yet they go to extraordinary lengths, in order to be featured on it. In *Goodbye Lenin*, the “reality” of the disappeared German Democratic Republic is maintained via the simulated television broadcasts, fighting against the billboards increasingly invading the streets, and yet the hero in the end says: “I was beginning to believe in the fiction we had created: finally there was a GDR as we had all dreamt it.” Finally, in the British film *About a Boy*, television is explicitly cast in the role of the derided “other”, against which the Hugh Grant character tries to define a consu-

merist cool, whose codes, poses and gadgets are – ironically - derived from the very ads shown on the despised box. The confusion is compounded, on the other hand, when one thinks of how the European cinema has developed a kind of retroactive national vernacular, as a way of “accenting” (borrowing the term from Hamid Naficy’s book, *An Accented Cinema*)⁵ the local or the regional within the global context, or packaging the past as heritage industry. A film like Jean Pierre Jeunet’s *Amélie* was roundly condemned for its fake image of Montmartre, straight out of Hollywood’s picture-book Paris, and *Goodbye Lenin* has been seen as a shameless pandering towards Ostalgie, i.e. nostalgia for the GDR, conveniently obliterating the stultifying repression, the permanent surveillance, and the wooden language of official hypocrisy its citizen were subject to.

SUB-STATE AND SUPRA-STATE ALLEGIANCES

Thus, in order to grasp what is happening even in these films of the “New European Cinema”, one needs to take perhaps a step back, and return to the origins of the post-national nationalisms. For as far as these new nationalisms are concerned, the general consensus seems to be that their contradictory and essentially modern nature can best be grasped if one posits the presence of general forces that put pressure on the typical conjunction of nation and state that we are familiar with in Europe since Napoleon and the Vienna Congress re-ordered Europe, which re-affirmed the notion of sovereignty that became international law with the peace of Westphalia in 1648 that ended the Thirty Years War in continental Europe.

To take the question of the combination of nation and state first: if, for a variety of reasons, in the political balance of modern Europe the idea of “nation” and the idea of “state” are drifting apart, then what we see in the social realm is the formation of “nation” groupings (or senses of belonging) that are either sub-state or supra-state, i.e., that articulate themselves above or below, or next to the old nation-state: some fighting for national identity, and others not. In certain parts of Europe, notably around the Mediterranean and the Adriatic, this has led to separatist movements such as in the Basque country, on Corsica, and to the more violent ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. But even in Great Britain, the 1990s brought devolution for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

⁵ Naficy, 2001.

Global political developments, then, which include the consumer society, labour mobility and satellite-supported media empires have produced a dynamics of dispersal and at the same time new clustering that at first glance seems very different from the geographically based, often fiercely blood-and-soil-centered sub-state nationalisms. Yet these latter, paradoxically, are at once *sus-tained* and *con-tained* by the European Union, when we consider how much talk there is, on the one hand, of “a Europe of the regions,” and on the other, how all forms of *de iure* separatism, and especially those that go about it by violent means, are countered and condemned. Instead of violence, the European Union supports symbolic action such as cultural diversity and cultural autonomy as the substitute for political autonomy.

What destabilizes the notion of the nation today, then, are two, apparently contradictory tendencies and yet interrelated challenges. On the one hand, the nation has become an unstable category because more and more so-called sub-state groups aspire to becoming a nation: the Palestinians, the Kurds, the Tamils, the Czechs split from the Slovaks, the Corsicans, the Croats, the Albanians, the Basques, the Chechens, and so on. On the other hand, many citizen of the traditional nation states of Western Europe also no longer feel that it is only the “nation” that they owe particular allegiance to. They sense that the nation itself has become too heterogeneous a category and hence they think of themselves as more represented by their city or community, their region, by their religion. In many cases, they prefer to identify themselves by their lifestyle, their leisure pursuits or their professional lives: in the name of which they travel all over the world, become expatriates in Spain, have second homes in Tuscany or the Dordogne, work somewhere in the European Union or find permanent positions in Australia or the US. For this group, the notion of Europe as a nation would be an impossibility, but even the idea of a European super-state carries no particular emotional charge.

The consequence of such post-national feelings of allegiance and identification with the nation in some of its parts, but no longer as an organic, deep-rooted totality, may be that we have to revise more fundamentally also the way we think about the social contract that ensures solidarity and defines citizenship. For the other, even more commented upon sub-nation, as opposed to supra-nation formation is, of course, made up of those who do not feel allegiance to the nation-state in the first place, because they are immigrants, refugees or asylum

seekers, and who live within their own diasporic communities and closed family or faith circles, cut off from the social fabric at large through lack of familiarity with either language or culture or both. Also sub-nation in their allegiance are sections of the second-generation diaspora who, while sharing the language and possessing the skills to navigate their society, nonetheless do not feel they have a stake in maintaining the social fabric, sensing themselves to be excluded or knowing themselves to be discriminated against, while also having become estranged from the nation of their parents. In the best of cases, where they have found the spaces that allow them to negotiate difference, they are what might be called hyphenated nationals, meaning that their identity can come from a double occupancy which here functions as a divided allegiance that cancels itself out: neither loyal to the nation-state into which they were born, nor to the homeland from which (one or both of) their parents came. Since all major European countries (France, Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, but also Italy and Denmark) now find themselves with large ethnic and national minorities, it is no wonder that the general disarticulation of the nation state along the lines just sketched, publicly discussed as either “assimilation” or “cultural autonomy” have become major issues of public debate and controversy, but find little common ground in practical policies. The question may be wrongly posed. We need to ask instead: what are the potentials and limits of culture as symbolic action and symbolic space in such a context, and how can we preserve, protect and enlarge these symbolic spaces for action? Under what circumstances do other, more direct forms of agency take over, as in the Netherlands? There, on the face of it, Theo van Gogh was murdered for making a film, even if, as I have tried to show, the symbolic dimension of the act inscribes itself in a media reality, where tabloid journalism, state warfare and sub-state acts of terrorism differ perhaps more in degree than in kind.

The hyphenation of identity produced by immigration, migration and exile makes those affected by it appear in stark contrast to another group of hyphenated nationals, hyphenated at the supra-state level. These are the cosmopolitan elites, i.e. intellectuals, businessmen, entrepreneurs, financiers, politicians, academics, artists, architects, who move freely between London, Paris and New York, or between Berlin, Milan and Warsaw. While their number may be comparatively small, their influence and role in the world economy is, however, so significant that they are the ones who set major trends in urban developments, in

the labour market and employment, as well as in the spheres of entertainment and leisure. Their activities and movements, thus, also contribute to the social crisis of the nation-states, when we think of them as employees of multinational companies, for instance, who operate as states within the state, and are able to move entire industries into other, low wage countries. Unlike the sub-state hyphenated nationals, the political power of the cosmopolitan elites consolidates the traditional hierarchies of the nation state, rather than flattening them: it even extends the pyramids of power into international institutions and into global spheres of influence.

A PROPOSAL FOR DEFINING A NEW EUROPEAN CINEMA

This very general sketch of some of the political ramifications of the many ways in which Europe as a union of nation-states is in the middle of a possibly long and painful process of *dis-articulating* and realigning key aspects of the traditional congruence between nation and state was *inter alia* also meant to underline the difficulty of drawing too direct a parallel between the question of national cinema on the one hand, and the nation on the other. While the nation states are re-negotiating with the European Union question of sovereignty and subsidiarity, while its citizens worry about the protection of civil rights versus the demands for surveillance and security, as well as trying to re-affirm the division between church and state in the face of different kinds of fundamentalism within Christianity and Muslim faith communities whose civil societies have not gone through the process of secularisation, the cinema seems to have a minor role to play in the public debate around these vital issues, not least given the small number of spectators reached by the films made in any of the European countries on whatever issue, and the unlikelihood of films from one European country finding distribution in another.

However, looked at from another angle, two things are noteworthy. First, as indicated, it is surprising how the cinema seems to have become the most prominent medium of self-representation and symbolic action that the hyphenated citizen of Europe's nation states have made their own. Films by Turkish-German directors, by French *beur* directors, by Asian directors in Britain have regularly won major prizes and come to prominence within Europe, though often not beyond. Secondly, the European Union does have a film and media policy, with directives, financing and funding structures, fiscally supporting co-productions,

for instance, providing all kinds of subsidy, encouraging mixed, i.e. private-public ventures. It also supports technological innovations in the audiovisual sector, such as the digital equipment in cinemas, it subsidized inter-European distribution, it is active in the European film festival circuit, etc. The Media Initiative, started in the mid-1990s, has as its brief to strengthen the economic aspects of the sector (too many low to medium-budget films, too fragmented a market, since European countries are notoriously bad at watching each other's films (with the exception of films originating from the UK). The Media programme also supports training, and indeed, "cultural diversity". But it is equally aware of the function of the cinema in fostering the idea of European unity, cohesion, and its democratic values.

Given this situation, I have been trying to conduct the following experiment: I have begun to look at films that over the past decade or so, have directly or indirectly benefited from these EU policies, and which have also been "successful" either critically or economically within the markets they intended to reach: those of the US (almost impossible to enter into for European cinema), Japan, Australia and of course, those of the other European countries, usually quite resistant to each other's cinema. In what sense, then, do these films make a contribution to this question of allegiance, how do they address sub-nation or supranation communities, their aspirations and anxieties, or to what extent can they be said to be working on the idea of Europe, its professed ideals of cultural identity or diversity, its vision of interpersonal or family values.

I started from the assumption that it is possible to understand the modern cinema as precisely a form of symbolic action, rather than as a medium of one-to-one reflection – a space for symbolic action that included but is not limited to the construction of socially significant "representations". I therefore did not look in the first instance to films that dealt with the representation of minorities or whose narratives directly relate to issues of migration, multi-culturalism or asylum or human trafficking, such as *Dirty Pretty Things*, *In this World*, *Lilia 4-Ever* or *Last Resort*, important as these films are for defining a new "European" cinema within the various "national cinemas". Instead, I began by examining some of the value structures – the ideology, to use an old-fashioned term – of the European Union, as they can be reconstructed from the various discourses, debates, position and policy papers emanating from the European union, as well as the visions and analyses promulgated by think-tanks, or other appointed or self-ap-

pointed representatives of the idea of Europe. In short, I wanted to take the European Union at its word.

“When inventorising these ‘big ideas’ of Europe, one realises just how many different scenarios for the geopolitical future of the Union exist. Focussing on just some of them, for instance, one can distinguish the hope for a European Union as a multi-cultural melting pot along the lines of the former Austro-Hungarian empire; the ideal of a Christian Europe; Europe as the super-nation of the United States of Europe; the Europe of the strong nation states, ceding as little of their sovereignty as possible; Real Europe, i.e. a association of largely economic interest groups under a common legal framework and binding rules of the game.”⁶

In the process, I also looked at some of the debates about redistribution and solidarity, i.e. the political as opposed to the moral justifications of the welfare state, when solidarity no longer extends even to all the citizens of nation state is political poison when shown to immigrants, asylum seekers or other non-nationals, when solidarity comes under strain with EU budget transfers being made to poorer regions, or now to the new accession countries. What is the relationship between nation-state solidarity (predicated upon a positive concept of national identity) and supra-national solidarity (human rights, international court of human justice, requiring an appeal to some other principle), where universal human rights supersede the sovereignty of the Nation State. Three visions or positions in particular have seemed to me to be worth pursuing with respect to the cinema, although it is no doubt too early to be certain that these are indeed the most productive ones. These concern immigration and the other (guest, hostage or stranger), mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion within national borders rather than across (the “abject subject”), and thirdly, the political mirror image of my “double occupancy”, which is “the mutual interference in the internal affairs of the other”.

AN “ENLIGHTENED” VIEW OF IMMIGRATION

The first position is perhaps the one most closely tied to the theme of the stranger and the immigrant, and here I want to focus on what one might call the Tony

⁶Hilder, 2003.

Blair-Gerhard Schroeder “enlightened” view on immigration, that is the social-liberal one, which maintains that altogether, immigration is a good thing, and that Europe, and in particular Britain or Germany, have to honour their obligations and responsibilities of asylum. Thus, they make distinction between different kinds of immigrants, legal and illegal, asylum seekers and economic migrants. Among the latter, more distinctions are made with respect to skilled and unskilled ones, and then further distinctions operate, regarding whether the immigrants come from countries that have family values which make all the members economically productive and upwardly mobile, such as the Chinese and the Indians, and those that keep their women indoors and illiterate, and raise their male children in the patriarchal code of macho-masculinity. This vision of distinctions and differentiations, of filters and safeguards appears as one of the ways the European Union is trying to steer towards a consensus, which it is hoped can lead to legislation or at least to a unified immigration policy.⁷

Such an apparently rational, enlightened and consensus-building strategy, I think, finds itself explored, tested – and finally found wanting – in a film by Lars von Trier which attracted a good deal of critical attention, even if it was not a box-office success, *Dogville*, shot in English, and with international Hollywood star Nicole Kidman in the leading role. Here a stranger, Grace, who is being persecuted and threatened with her life, is taken in by a young man in a remote and self-contained village community. Grace makes herself useful, indeed even indispensable, but after a while, her selflessness and goodness provoke the villagers into trying anything on her they think they can get away with. Knowing they can blackmail her, the villagers do what they think serves their own survival. As one perceptive reviewer noted: “The film is focused on an evocation of the independence, privacy, small-mindedness and suspicion of a town’s residents, and how they are first charmed and liberated by the thoughtful, and pretty, but needy young woman who makes herself useful through babysitting, gardening, tending a handicapped girl, and spending time with a reclusive blind man. The town’s citizens reveal themselves as capable of acceptance, joy, and respect for others, but when they learn more about Grace’s relationship to the outside world, they become much more demanding of her, to the point of brutality, degradation, and imprisonment.”⁸

⁷ See “Towards a Common European Union Immigration Policy”, 4 May 2005, http://europa.eu.int/comm/justice_home/fsj/immigration/fsj_immigration_intro_en.htm.

⁸ Garrett, 2004.

However, one can also argue that rather than being petty and small-minded, the villagers show a remarkable community spirit, closing ranks, for instance, or turning a blind eye, when it is a matter of realizing individual advantages (sex, money), which are tolerated, but only insofar as they do not endanger community cohesion. Thus, Ben brings Grace back into the village after taking her money and having sex with her; hence Tom is lying to Grace about how he got the money and to his father about who took the money. Both act pragmatically within the terms of a certain social contract, extending the villager's self-protective shield of disavowal, and thus keeping the public secret, as it were. However, this enlightened self-interest is in the end found wanting. The spectator tends to side with Grace – which is to say, with her father and his brutal gangster methods – when they assert that certain ways of behaving are just not good enough, irrespective of the “real-politik” and its pragmatism. Because of the American accents and a montage of Depression America photographs, Lars von Trier has been accused of anti-Americanism.⁹

Yet as von Trier himself pointed out, the film was made under the impact of the 2001 Danish elections, when a right-wing anti-immigrant party won 24% of the popular vote, obliging the mainstream centre parties to come to an agreement with the populist right. Thus, *Dogville* makes as much sense if read as an allegory or parable not so much of the stranger, but as a model of the ideal immigrant. Preternaturally good, resourceful, adaptable and skilled, she finds herself not only exploited while at the same time becoming the scapegoat and bogeyman, but the hosts – in this case the villagers – by always setting new conditions and making further distinctions around Grace's right to stay, effectively undermine their own ability to act with any moral authority. Von Trier seems to suggest that a community looking for the pragmatic consensus, in the end betrays itself, if it is not at the same time guided by fundamental or non-negotiable principles: “Culture may be what we make of our daily habits and basic social relationships, the ways in which we wake, wash, eat, work, play, and sleep; but civilization, which requires knowledge and organization, is more than the handling of necessities and simple doings—civilization is the result of choices that are willed into being.”¹⁰

⁹Scott, 2004.

¹⁰Garrett, 2004.

My point is not that *Dogville* is “about” Europe’s immigration practices or that it specifically critiques either the rural backwardness become *cliché* in a certain image of 1930s America (which is its historical reference point), or a kind of social Darwinism to which the liberal market economies of the West seem to subscribe. Rather, the film, in its abstractions and schematism, disengages a certain logic of self and other, the community and the stranger which becomes a tool to think with, especially given the *mise-en-scène* which dispenses with locations other than a stage set, whose spaces are mostly delineated with chalk marks, and whose boundaries are at once imaginary and real, invisible and brutally enforced. Here, too, space is doubly occupied, insofar as the spectator is forced to superimpose not so much a “realistic” decor on the bare planks, but a different cognitive mapping of what constitutes inside and out, exclusion and inclusion, and even to ponder how an act of inclusion and co-option can be a form of exclusion, if the other’s singularity is covered or occupied by fantasy projections.

EUROPE CANNOT BE DEFINED BY EITHER FAITH OR ETHNICITY

For my second position I draw on Manuel Castells, and his vision of Europe. Castells, best known for his books on the network society, has often argued that he thinks that the European Union will not be able to sustain itself as a viable political experiment if it relies on its Christian values, or its present understanding of liberal democracy around the notion of ethnicity and multiculturalism.¹¹ What he values in the European Union is the way it reaches decisions by the long-drawn out, seemingly chaotic, opaque and bureaucratic methods of the Commission, the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament, the various consultative bodies apparently blocking each other or reaching only compromises and fudges. Here he sees a novel, even if as yet non-formulatable set of decision making procedures with their checks and balances, which to him will eventually supersede the classic tripartite division of power of Western democracies.

But Castells’ main concern is to insist that even with these structures in place, the European Union will not be able to escape the impact of globalisation dividing up the world quite differently, namely between those who are networked, connected and “on-line” and those who are not. Translated into slightly different terms, Castells predicts a world where there are human beings that are useful to

¹¹ Castells, 1996.

the world-system as producers and/or consumers, and those who are too poor, too unskilled, too sick, or too destitute to be either producers or consumers, not even of health and welfare services, which is to say, who are unable or unwilling to participate in any of the circuits of redistribution and networks of exchange – of goods, services, affective labour or needs – then these human beings effectively drop out of the human race. In this sense, Castells maintains, not only drug dealers, criminals, traffickers of women or refugees, but also patients in hospitals or a car-thief in prison are more useful to our society than, say someone who grows his own vegetables, is self-sufficient and never leaves his plot of land. Castells even speculates that to be a slave-labourer or a colonial subject might be seen to be preferable to being not even thought valuable enough to being exploited.

What is relevant about this position with respect to the cinema is that it alludes to a state of subjectivity that has been thematized in many of the films coming out of European countries in the last two decades, though they are by no means entirely confined to Europe. One might call this state that of abjection, to use a term made familiar from Julia Kristeva,¹² or the state of “bare life” in the terminology of Giorgio Agamben.¹³ Such abject heroes (or heroines) can be found in the films of R. W. Fassbinder, Agnès Varda’s *Sans Toit ni loi*, Aki Kaurismäki, Matthieu Kassowitz’ *La Haine*, Dany Boyle’s *Trainspotting*, the films of Catherine Breillat, Mike Leigh’s *Naked*, Gaspar Noé’s *Seule contre tous*, the Dardenne Brothers’ *Rosetta*, and most recently Fatih Akin’s *Head-On (Gegen die Wand)*. In some of these films, the protagonists are indeed members of minorities, ethnic others, or hyphenated nationals (French-Moroccan, French-African, or German-Turkish), but these films do not seem to be primarily about race. Rather, they are about human beings that have, for one reason or another, lost the ability to enter into any kind of exchange, sometimes not even one where they can trade their bodies.

The other point to note about them is that they are not victims, at least they do not consider themselves as such, which removes them from yet another circuit of exchange and interaction – that with the victimizer or perpetrator, but also with the one who through charity and philanthropy implicitly or explicitly asserts his moral or material superiority. The protagonist’s stories generally take

¹² Kristeva, 1982.

¹³ Agamben, 1998.

them through this progressive stripping of all symbolic supports of their selfhood, they lose their jobs, their friends, their family, their mind, or their memory, as in the case of Kaurismäki's film, *The Man without a Past*.

These films, in my scheme of things, are the negative equivalent of double occupancy – they are subjects in circulation, but “out of service”, to allude once more Tomi Ungerer's toilet. Or, to vary the metaphor, the subjects of such narratives have been vacated, even by their oppressors, and the space they occupy has been declared a blank. Abject heroes or heroines in European cinema are not only symptomatic for what they tell us about a society and subjectivity that no longer has a social contract about what count as the minimum conditions of value and use, of labour and affective work in a given society or community. They may also tell us something about the conditions of possibility of a counter-image of what it means to be human, and thus they approach what I called the utopian dimension of my double-occupancy. In some films, for instance, Fatih Akin's *Head-On*, after a near-death accident, the male protagonist, having cancelled all obligations even to the proposition of staying alive, eventually agrees to enter into a kind of contract, with an almost equally post-mortem young woman, and the film draws its power, its universality, but also its politics, from the spectator following a human relationship that tries to live by a new socio-sexual contract, an experiment in utopian living, after everything else has failed, but which is itself, in the end, shown to be impossible.

MUTUAL INTERFERENCES

As indicated, according to Castells, the current trial and error process in constructing a European political project is the only feasible option and should be considered as a positive gain. This view is shared, sharpened and reformulated in *The Breaking of Nations* (2003),¹⁴ by Robert Cooper, a British writer and diplomat who provides me with my third vision of Europe, this time centred on new notions of sovereignty. Cooper argues that the world order – based on liberal democracy – will come to an end, since, as everyone readily acknowledges, we are currently in the middle of a major reconfiguration of geopolitics. He distinguishes four state forms: the hegemonic state or contemporary form of imperialism (USA), the post-modern state (EU), the modern (nationalist, authoritarian) sta-

¹⁴ Cooper, 2003.

te (Pakistan, Algeria, Iran) and the pre-modern (failed) state (Sudan, Congo). Cooper maintains that the European system of nation-states and their concept of sovereignty as non-interference in matters of state and religion by outside powers, as formulated in Treaty of Westphalia, will also have to give way. According to this view, this balance of power system has been superseded, because the European Union has institutionalised the mutual interference in domestic affairs between nation-states as its *modus operandi*. Cooper's model of the European Union as a conglomerate of nation-states that are connected with each other through the right and necessity of mutual interference, contrasts with the Franco-German notion of a European super state, but also with the US policy of unilateral interference.

What attracts me to Cooper's notion of the mutual interference in each other's internal affairs is not only that I have some broad political sympathy for the principle itself, since its constant shift of levels from micro to macro and back to micro, seems to me one of the most promising ways of renegotiating the social contract or solidarity based on mutual self-interest that has sustained the European welfare state since 1945. It also provides a legally secured alternative to the American model of pre-emptive strikes by which the current US administration justifies but does not legitimate its unilateral interference in the internal affairs of others. Finally, what I also like about Cooper's notion is that it reminds us of the fact that Europe is present in our everyday lives at precisely this interface of sometimes petty and quaint, but also often irritating and aggravating detail. In Britain you now buy your bananas by the metric kilo rather than the pound; what goes into your German or Slovenian sausages has been regulated by Brussels, just as the French can no longer use unprocessed milk for their celebrated cheeses. But what is a cheese or a sausage against the possibility that as an ordinary citizen you can now also take your own government before the European Court in Strassbourg and seek redress for something that the laws of your own nation state have not provided for or overlooked.

Cooper's model of mutual interference is also suggestive of a number of strategies that can be observed in European films. The much maligned French film *Le destin fabuleux d'Amélie Poulain* would offer itself as a prime case study for such an allegory. The heroine, Amélie, a somewhat autistic waitress in a Montmartre café, traumatized in childhood by bizarre parents, and seemingly unable to form normal friendships or heterosexual bonds, not least because she is endo-

wed with a rich inner fantasy life that always gets in the way of waking life, decides – with the death of Lady Di, and the discovery of a shoebox of old toys and memorabilia – to devote herself to the happiness of others. She does so by interfering in their inner and outer lives, mostly for their own good, as she perceives it, but with means that are unconventional, doubtful even, and that have no sanction in law, as it were. They mainly consist of small alternations to the perceptual field of the other, ways of manipulating the everyday surroundings and habits. She fakes, forges, re-writes or re-interprets the reality or intersubjectivity of her victim, entering into their fantasies, phobias and anxieties in such a way that only the tiniest hint or trace is sometimes enough to make their world-picture tip over into a new reality. Thus I am tempted to see *Amélie* as the master or mistress of the strategy of double occupancy of site, space and time – in its benign, but by no means unambiguous forms, as well as instantiating Robert Cooper's principle of mutual interference in the internal affairs of others, but again with a caveat, namely that *Amélie* – at least almost to the end, where there is a kind of enfolding reciprocity – acts for most of the time unilaterally, though with fantasy, rather than force. Here we have a balance of benefits and dangers, typical for the New Europe.

The other film to be considered under the aspect of mutual interference, could be Wolfgang Becker's *Goodbye Lenin*, a surprise success both in Germany and elsewhere in the world, and which like *Amélie*, has displeased many critics, looking for a realist depiction of post-wall Germany in general and Berlin in particular. The premise is that in East Berlin, a mother of two, and a stoutly devoted communist, falls into a coma just days before the fall of the wall in 1989. When she comes to, eight months later, her children are told that any shock, especially any changes in her surroundings, might be fatal. So the son decides to recreate for her not only her bedroom, which in the meantime – rather like in *Amsterdam Global Village*, has been completely refurbished – but the entire perceptual field of her former pre-fall-of-the-Wall life, mainly by the ruse of simulating with his friend the nightly news broadcast of GDR television. There, all the cognitive and perceptual clues of her surroundings, such as the big banner advertising Coca Cola are re-figured and re-interpreted within the framework and ideological terms of the GDR, whose citizens, especially those still devoted to the socialist dream, were evidently used to such improbable ideological manoeuvrings by their government regarding "reality".

Here, too, someone interferes in the life-perception and reality-check of another, for the best possible reasons, and he does so by sometimes minor, sometimes major adjustments to the perceptual field. On the one hand, the physical territory of the GDR has been occupied in the most arrogant and heartless manner by the West Germans, taking over houses, villas, offices and institutions, but on the other hand, as a moral and emotional territory, the same ex-GDR is also still occupied by the feelings, memories, faded dreams and dashed hopes of its socialist inhabitants. As the film progresses, this double occupancy becomes – in the nightly broadcasts – almost literally that duck-rabbit construction of Wittgenstein, so that the son, after a particularly bold and totally convincing re-coding of the West’s televisual news images of the fall of the wall, can admit to himself that he is beginning to believe in his own fiction, because it allows that other – utopian – reality to coexist with the new one, that of unification, the capitalist state, and consumerism, as if the ultimate addressee of his manipulation was not his mother, but he himself, and with it, his generation: double occupancy redeems a dream while not being in denial of reality. It is his own trauma/coma of waking up in the West that he was able to narrativise and therapeutise.

At the same time, the mother’s coma also stands for a near-death experience, comparable to the state of abjection or loss of mind and memory already alluded to in my other group of films. What in each case is important, is that with this engineering of mutually sustaining fantasies in *Goodbye Lenin* or *Amélie*, with this implicit presumption that it is small changes in the everyday which can shift the entire picture, these films at once enact Robert Cooper’s political principle of mutual interference in the internal affairs of others, and subtly re-adjust or question it: in the project Europe of the European Union, it may not be a matter of the big idea, the “vision” which is so woefully lacking, as can be seen in the non-debate around the European constitution, but rather, what matters is the small gesture, the tiny detail that at once irritates, surprises and makes us take stock. In each case, it makes us “work” on the idea of Europe, which is to say, it has the capacity to politicise us, and who knows, through the bananas we buy or the chicken we keep, turns us from consumers back into citizens, not at the supra- or sub-nation level of the nation-state, but at the trans-national level, as citizens of Europe and the globe.

If in *Goodbye Lenin*, Europe is thus not the big idea, but the adjustment or alteration in small everyday things that change the semantic occupation of a spa-

ce, a history and a memory, then the film also provides us, I am arguing, with a kind of allegorical refiguring of the history I have been trying to tell, namely the respective transfer of representation, address and articulation of nation in film and television in Europe over the last fifty years or so: national identity, first projected by state-controlled television, disarticulated by the consumer society, and then re-enacted, imperso-Nationed by the charade that the dutiful son performs for the mother-country, waking from a coma that is metaphoric at least as much as it is medical. Once again, it indicates the need for a kind of zero degree, a system re-boot if you like, in the political, social but also subjective-affective imaginaries of the European nation states. Perhaps what is needed is to vacate of the all too crowded and pre-occupied spaces of multi-cultural discourse and the diversity debate, as the pre-condition for rethinking both identity and diversity, both history and memory, both the micro-politics of a city and a community and the macro-politics of globalisation. As the holiday brochure says: “double occupancy means that the rate is the same whether one or two people stay in the room, providing that they use the existing bedding”. It may not always make for a good night’s sleep or it may indeed bring together some very strange bedfellows, but sharing the symbolic “bedding” may still be preferable to either being left out in the cold, or being locked up in a Disneyland Europe visited only by Chinese and Japanese tourists. So – however painful and even dangerous it will turn out to be, we need to find the will and the arguments to sustain the principle of mutual interference – democracy’s last hope before it becomes it lost hope - in order to keep the balance between a Europe, *toujours occupé* and Europe, the empty fortress.

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