

# **FACING ARCHIVES/FACING CINEMA:**

The Face-Image, Reappropriation and Experimental Cinema

Libertad Gills Arana



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## Abstract

Focusing on the cinematic treatment of archival images of the face in contemporary experimental cinema (from 2004 to the present), this dissertation analyzes the possibilities for cinema that are opened up by reappropriations of the face. We begin with the hypothesis that the *face-image*, as concept and object, is unlike other archival images. Defined as an image of a face that has been removed from its original source and edited into a new reappropriation, the face-image acquires *a new object status* in the process and in the new context provided by montage.

Each chapter centers on how a different typology of archival material (including propaganda, colonial, home movies, commercial cinema, as well as ethnographic, documentary and police photography archives) has been reappropriated into a film or group of films through diverse methods of re-inscription (including montage, the transformation between different formats, the use of sound, text and voice, and performance, etc.). We analyze the origin of the face-image from these materials and how the object is transformed in the new reincarnation(s). With this research we demonstrate that in contemporary experimental film practice the face-image is where tensions of identity, colonialism, race, gender, and constructions of otherness and criminality can play out in new ways on the contemporary screen.

## Resumen

Esta tesis doctoral aborda el tratamiento cinematográfico de imágenes de archivo del rostro en el cine experimental contemporáneo (del 2004 al presente) y analiza las posibilidades que la reapropiación del rostro abre para el cine. Parte de la hipótesis de que la *imagen-rostro* -como concepto y objeto- es distinta a otras imágenes de archivo. En tanto es la imagen de un rostro tomado de un archivo y editado en una nueva producción audiovisual, la imagen-rostro pasa más de una vez por el aparato fotográfico-cinematográfico y adquiere el estatus de *un nuevo objeto* en el proceso.

Cada capítulo se enfoca en cómo una tipología de archivo (incluyendo cine de propaganda, colonial, casero, y comercial, como también material fotográfico etnográfico, policial y documental) ha sido apropiada en una película o conjunto de películas a través de diferentes estrategias de re-inscripción (incluyendo montaje, la transformación de soportes materiales, distintos usos del sonido, texto y la voz, y la performance, etc.). Comenzamos estudiando el origen de la imagen-rostro y luego analizamos cómo el objeto ha sido transformado en su(s) nueva(s) reencarnación(es). Con esta investigación demostramos que en la práctica cinematográfica experimental la imagen-rostro se convierte en un terreno fértil para explorar cuestiones y tensiones en torno a la identidad, el colonialismo, la raza, el género y las construcciones de otredad y criminalidad de nuevas maneras en la pantalla contemporánea.

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## Introduction

When I made my documentary titled *Comuna Engabao* (2014) about a fishing commune on the coast of Ecuador, I was interested in creating an archive of images and testimonies that could be useful to the community in their historic land struggle and collective search to tell their story. The making of this film took me deep into the waters of the commune's history. When I came up for air –or when I was able to distinguish between their story and my own search as a researcher and filmmaker– I discovered that I was interested in filming the participants' faces as they watched the images I had shot a year earlier. I edited a split-screen video with the images of their faces recorded earlier on the left, and the images of their faces *looking* at the faces, on the left (Figure 0.1)<sup>1</sup>.



Figure 0.1. *Cine Foro: Comuna Engabao* (Libertad Gills, 2013)

Two things occurred: first, without realizing it, my own footage *became an archive*. Images and sounds I had recorded earlier became materials that could help me to think of and to propose critical ways of seeing, in collaboration with the participants and subjects that I had filmed. I say “in collaboration” because the second thing that occurred is that these faces –that were doing the *looking*– became *faces of contemplation* and critical thought. As they watched, the people spoke to/responded to the material, to me, and to themselves, commenting on what they were seeing and sharing the thoughts and emotions provoked by the images and sounds in the process of looking (and listening). Their “looking” faces became part of my research. As I watched these two faces side by side, I became fascinated by the expressions of faces looking at themselves, as in a mirror, but from another time. At the time, I was interested in how the distance –provoked by time, an awareness of the materiality of the images, and the act of self-spectatorship and the double consciousness that it requires—can contribute to a more critical perspective on one’s own history.

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<sup>1</sup> *Cine Foro: Comuna Engabao* (Libertad Gills, 2013) is a video installation which won the Premio Nacional de las Artes Mariano Aguilera 2013 and was exhibited at the Museum for Contemporary Art in Quito in the exhibit titled *Premios Mariano*. This work was made in the context of my Master’s research for my thesis titled “Comuneros, pescadores, defensores del territorio: El caso de la comuna de Engabao, Provincia del Guayas, Ecuador” in the Maestría de Antropología Visual y Documental Antropológico at the Facultad de Ciencias Sociales de Ecuador in 2013.



I was hopeful that cinema might be able to stimulate or create a public space for critical conversation and collective action<sup>2</sup>. The shot/counter-shot of faces and, more precisely, the discovery of the *face-image* as an object of critical contemplation (which I did not identify as such, at the time), gave me the critical distance I needed to proceed with my project, even if I did yet conceptualize the images in this way. I was searching for contemplation images that would inspire political action. It is out of this experience of looking and contemplating faces, as well as the recycling of faces from my own archive in order to create face-images, that the seeds for the present dissertation were first planted.

### **The Problem of Faces: From the Face to the Face-Image**

As I began my research, I very quickly became aware of *the problem with faces* generated, in part, by the mass proliferation of face-images in Western culture. To be specific, I was cautious of the ease with which faces-images are turned into *commodities*. I grew up with a home decorated by photographs and posters of faces of people who would inspire us, or remind us of what was possible in political action, poetry, music. The faces were icons for the ideas, the lives, and the work that we admired as a family and as individuals. In a demonstration, perhaps, of what Walter Benjamin understood as the “ultimate retrenchment” of the *aura* in photography: the human face<sup>3</sup>. Then, as I grew older, I saw these same faces of revolutionaries on T-shirts sold at stores that I knew relied on sweatshop labor; I saw these faces reproduced, multiplied, turned into commodity objects stripped of the meaning that we had collectively originally assigned to them. As they became ubiquitous, these faces lost their meaning, or their meaning was transformed into a purely commercial one. What happens when faces lose their meaning? How can we, as artists and documentary filmmakers, respond?

Deleuze and Guattari’s 1987 essay “Year Zero: Faciality”<sup>4</sup> calls for the dismantling of faces. As “faces are produced by certain assemblages of power”, they must be eliminated. But the authors also warn: “Know your faces”. Before we dismantle, we must know what is being dismantled. We must know where the power of the face lies and how it has been constructed. But is “dismantling” the only option and what does it involve? Could the spectator be taught how to dismantle faces in the viewing process? Can the “dismantling” be a pedagogic process? Or, if dismantling is not the only option, are there ways of working with faces that are equally as radical

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<sup>2</sup> I wrote about this possibility in the chapter: Gills, Libertad, “Comuna Engabao: El dominio público y el cine documental.” *Hacer con los ojos: Estados del cine documental*, ed. Christian León and Cristina Burneo Salazar (Quito: Universidad Andina Simon Bolívar, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> In his famous essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” from 1936, Benjamin writes: “In the cult of remembrance of dead or absent loved ones, the cult value of the image finds its last refuge. In the fleeting expression of a human face, the aura beckons from early photographs for the last time”, Benjamin, Walter. “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (Third Version).” *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott and Others, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 258.

<sup>4</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. “On Faciality”, in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. I* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 180.

and resistant to the assemblages of power that have produced them? Can face-images empower? Can they mobilize? What role, if any, can they play in critical thought? How to make faces *seen* again? These were some of my initial questions, posed not only as a researcher, but primarily as a filmmaker and someone working with images and participating in the filming of others.

In the configuration of the research question that would guide this dissertation, it was a deciding factor to choose the *face-image* and not the face as the subject of inquiry. The difference between the two might best be described borrowing from video essayist and scholar Catherine Grant's distinction of photos from *photo-images*: the latter, she writes in her essay titled "Still Moving Images: Photographs of the Disappeared in Films about the "Dirty War" in Argentina", are "facsimiles of varied quality that have their new object status heightened by the film's presentation of them"<sup>5</sup>. Face-images can be understood as images that have passed not once but twice or more through the photographic-cinematographic apparatus (including the camera or the editing table) and which have acquired *a new object status* in the process, and in the new context provided by montage. *Recycled faces. Found faces*. This shift was apparent when I decided to turn my focus from Peter Lorre's face in *M* (Fritz Lang, 1931) to his multiple face(s) in Harun Farocki's essay film *Peter Lorre – Das Doppelte Gesicht* (*The Double Face of Peter Lorre*, 1995) (Figure 0.2). New questions began to emerge from this shift, but most of all, my place as a researcher studying the face, changed. I acquired distance. By stepping away from the face on film, and towards the face-image, I gained the critical distance necessary to study my object. And the object itself acquired a history that could be known through a study of the image's migration across media, from one context to another.



Figure 0.2.  
Looking at the face  
*M* (Fritz Lang, 1931)



Looking at the face-image  
*Peter Lorre – Das Doppelte Gesicht*  
(Harun Farocki, 1995)

This new object of study allowed me to understand that "the problem of faces" could be turned on its head. This discovery allowed me to continue my research but now through a new

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<sup>5</sup> Grant, Catherine, "Still Moving Images: Photographs of the Disappeared in Films about the "Dirty War" in Argentina", in *Phototextualities: Intersections of Photography and Narrative*, ed. Alex Hughes & Andrea (University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 21.

perspective. As I began to research films invested in the study of the face-image, rather than the face, I discovered a cinematographic corpus rich in critical contemplation (Figure 0.3), a “thinking with images” made possible through the face and an *opening of the face-image* (for example, through the image’s enlargement, the addition of sound, or the touching of the image). I discovered images in which this “thinking” was mediated by *touching and listening*, involving senses beyond sight, as a form of care towards the archive for restorative purposes. And at the same time, I found films that sometimes quite violently directly attacked the face-image, be it through forms of intervention on the image itself (scratching, crossing out the eyes, or even burning it) or the flat-out refusal to even show the face-image. All of the films that spoke to me in their treatment of the face-image were, in their majority, classified as “experimental” works. They were essay films, documentaries, or avant-garde films. Some were video essays, or exercises in videographic criticism. Many were shot on Super 8mm or 16mm; some were digital and postdigital works, others hybrids of both analogue and digital materials. No matter their genre, modalities, or forms, however, I realized that in all the face-image was a site of tension between the spectator/director and the image: a battleground for questions regarding the relationship between seeing and power.



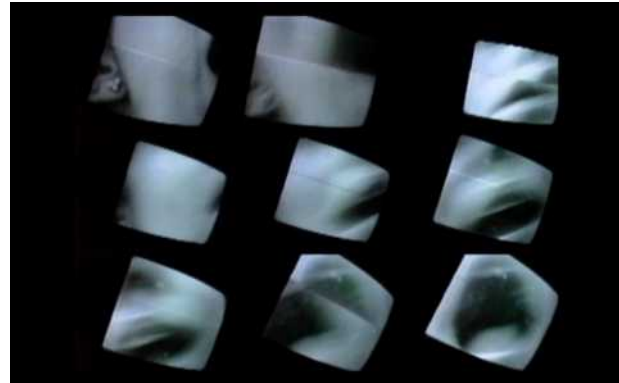
*Reflections on Black* (Stan Brakhage, 1955)



*(nostalgia)* (Hollis Frampton, 1971)



*Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* (Harun Farocki, 1988)



*It Is A Crime* (Meena Nanji, 1996)



*Touching the Film Object?* (Catherine Grant, 2011)



*Faces without Visage* (Hesam Rahmani, 2019)

Figure 0.3.

It is at this point that I begin to intuit that the face-image has a kind of power -to be explored, listened to, questioned or refused in cinema and that how filmmakers and films respond to this power in their reappropriations of the face-image might be able to tell me something about film, but also perhaps about our relationship to images. It is here that the index for this dissertation took its first form which divided the two “types” of approximations to the face-image: the opening up and the destruction. After much thought, however, I decided to combine these gestures, as I realized that they often went together, and it was, at times, in acts of so-called “destruction” that the face-image was sometimes finally cracked open.

This brief summary of the transformation of this dissertation, from a question of looking to a question of looking *again and in another time*, is to give the reader a sense of how my research question has evolved, from one born of the film practice itself, as a filmmaker and creator of images, to one formed in the position of spectator, film critic, and thinker about/with/near images. It is this spectrum of perspectives around film, from filmmaker to critic to teacher to researcher,

that I position myself in relation to my subject. And it is from these multiple layers of inquiry, grounded both in practice and theory, that my dissertation begins to take shape.

Focusing on the cinematic treatment of archival images of the face in experimental cinema, analogue and digital, this dissertation analyzes the possibilities for cinema that are opened up by reappropriations of the face. Our film corpus consists of films made between 2004 and 2018, and the types of reappropriation that we are interested in are sometimes called *found footage*, but also expand beyond what is typically considered *found*, as these films include reappropriations of film materials and photographs.

## The Face in Tides

Why a dissertation on the face? Primarily because we consider it to be one of the, if not *the most* important of all cinematographic images. As cinema's "most beloved object"<sup>6</sup>, the face has been one of the first and most important of all of cinema's subjects and the study of the face on film has served –and continues to serve– to deepen explorations of the very nature of the image and of cinema in general<sup>7</sup>. Defined as a type of shot that favors the face, the close-up is, according to scholar Mary-Ann Doane, the most heavily discussed film shot of all<sup>8</sup>. In film theory, the close-up has been written about in relation to the face<sup>9</sup>; as fragmentation of the detail of the rest of the image<sup>10</sup>; as symptom of the mercantilization of women's faces<sup>11</sup>; as objectification of the face<sup>12</sup>;

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<sup>6</sup> Aumont, Jacques, *El rostro en el cine* (Barcelona: Paidós, 1998), 16.

<sup>7</sup> Balázs, Béla, "The Creative Camera"; "The Close-Up"; "The Face of Man". in *Critical Visions in Film Theory: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Timothy Corrigan, Patricia White, Meta Mazaj (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011); Benjamin, Walter, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (Third Version)", in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Others, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003); Barthes, Roland, "Visages et figures", *Esprit* 204 (1953): 1-11; Lévinas, Emmanuel, "The Face of the Other", "Sensibility and the Face", and "Ethics and the Face", in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969); Simmel, George, "The Aesthetic Significance Of The Face", in *Essays, Philosophy and Aesthetics*, ed. by Kurt H. Wolff. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959); Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Aumont, Jacques, *Du visage au cinéma* (Paris: l'Etoile, 1992); Steimatsky, Noa, *The Face on Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Doane, Mary-Ann, "The Close-Up: Cinematic Scale and the Negotiation of Space", Lecture at the American Academy in Berlin, October 2013. Doane opens her recently published book with this idea, *Bigger Than Life: Close-Up and Scale in the Cinema* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> Balázs, 2011; Aumont, Jacques, "The Face in Close-Up", in *The Visual Turn: Classical Film Theory and Art History* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Eisenstein, Sergei, "History of the Close-up", *Beyond the Stars: The Memoirs of Sergei Eisenstein, Selected Works, vol. IV*, ed. Richard Taylor, trans. William Powell (London: British Film Institute and Calcutta: Seagull, 1995); Doane, Mary Ann, "The Close-Up: Scale and Detail in the Cinema", *differences* 14(3) (2003): 89-111.

<sup>11</sup> Doane, Mary Ann, "Veiling Over Desire: Close-ups of the Woman" in *Femme Fatales: Feminism, Film theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Mulvey, Laura, "Close-ups and Commodities", in *Fetishism & Curiosity* (London: BFI, 1996).

<sup>12</sup> McElhaney, Joe, "The Object and the Face: *Notorious*, Bergman, and the Close-Up," in *Hitchcock: Past and Future*, ed. Richard Allen and Sam Ishii-Gonzales (London: Routledge, 2004), 64–84.

and in relation to scale<sup>13</sup>. It has been written about in early cinema<sup>14</sup>, in modernity<sup>15</sup>, in contemporary media<sup>16</sup>, in the post-war period following WWII<sup>17</sup>, and in relation to speech<sup>18</sup>. Certain faces have been written about more than others. Prominent faces tend to belong to actors from the silent era who had important careers in Hollywood (but not only), including Greta Garbo<sup>19</sup>, Marlene Dietrich<sup>20</sup>, Peter Lorre<sup>21</sup>, as well as Henry Fonda<sup>22</sup>, and the face of Soviet actor Ivan Mozzhukin<sup>23</sup>, to name a few examples. Not to mention historical figures whose faces (in relation to media and film representation) have been analyzed and discussed by academics<sup>24</sup>. The face in film has been discussed from an *auteur* perspective, as in the films of Michelangelo Antonioni<sup>25</sup>, Robert Bresson<sup>26</sup>, or comparatively in the films of Pier Paolo Pasolini and Bruno Dumont<sup>27</sup>, as well as its appearance and treatment in key films, including (in chronological order): *Ballet Mecanique* (Fernand Léger, 1924)<sup>28</sup>, *La Passion de Joan d'Arc* (Carl Dreyer, 1928)<sup>29</sup> – which we will come back to–, *The Wrong Man* (1956)<sup>30</sup>, *Eyes Without a Face* (Georges Franju,

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<sup>13</sup> Doane, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Gunning, Tom, “In Your Face: Physiognomy, Photography, and the Gnostic Mission of Early Film”, *Modernism/Modernity* 4.1 (1997): 1-29.

<sup>15</sup> Coates, Paul, *Screening the Face* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Davis, Therese, *The Face on the Screen: Death, Recognition and Spectatorship* (Bristol: Intellect, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Steimatsky, 2017; Geroulanos, Stefanos, “Postwar Facial Reconstruction: Georges Franju’s *Eyes Without a Face*”, *French Politics, Culture & Society* 31(2) (2013): 15-33.

<sup>18</sup> Chion, Michel, “Faces and Speech” in *Film, A Sound Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Barthes, Roland, “The Face of Garbo”, in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Paladin, 1973).

<sup>20</sup> Koepnick, Lutz, “Dietrich’s Face” in *Dietrich Icon*, ed. Gerd Gemünden and Mary R. Desjardins (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Thomas, Sarah, *Peter Lorre: Face Maker* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Farber, Manny, “Rain in the Face, Dry Gulch, and Squalling Mouth (1971)” in *Negative Space: Manny Farber on the Movies*, expanded edition (New York: De Capo Press, 1998).

<sup>23</sup> Abel, Richard, “The ‘Magnetic Eyes’ of Ivan Mozzhukhin”, *Cinefocus*, 2 (Fall 1991): 27-34.

<sup>24</sup> Including, Che Guevara, see: Mestman, Mariano, “The Last Sacred Image of the Latin American Revolution”, *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 19(1) (2010): 23-44; Princess Diana, see: Davis, Therese, “The Face of a Saint”, in *Planet Diana: Cultural Studies and Global Mourning*, ed. Re-Public (Sydney: Centre for Intercommunal Studies, 1997), 93-95; Adolf Hitler, see: Schmolders, Claudia, *Hitler’s Face: The Biography of an Image* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); and Mao Tse-Tung, see: Belting, Hans, *Face and Mask: A Double History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017).

<sup>25</sup> Forgacs, David, “Face, Body, Voice, Movement: Antonioni and Actors,” in *Antonioni: Centenary Essays*, ed. John David Rhodes and Laura Rascaroli (London: BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Steimatsky, Noa, “Pass/Fail: The Antonioni Screen Test”, *Framework Journal of Cinema and Media* 55, no.2 (2014).

<sup>26</sup> Steimatsky, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Muñoz Fernández, Horacio, “Del rostro humano de Pasolini, al rostro demasiado humano de Dumont”, in *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Una desesperada vitalidad* (Madrid: Shangrila, 2015), 360-372.

<sup>28</sup> Townsend, Christopher, “The Purist Focus: Leger’s Theory of the Close-Up”, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* Vol.16 (2011): 161-180.

<sup>29</sup> Steimatsky, 2017, and others.

<sup>30</sup> Steimatsky, Noa, “What the Clerk Saw: Face to Face with *The Wrong Man*”, *Framework Journal of Cinema and Media* 48, no. 2 (2007).

1959)<sup>31</sup>, *Persona* (Ingmar Bergman, 1965)<sup>32</sup>, *Screen Tests* (Andy Warhol, 1964-1966)<sup>33</sup>, and *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, 1985)<sup>34</sup>.

Although cinema's obsession with the face has perhaps not been convincingly traced *all the way* to film's origin<sup>35</sup> (after all, the *close-up*, it is said, does not exist until 1911 or 1912<sup>36</sup>), it has been the object of many artistic and philosophical explorations of historical importance since the 1920s. And even before then, as scholar Thomas Elsaesser points out, early cinema exhibited a certain "latent anxiety concerning the integrity of the human body and ...a fear of its fragmentation through the techniques of editing"<sup>37</sup>, evident in many Méliès films including *Dislocations Mystérieuses (Dislocation Extraordinary)*, 1901), in which a clown's body is entirely dislocated and then put back together, as in a magic trick (Figure 0.4). These are, write Elsaesser and Hagener, "attempts to come to terms with the progressive disintegration of the body's wholeness, brought into the culture by the invention of cinema (as well as modern regimes of mechanized labor and assembly-line production methods)"<sup>38</sup>. According to Doane, early cinema also exhibited the opposite: not only coming to terms with the disintegration of the body but also with the body's expansion on the screen<sup>39</sup>. For example, *L'homme à la tête de caoutchouc (The Man with the Rubber Head)* (Méliès, 1901) explores, with the assistance of innovative visual tricks, the literal enlargement of a human head (Figure 0.4). The head grows larger, then smaller again, then larger and larger until it finally blows up! Citing this film and *The Big Swallow* (James Williamson, 1901), in which a gentleman becomes angry at the cinematographer filming him—as the camera gets closer, and the shot becomes an extreme close-up, the gentleman "eats" the camera and the cameraman, and the spectator "enters" into the black void which is his mouth—Doane makes the argument that in early cinema the close-up opens up the possibility of breaching the spatial limits of the screen (Figure 0.5). Therefore, although early cinema did not yet "deal" with the face *per se*, many early films were already thinking through the body's fragmentation (and, in

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<sup>31</sup> Geroulanos, 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Coates, 2012, and Belting, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Raviv, Orna, "Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests*: a face-to-face encounter", *Angelaki* 21(2) (2016): 51-63 and Steimatsky, 2017.

<sup>34</sup> Saxton, Libby, "Fragile Faces: Levinas and Lanzmann", *Film-Philosophy*, 11(2) (2007): 1-14.

<sup>35</sup> Aumont argues that, unlike photography, cinema did not deal with the portrait right away; he attributes this in part to the fact that the face presents pictorial and photographic problems for cinema later on. Aumont, 37-38: "¿Y el cine, el cine reconocido como arte? ¿Qué ha hecho del rostro? A decir verdad, ha tenido que hacer mucho para saber cómo tratar el rostro, porque en principio se preocupó de otras cosas. Tal vez por no haberse dedicado conscientemente a ello desde sus comienzos, el cine, al prodigar los atajos, los callejones sin salida, los rodeos en su tratamiento del rostro, se ha debido encontrar de nuevo, sin estar preparado para ello, con los problemas pictóricos (y fotográficos) del rostro, incluido el del retrato". For Thomas Elsaesser, "To take the link between cinema, face and close-up first: it can be traced back to the earliest days of moving pictures, became prominent in thinking about D. W. Griffith, but was popularized especially with the face of (Maria) Falconetti in Carl Theodor Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*", in: Elsaesser, Thomas and Malte Hagener. *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 57.

<sup>36</sup> Shrader, Paul, "Game Changers: The Close-Up", *Film Comment*, September-October 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Elsaesser and Hagener, 2010: 70.

<sup>38</sup> Elsaesser and Hagener, *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Doane, 2021: 2-3.

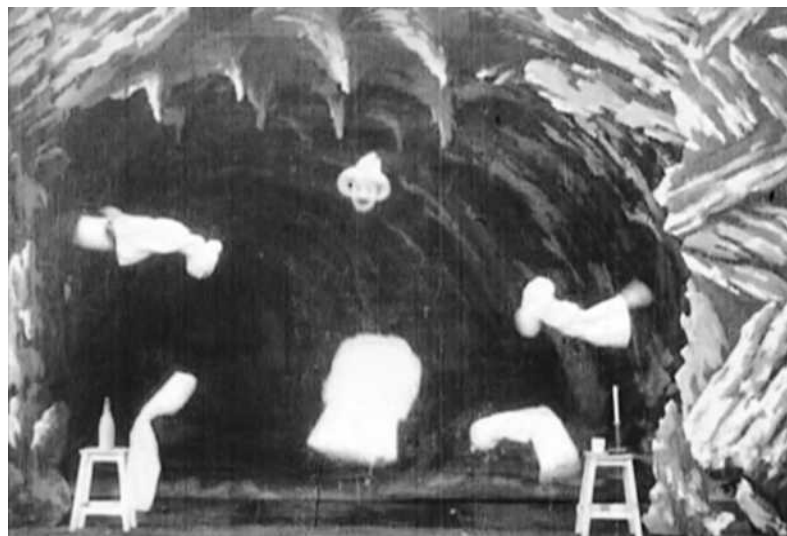
some cases, monstrosity) as well as its expansion –*as it relates to the screen space*– as well as the transportability of the body’s fragments in modernity<sup>40</sup>.



*Un homme de têtes* (Georges Méliès, 1898)



*L'homme à la tête de caoutchouc* (Georges Méliès, 1901)



*Dislocations Mystérieuses (Dislocation Extraordinaire)*, Georges Méliès, 1901)

Figure 0.4.

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<sup>40</sup> We would like to pause for a moment on this subject of transportability, as the fragmentation of the body will be met by the fragmentation of the image itself and the image’s *transportability* from one film or source to another (the definition of reappropriation). There is, in fact, a movement there between the fragmentation of the body in film that early films were fascinated with and the subsequent fragmentation of the film material itself (into smaller parts that can be later reworked into new productions).



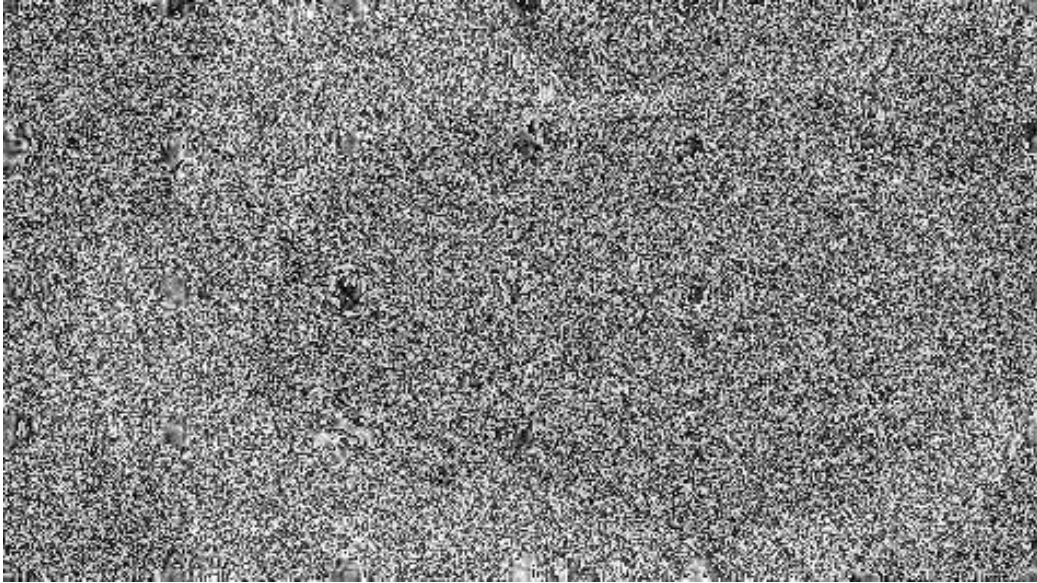


Figure 0.5. *The Big Swallow* (James Williamson, 1901)

Classical cinema of the 1910s responds with what Elsaesser calls “a process of ‘re-centering’ and ‘re-calibration’ around the human figure as the norm of spatial relations of scale and proportion”<sup>41</sup>. At this point *the close-up* is established in D.W. Griffith’s cinema not as a monstrous head that has been separated from the body, but rather as a (proportionate) representation of the whole person –emotions included– filmed for specific narrative purposes. Although the first close-up in film history is most often attributed to *The Lonedale Operator* (D.W. Griffith, 1911) (used to show that the character is holding a wrench, not a gun), others have argued that the first “real” close-up came a year later in the film *Friends* (D.W. Griffith, 1912), when the close-up is on the face –of actress Mary Pickford– as she is emotionally torn between two men (Figure 0.6). As Paul Shrader writes, “(The) difference between a wrench and a human face is that a face has about 43 muscles. There’s a great deal of complexity in a close-up of the human face. [...] When filmmakers realized that they could use a close-up to achieve this kind of emotional effect, cameras started coming in closer. And characters became more complex”<sup>42</sup>. In early Hollywood, the close-up was used to show details that would be missed by audiences in a wider shot –for example, wrenches in hands. But it is when the close-up is linked to the face of the actors, that the image becomes a device that not only gives information (i.e., she is holding a wrench, not a gun), but also can tell the viewer something more intimate about what the character is thinking or feeling. At this point, the face and the close-up become intimately tied on the screen.

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<sup>41</sup> Elsaesser goes on to argue that German Expressionist cinema in the 1920s is an attempt to break the hegemony of classical Hollywood storytelling and resorts to “skewed perspectives and odd angles” as well as working with the motif of the double, the mirror and the lost shadow. (70-71).

<sup>42</sup> Shrader, Paul, “Game Changers: The Close-Up”, *Film Comment*, September-October 2014.



*The Lonedale Operator* (D.W. Griffith, 1911)



*Friends* (D.W. Griffith, 1912)

Figure 0.6

Soviet filmmaker and theorist Lev Kuleshov made several pedagogical film experiments between 1918-1920. The most famous of these, known in Western literature as *The Kuleshov Effect*<sup>43</sup> deals directly with the cinematic potential of the face on screen (Figure 0.7). It must be noted that this pedagogical film (never screened in theaters, only for Kuleshov's students) is an early example of reappropriation of a face-image (perhaps one of the first in film history). In it, Kuleshov recycles an image of the star Ivan Mozzhukhin<sup>44</sup> from pre-existing films<sup>45</sup>. It is also interesting to add that the circulation and importance of this experiment, well above others made by Kuleshov, his partner and lifelong collaborator Aleksandra Khokhlova, student and filmmaker

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<sup>43</sup> The Kuleshov Effect is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gG13LJ7vHc>. Another version, with moving images, is here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5JTX2DD4qTQ>. However, after much research on the subject, I believe that neither of these reproductions are the "original" experiment they claim to be. In an extensive interview with Kuleshov printed in *Film Culture*, he says that all of the experiments from this time were lost. The first video that is often projected in classrooms seems to be a recreation of the original, but the close-up used does not seem to be of Mozzhukhin. The second video which claims to be the "original" experiment does use images of Mozzhukhin from another film but this is also unlikely the original pedagogical film. It is interesting to observe how this experiment has attracted many reappropriations, including one rumored to have been made by Alfred Hitchcock.

<sup>44</sup> Usually billed Ivan Mosjoukin, using the French transliteration.

<sup>45</sup> Wikipedia asserts that: "Mosjoukine's most lasting contribution to the theoretical concept of film as image is the legacy of his own face in recurring representation of illusory reactions seen in Lev Kuleshov's psychological montage experiment which demonstrated the Kuleshov Effect. In 1918, the first full year of the Russian Revolution, Kuleshov assembled his revolutionary illustration of the application of the principles of film editing out of footage from one of Mosjoukine's Tsarist-era films which had been left behind when he, along with his entire film production company, departed for the relative safety of Crimea in 1917". Meanwhile, Scholar Ekaterina Khokhlova points out that the Mozhukhin experiment is the only experiment by Kuleshov for which no documentary evidence exists. Film historian Kristin Thompson speculates that the experiment would have consisted of "footage cut from old positive prints and re-edited", and therefore "could be made without special provisions from governmental agencies". This might explain why no documentary evidence exists for this experiment in particular. Yuri Tsivan points out that Kuleshov "was involved in re-editing foreign and pre-Revolutionary films and presumably had easy access to whatever ended up on the cutting-room floor". In: Tsivian, Yuri, Ekaterina Khokhlova, Kristin Thompson, Lev Kuleshov and Aleksandra Khokhlova, "The rediscovery of a Kuleshov experiment: A Dossier", *Film History*, Volume 8 (1996): 357.

Vsevolod Pudovkin, has been attributed in part to the fact it included a well-known face<sup>46</sup>. Kuleshov describes the experiment:

This experiment consisted in the following: from old films I took shots of the actor Mozhukhin and edited them with various other shots. At first, I had Mozhukhin seeming to sit in jail and then he was gladdened by the sun, the landscape, and the freedom which he found. In another combination I had Mozhukhin sitting in the same position, in the same attitude, and looking at a half-naked woman. In another combination he looked at a child's coffin –oh, I don't remember – there were many different combinations. And in all those cases, so far as the expression on Mozhukhin's face is concerned –uh– it was the very same significance which I gave it in my editing<sup>47</sup>.

Kuleshov observes that by alternating shots of the actor with other shots (a plate of soup, a young woman, a child's coffin), the shots of the actor's face “acquired a different meaning” through the *power of montage*, despite the fact that they were always exactly the same image. That is, the meaning of the actor's face changed depending on what images preceded it. His pupil, the director V.I. Pudovkin, was especially interested in how audiences responded to the images in their different orders. In particular, he remarks on how people read emotions into the neutral expression on Mozhukhin's face<sup>48</sup>. The face becomes a kind of blank canvas on which emotions can be ascribed depending on what shots precede and follow the face-image. As such, it becomes an extremely *useful* shot for Hollywood narrative cinema, as it allows characters to become more (and in some ways less) complex, and spectators to become “readers” of emotions in the character's faces and of possible associations between shots.

But more importantly, the face for Kuleshov is an image that allows him to discover the “forces” intrinsic to the image itself and created in the montage. As Jay Leyda, one of the key historians responsible for bringing Kuleshov's films and writing to the United States and to English-speakers<sup>49</sup> describes, Kuleshov's basic technical contribution and artistic legacy towards the later work of Pudovkin and Eisenstein was the discovery that an isolated film strip has two inherent “forces” or potentials: that which it has on its own (as an image) and that which is created in its relation to other parts of the film (in montage)<sup>50</sup>. Pudovkin followed the Kuleshov school's teachings which saw montage as a link between film shots, or as a chain of bricks laid in a sequence

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<sup>46</sup> Thompson also speculates that this experiment was not in fact the most important to Kuleshov but it became the most well-known, most likely because it was the only experiment of his to involve a big star. Ibid: 357.

<sup>47</sup> Hill, Steven P, “Kuleshov - Prophet Without Honor?”, *Film Culture* 44 Special Issue on Kuleshov, ed. Jonas Mekas, 1967: 8.

<sup>48</sup> “The audience raved about the actor's refined acting. They pointed out his weighted pensiveness over the forgotten soup. They were touched by the profound sorrow in his eyes as he looked upon the dead woman, and admired the light, happy smile with which he feasted his eyes upon the girl at play. But we knew that in all three cases the face was exactly the same”, In: V. I. Pudovkin, “The *Naturschchik* instead of the Actor,” *Selected Essays*, ed. and trans. Richard Taylor (Oxford: Seagull, 2006), 160. Cited in David Bordwell's blog entry “What happens between shots happens between your ears” from 2008.

<sup>49</sup> Leyda was the first to translate fragments of Kuleshov's writing to English for his book *Kino*, published in 1960, and brought Kuleshov's film *By The Law* to the Museum of Modern Art in 1937. See: Hill, 1967: 2-3.

<sup>50</sup> Leyda, Jay, *Kino: Historia del cine ruso y soviético* (Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires: Buenos Aires, 1965): 211.

to present an idea, while for Eisenstein, more than a chain, montage was a *collision*, from which an idea would *surge*<sup>51</sup>. In both cases, we are dealing with the key formative principles of found footage filmmaking and the practice of reappropriation, whose objectives have been described by scholar Adrian Danks as “to change and unsettle the meaning of individual shots and images through the simple ‘act’ of montage and associative juxtaposition”<sup>52</sup>. To this end, the work of Soviet directors including Kuleshov, Pudovkin and Eisenstein, but also Esfir Shub (particularly her film *Padeniye dinastij Romanovjkh, The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, from 1927, that utilizes footage shot by the West and under the Czarist regime in a way that reverts the material’s intended ideological use) have been absolutely essential.

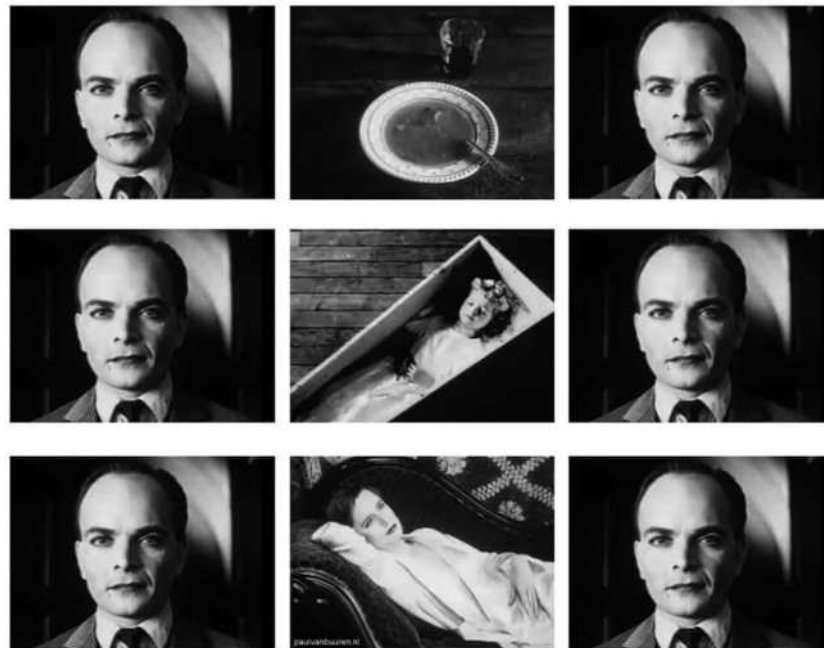


Figure 0.7. *The Kuleshov Effect*

Returning to the face and the close-up, Kuleshov writes, “We could see that in individual scenes the Americans used so-called ‘close-ups’ –that is, that at necessary, expressive moments, they showed things in large format, more distinctly, that in a given moment, they showed only what it was necessary to show. The close-up, the compositional expression of only the most important and necessary, proved to have a decided influence on our future work in montage”<sup>53</sup>. For him, the face was at the heart of editing<sup>54</sup>. In our dissertation on the face-image, we will focus our film analysis

<sup>51</sup> Discussed in Leyda, 288.

<sup>52</sup> Danks, Adrian, “The Global Art of Found Footage Filmmaking”, in *Traditions in World Cinema*, ed. Linda Badley, R. Barton Palmer and Steven Jay Schneider (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2006): 247.

<sup>53</sup> Kuleshov, Lev, “The Principles of Montage”, in *Critical Visions in Film Theory*, ed. Timothy Corrigan, Patricia White, and Meta Mazaj (Bedford/St.Martin’s: Boston, 2011): 142.

<sup>54</sup> Kuleshov became more critical of these ideas later on. In the 2011 edition of *Critical Visions in Film Theory* in which a revised and retrospective version of “The Principles of Montage” is included, he writes “We understood montage futuristically, but when it came to the negative aspects of its relationship to the bourgeois essence of

primarily on montage as contemporary reappropriations of the face-image in experimental film are primarily montage-based endeavors.

For scholar Noa Stiematsky, in her Preface to *The Face on Film* published in 2017, “Even if not named as such, the face is operative in a great deal of film criticism and theory, and it reasserts itself with the tides of cinematic practice”<sup>55</sup>. From the very measure of the shot and of scale in cinematography which is constructed around the human face (i.e., the face as a whole = close-up, the face + upper chest = medium close-up, etc.), to the construction of shot-reverse-shot, the human face is “front and center”<sup>56</sup>.

For Elsaesser and Hagener, the face “steps in at moments of crisis in cinema”<sup>57</sup>. The face in cinema has consistently served as fertile ground for rethinking the role of the spectator, because of cinema’s ability to reflexively turn the spectator’s regard upon themselves and decipher the look of the other by way of the face in film *as mirror*<sup>58</sup>. Although these authors argue that the face as mirror has “destabilized” the role of the spectator, it could also be said that cinema’s habitual turn to the face in moments of crisis may also work to redefine and perhaps *reaffirm* the place of the spectator in moments of crisis (as was the case, for example, in the previously mentioned response of Classical Hollywood in the 1910s re-centering the human figure on the screen), as well as define who gets to look and who gets to be looked at.

Elsaesser and Hagener call attention to two periods for the face in film theory: the 1920s and the mid-1960s to mid-1980s. In the 1920s the close-up held a special fascination for film theory, the best examples may be found in the writings of the French filmmaker and theorist Jean Epstein and the Hungarian film theorist Béla Balázs. Epstein’s concept of *photogénie*, described by the author as “any aspect of things, beings or souls whose moral character is enhanced by filmic reproduction”<sup>59</sup>, places the human face at the center<sup>60</sup>. Epstein’s enthusiasm for the face on the screen is palpable throughout *Bonjour Cinéma!* published in 1921, in phrases such as: “le visage éclate comme un orchestre”<sup>61</sup>, and many more. For Epstein, the face on screen is explosive, intimate, touchable, sensual, and powerful. In this same decade, the first theory of the close-up was articulated by Balázs in 1924, who, drawing on the long-standing European tradition that viewed the face as the sensual manifestation of the human soul<sup>62</sup>, posited that the cinematic close-up introduces *a new faciality* as it enables the spectator not only to see aspects of the world in previously unknown light, but also “to look at him/herself as if in a mirror, since the close-up

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American films, we were gulled” (141). So taken by “the boldness and energy” of American montage, Kuleshov and his contemporaries believed that it would also be “indispensable to revolutionary struggle”. Later he comes to the conclusion that it is not possible to make revolutionary cinema while uncritically accepting U.S. film culture and U.S. montage principles into one’s own filmmaking.

<sup>55</sup> Steimatsky, 2017: 1.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Elsaesser, Thomas and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses*, 2010.

<sup>58</sup> Elsaesser and Hagener, 73.

<sup>59</sup> Epstein, Jean, “Bonjour Cinema and Other Writings”, trans. Tom Milne, *Afterimage*, no.10 (1981): 20, 21.

<sup>60</sup> Mulvey, Laura, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006): 164.

<sup>61</sup> Epstein, Jean. *Bonjour Cinema!* (Paris: Editions de la Sirene, 1921): 47. “...the face explodes like an orchestra”.

<sup>62</sup> For more on the field of physiognomy, read: Polónyi, Eszter, “Béla Balázs and the Eye of the Microscope”, *Apertúra* (2012).

typically shows a face, or gives the world the ability to look back at us”<sup>63</sup>. Balázs’ theories, based on the ideological hold of physiognomy and an embrace of eugenics<sup>64</sup>, deployed “the nostalgic narrative of a loss of an ordinary language”<sup>65</sup>, which would be resolved or regained by the cinema and the new faciality. His ideas have returned throughout film theory, in Deleuze and others, and continues to influence the way that the face is thought about in film. As an image of interiority of the character whose face we see, but also as a reflection and point of identification for the viewer looking at it. The emblematic film of this period is Carl Theodor Dreyer’s *La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc* (1928) with the face of the French actress Renee Jeanne Falconetti. It is said that this film “redefined the close-up”<sup>66</sup>. To this day, this film continues to be the most studied and celebrated in relation to the close-up and the face on film (Figure 0.8).



Figure 0.8. *La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1928)

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<sup>63</sup> Elsaesser and Hagener, 59.

<sup>64</sup> “We may say that the language of gestures has become standardized in film. It...contains the first living seeds of the standard white man who will one day emerge as the synthesis of the mix of different races and peoples. The cinematograph is a machine that in its own way will create a living, concrete internationalism: the unique, shared psyche of the white man. We can go further. By suggesting a uniform ideal of beauty as the universal goal of selective breeding, the film will help to produce a uniform type of the white race”, Balázs, Béla, *Early Film Theory: Visible Man and the Spirit of Film* (New York: Berghahn, 2011): 14.

<sup>65</sup> Doane, Mary Ann. “Facing a Universal Language”, *New German Critique*, No. 122 (Summer 2014): 118.

<sup>66</sup> Shrader, 2014.

The second time period of importance for the face, according to Elsaesser and Hagener, is the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s when “the idea of cinema as a mirror became a central paradigm of film theory”<sup>67</sup>, set-off in part by the crisis of cinema caused by the introduction of television, and exemplified in Jean-Louis Baudry’s notion of the “cinematic apparatus” (inspired in Sigmund Freud) and Christian Metz’s “imaginary signifier” (borrowed from Jacques Lacan)<sup>68</sup>. Elsaesser writes, “...As the cinema begins to lose its audiences to television, and becomes unsure of what sort of audience it can count on, its makers turn their regard upon themselves, or –through the return of the look and the mirroring of the face– try to decipher the look of the other”<sup>69</sup>. A key film here is *Persona* (Ingmar Bergman, 1965), which most famously deploys the mirror motif (Figure 0.9).



Figure 0.9. *Persona* (Ingmar Bergman, 1965)

Film theory shifts to the metaphor of the film as mirror, to replace the previous metaphors of cinema as window and frame. Like *Persona*, *Le Mépris* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963), *Blow Up* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966), and *8 ½* (Federico Fellini, 1963), films from this period attempt to come to terms with the creative process itself and, notably, the face becomes a terrain for the exploration and opening up of this more reflexive cinema. This “reflexive turn” for cinema, in which the face plays a central role, is also said to be inspired by the cultural force of Bertolt Brecht’s critical reflexivity in the 1960s and a general movement toward political action through revolutionary aesthetics of the time, particularly in the Civil Rights movement of the United States and the Third Cinema movements of Latin America. However, it is still a European-made cinema

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<sup>67</sup> Elsaesser and Hagener, 63.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid: 73.

that looks primarily at *itself*, and that addresses –no matter how reflexively—a tradition of film history that is undeniably European.

The idea of the cinema as a mirror is explored in the New Waves of the 1960s. For example, in one of the most important scenes in *Vivre sa vie* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1962), the protagonist Nana watches Dreyer’s film in the cinema (Figure 0.10). Godard inserts images from *The Passion of Joan of Arc* into his (as an early form of appropriation in Godard), in order to create a mirror-image for Nana who sees herself reflected on-screen (and who the spectator sees reflected as well, through the deployment of the shot-counter shot). As Kaja Silverman has observed, “...The relation between the two women becomes mimetic: the tears in Nana’s eyes mirror the tears in Jeanne’s.”<sup>70</sup> The mirroring relationship is not only achieved through the shot-counter shot of two faces in close-up, but also through text and the use of the subtitle. As Silverman observes, “The point at which this mirroring relationship is established comes immediately after the priest asks Jeanne what her deliverance will be, and she answers: ‘Death’<sup>71</sup>.” Even though this subtitle in Dreyer’s film is only seen once (printed in black against a white background), in Godard’s reappropriation the subtitle is shown twice, notes Silverman, once before we see Nana crying and once after, at the bottom of the image of Jeanne, as her lips form the word “death”. She writes, “The second time that word is available only to us; it is thus Godard, not Nana, who insists upon the relation between her and Jeanne”<sup>72</sup>. The mirroring quality of the image is produced between the protagonists, but done so in a way that calls attention to its own form and to the *auteur* behind the film. This is also part of the film’s reflection: what is reflected is not only between Nana and Jeanne, but also between Godard and the spectator.



Figure 0.10 *Vivre sa vie* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1962)

While drawing a connection between his protagonist and Dreyer’s, and therefore between his film and *La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc* (1928), this montage emphasizes the ideas expounded by Balázs in his theory on the close-up developed many decades earlier, namely the ability for the face to act

<sup>70</sup> Farocki, Harun and Kaja Silverman. *Speaking about Godard* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998): 27.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*



like a mirror for the spectator (in this case, Nana). In other words, Balázs' *new faciality* becomes a narrative device for the film itself. If what Balázs considered most innovative about cinema, as scholar Eszter Polónyi emphasizes, "is the splitting of the optical viewpoint, so that what is gained is an eye that can see from the viewpoint of multiple selves (Romeo looking at Juliet, Juliet looking at Romeo, etc.)"<sup>73</sup>, in this scene there is a double-act of viewing at the heart of *Vivre sa vie* which in addition to multiple is also reflexive: Nana looking at Jeanne, Godard looking at Nana. Reflexivity in the 1960s became a way of introducing the auteur politics of the time into the film itself and *Vivre sa vie* demonstrates this very well.

In the early 1980s, Balázs' theory on the close-up made a comeback in the writings of Gilles Deleuze, who articulates three types of "movement-images": the perception-image, the action-image and the affection-image, the latter being both the close-up and the face<sup>74</sup>. For Deleuze, the face is the site for the expression of local movements which the rest of the body usually keeps hidden. It is an object that reflects both surface and intensive micro-movements. He writes, "There is no close-up of the face. The close-up is the face..."<sup>75</sup> and "the face is in itself close-up, the close-up is by itself face and both are affect, affection-image"<sup>76</sup>. He points to two types of close-ups, one attributed to Griffith and the other to Eisenstein. The first is the reflective face, a face that reflects thought (posed in the question "What are you thinking about?"), and the other is the intensive face, a face that experiences or feels something ("What is the matter? What do you sense or feel?"). While Griffith's close-up establishes a relationship between the individual and the spectator, Eisenstein's close-up encompassed both the individual and the collective. Unlike Balázs, Deleuze emphasizes the non-narrative qualities of the face in close-up. No longer dependent on a narrative-centered chain of cause and effect, the face plays a very different role in the film, acting as "a reflecting and reflected unity"<sup>77</sup>. "What compromises the integrity of the close-up... is the idea that it presents to us a partial object, detached from a set or torn away from a set which it would form part"<sup>78</sup>. For Deleuze, the fact that the face is cut-out from the body does not mean that it is isolated; leaning on Balázs, Deleuze affirms that it is part of a universal language, raised to "the state of Entity"<sup>79</sup>. Unlike Balázs, however, Deleuze believes that *all* things shot in close-up can have the same power as the face. Objects and things can *be* faces. But the facial close-up, perhaps more than any other image, "is both the face and its effacement"<sup>80</sup>.

Three years earlier, Deleuze and Guattari published the already-mentioned essay "Year Zero: Faciality", in which they called for the face's effacement<sup>81</sup>. This dual, even contradictory,

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<sup>73</sup> Polónyi, "Béla Balázs and the Eye of the Microscope", 18.

<sup>74</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image* (1983), trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid: 99.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid: 88.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid: 87.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. This idea of detachability of the face and the close-up is doubly reinforced when we speak of the face-image. The face-image is detached because it is the image of a face, but also because it is an image that has been taken out of its original archive (be it a film or a family album) and placed into another.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid: 98.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid: 100.

<sup>81</sup> Deleuze and Guattari. "Year Zero: Faciality", 1987.

response to the face as at once an affection-image *and* an image that *must be* dismantled, will come back again in our discussion on reappropriation and the found footage film. For now, it is curious to note the difference in attention that these texts have received. It is not until the past decade that scholars have begun to respond to Deleuze and Guattari's call to dismantle faces, including Simone Bignall's article from 2012 "Dismantling the Face: Pluralism and the Politics of Recognition", which posits Deleuze and Guattari's essay as a useful perspective in light of postcolonialism and pluralist political engagement, and Jenny Edkins's *Face Politics* published in 2015, which offers an interdisciplinary account of how faces exercise power in modern society. What we see currently is a renewed academic interest in the face from an interdisciplinary perspective including psychology, philosophy, postcolonial and cultural studies.

After Deleuze, many filmmakers, critics and scholars have returned to questions about the face and the close-up, including Jacques Aumont's previously mentioned book *Du visage au cinéma* published in 1992, covering films from early cinema to about the 1970s, and Noa Skietmatsky's *The Face on Film* published in 2017, which in many ways builds off of Aumont, in dialogue with the writings of Roland Barthes, Béla Balázs, and others, and focuses on cinema from rise of World War II to the mid-1960s. Both Aumont and Steimatsky center their analysis on European authors (Carl Dreyer, Robert Bresson, Jean-Luc Godard, Michelangelo Antonioni, etc.), with Aumont especially dedicated to French cinema (Phillipe Garrel, Pialat, Leos Carax, Maurice Pialat, Jacques Rivette), and Steimatsky also bringing in films from the United States (Andy Warhol, Alfred Hitchcock). Significantly, Steimatsky proposes the face as *dispositif*, as an image which can be thought "through", as opposed to only "about". In assuming the face as as *dispositif*, the face is treated not only as a "a type of object nor a discrete metaphor, but a complex of figural functions and relations, open to expansion and, indeed, transfiguration"<sup>82</sup>. Seen in this way, the face is "a way of seeing, a critical lens, a mode of thought". As critic Adrian Martin observes, this approach allows Steimatsky to not wed her ideas to any particular theory or school of thought, but rather explore the face in film as a space to think through tensions and contradictions<sup>83</sup>.

While there have been moments in film history where the face has taken a central place, there have also been others where the close-up has faded out of fashion. In the early 2000s, for instance, filmmaker and writer Mark Cousins identified "the current rejection of the close-up in mainstream cinema" and the preference for the wide shot, the panorama, "the spectacular vista intended to make us say 'wow'"<sup>84</sup>. The turn away from the close-up is something that repeats over time, he says, "[Cinema] does this every now and again, *as if bored* with the effortless way in which macro-imagery can enrapture", and "At times of great change in cinema, it seems, the movie world abandons its unique selling point, the close-up, to impress audiences in more conventional ways"<sup>85</sup>. After all we have said, it would be hard to imagine anything more conventional than the close-up. However, Cousins is writing at a time when he is particularly cautious of the technological changes caused by the digital revolution and computer-generated imagery (CGI) in

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<sup>82</sup> Steimatsky, 4.

<sup>83</sup> Martin, Adrian, "Book Review: The Face on Film (Noa Steimatsky, 2017)", *filmcritic.com.au* (January 2020).

<sup>84</sup> Cousins, Marc, "Cinematic truth lies in the closeup", *Prospect* (June 20th, 2004).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* Italics added.

films by George Lukas and Steven Spielberg. At the end of this short piece published in *Prospect Magazine*, Cousins wonders about how directors will respond to the new possibilities of digital filming. He turns to Abbas Kiarostami's film *Ten* from two years prior. "He made a film in which every shot except one was a close-up. Just as Hitchcock, Dreyer and Eisenstein in their bravest, most driven projects reached for cinema's unique selling point, so, in *Ten*, did Kiarostami. When cinema next reinvents itself, that will be the lesson to remember"<sup>86</sup>. It is curious that the reinvention of cinema should be linked, by Cousins, to the close-up through this shot's monetary value. What is the value of the close-up and how can it be calculated? Does its value go down when it is overused, only to rise again after a significant absence? And what then would the value of the face-image be, as an image that has been taken from a previous film or archive? Are there other ways to revindicate the face-image that go beyond commercial value?

It is our hypothesis that the face is once again playing a pivotal role in cinema at a moment of crisis, or of many crisis (in plural), not only due to the much theorized digital turn as well as the midst of the obliteration of the movie theater as primary place for film watching (and where faces appear at their most impressive, in the large format), both events which for many have represented "the death of cinema", but also a crisis in the industry itself, as salary disparities and abuses of power based on gender and race become publicly known and many begin to challenge the modes of production which prioritize certain stories –*and certain faces*– over others. Another point of rupture in cinema today has to do with the archive itself and questions –also often of power– related to which films are preserved, which are not, and how accessible these films and archives are to the communities to which they belong. As archives begin to open up, and as new faces (and sounds) emerge, audiovisual materials recently made accessible to filmmakers, artists and researchers become primary materials for the elaboration of new film and video works. In this context, "the face in film" is not only limited to the faces filmed by the European and North American filmmakers and auteurs –such examples have been widely covered by both Aumont and Steimatsky in their books on the subject from 1992 and 2017, respectively– but now becomes open to the face in film *as image*, the face-image as it is reappropriated into new films and videos, as an image that has already been photographed or filmed by another, and which now passes *again* through the hands of a filmmaker removed from that original context (many times even critically opposed to it) and across the lens and/or editing table into a new audiovisual context and in a new moment in time. As such, we have discovered the face to be an image through which tensions of identity, colonialism, race, gender, and constructions of otherness and criminality, play out in contemporary screen-space. While previous studies of the face in film have focused on European and North American films and have been written from a Hollywood or Eurocentric perspectives, our corpus will include but also extend beyond these territories to include approximations to the face-image from anti-colonial and often anti-imperialist perspectives.

For this reason, the films in our chosen corpus belong to works of reappropriation, also sometimes called *found footage*, in contemporary experimental archival cinema. Many of the films in our corpus extend beyond what is typically known as "found footage", however, as they many

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

times include materials that are not actually “found” at all, including still photographs and state archives. In the next pages we will explore how this film practice has been written about in academia, the distinctions and classifications that have been made, in order to identify the authors and concepts that will continue to guide our discussion and analysis of these films, but also to make the case that this is an amorphous practice that is continually shape-shifting and presenting classification challenges for film academics. As such, the films in our corpus come from different subgenres within the reappropriation film, including films that are generally accepted as documentary, as well as others that are not.

## Reappropriation in Experimental Cinema

In recent film studies and film practice, we have seen the emergence of a diverse body of films which turn to reappropriation, found footage, and the recycling of images and sounds in both digital, analogue, and hybrid formats. If we look back at the history of the *found footage* and the *reappropriation* film, we shall see that historians and critics have often divided these films into two somewhat well-defined yet separate groups: on the one hand, a more documentary-oriented direction (often referred to as “compilation film”), and on the other, a more experimental one (often called “found footage”). In fact, found footage cinema has been called by many different names throughout film history and the definition of what is and what is not found footage has also varied, depending precisely on the term being used.

One of the first texts on the subject belongs to Jay Leyda’s *Films Beget Films* from 1964 which begins, “When I fixed upon this subject I was somewhat taken aback by the fact that there was no name for it”<sup>87</sup>. Names like “archive films”, “documentary archive films”, “chronicle montage films”, and “montage films” (from the French, *film de montage*) are for Leyda unsatisfactory, ambiguous, and misleading. “The proper term would have to indicate that the work *begins* on the cutting table”, he thinks aloud, “with already existing film shots. It also has to indicate that the film used originated some time in the past. The term could also indicate that it is a film of *ideas*, for most of the films made in this form are not content to be mere records or documents—and in this factor lies my chief interest in the form, which will have to be referred to in the following pages in various inconsistent ways”<sup>88</sup>. Then he turns the question to the reader, inviting him/her to think with him: “Can you suggest a right term?”

This text is a great place to begin our discussion on this particular kind of filmmaking because it testifies to how big of a task just the naming of it can be. So many years later, and so many found footage/compilation/archival/appropriation films later, it is uncertain that academics have made much progress in this regard. What has occurred is that as the practice has become even more common, varieties of this kind of filmmaking have begun to appear and names or terms have been introduced to better define or describe them. As is often the case, the names often appear to distinguish the object from what it is *not*. In Leyda’s case, it seems that his urgency in naming this

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<sup>87</sup> Leyda, Jay, *Films Beget Films: A Study of the Compilation Film* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 9.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

kind of film is to distinguish it and separate it from the traditional documentary film. The “compilation film”, as he calls it, and the documentary have one element in common, says Leyda: the manipulation of actuality. This manipulation is usually hidden from the spectator so that she/he “sees only one ‘reality’”. As Leyda dives into the compilation film, it becomes clear that the manipulation is less hidden here than in the traditional documentary form. This particularity, in relation to the visibility or invisibility of the manipulation and therefore of the form, seems to be at the center of what makes this kind of filmmaking distinct.

In Bill Nichols’ article on the book, written fifty years after the book’s publication, he situates *the compilation film* within the larger documentary film practice even as he confesses that, especially in the United States, it has remained “a largely neglected, secondary consideration” of that field, too often left out of major books dedicated to the subject, including his own<sup>89</sup>. He attributes this to the documentary filmmaker’s preference for “the direct, the immediate, and obvious”<sup>90</sup> which is entirely contrary to the compilation film’s “too distracting” collage-like foundation, whose “full effect depends on recognizing that what is being signified is not what the presented footage originally signified but is, instead, a transformation of that initially intended meaning”<sup>91</sup>. When the compilation film was picked up by the documentary tradition, “the humanist tendencies” of Robert Flaherty and other post-war documentary filmmakers turned the compilation film into something else altogether. This “different direction” of the compilation film, writes Nichols, was one of “mythic abstraction”; while for Leyda, “the compilation film was a way to understand history in a new way, not a technique for the perpetuation of more of the same”<sup>92</sup>. Central to this mis-direction is the *voice-over commentary*, which has dominated the expository mode of documentary since the 1930s<sup>93</sup> and on which the documentary filmmaker often depends, converting the images into often illustrative and arbitrarily (and many times unethically) selected additions to the commentary. In other words, the tension between documentary and the compilation film (which now has other names, we will get into this in a moment) has existed from the very beginning and has marginalized the compilation film while, at the same time, co-opting it into becoming “more of the same”. The films that we are interested in this dissertation are not these commentary-driven films but rather the kind of films that Leyda was interested in from the beginning: the ones that questioned history instead of affirming it, and in which the filmmaker paid close attention to the images –and sounds, and texts– that would be selected for the montage. However, in our study we will not limit ourselves to films which recycle only “documentary” materials<sup>94</sup>. We will explain this distinction now.

In Patricia Zimmermann’s 1989 essay “Revolutionary Pleasures: Wrecking the Text in

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<sup>89</sup> Nichols, Bill, “Remaking History: Jay Leyda and the Compilation Film”, *Film History* 26(4) (2014): 146.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid: 148.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid: 150.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid: 150-151.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid: 151.

<sup>94</sup> For Antonio Weinrichter, “el *compilation film* tradicional se limita al empleo de material documental, al que adjudica un valor evidencial incuestionado” (“The traditional compilation film is limited to the use of documentary material, whose value as evidence is unquestioned”). Weinrichter, Antonio, *Metraje encontrado: La apropiación en el cine documental y experimental* (Navarra: Gobierno de Navarra / Festival Punto de Vista, 2009), 104.

Compilation Documentary”, she identifies that something has changed in the compilation film and proposes the term “new compilation documentary” to speak of the work of contemporary filmmakers whose work “foreground the reviving, remaking, and refiguring of history and the celebration of the revolutionary pleasures of active spectatorship in the public sphere”<sup>95</sup>. Importantly, she contextualizes these films within the new technologies of the time, writing: “In effect, the context of this compilation documentary that investigates discursive formations rather than narrative history coincides with the penetration of television into the home and the development of new technologies like home video, which make it easy to “steal” images, the advent of global news via satellite, which decomposes the relationship between time, distance, and immediacy, and the growth of the international film festival circuit”<sup>96</sup>. In Zimmermann’s analysis, she focuses her attention on the diversity and instability of the media (stills, music, film, cartoons) and voices (political, personal, logical, aesthetic) employed. She argues that new compilation documentary films *wreck the text*: “They play with this multiplicity and instability as a process, as a discontinuity, and as an intervention and reinvention into historical explanation and the position of the historical subject as a collective agent in both the private and public spheres”. Unlike the compilation films made earlier, these films elaborate “a historical, collective subject”, and in doing so, “induce, seduce, and demand the spectator to enjoin and engender the public sphere”. This occurs precisely because of how these films reorder and reset the recycled materials—which span across private and public spheres—and which operate “between the relations of discourse rather than within a specific content area”. Zimmermann writes that these films “destroy textual authority”. Although she does not need to say it, that gesture *in itself* represents a rupture with the traditional documentary form which has for so long relied upon the voice-over commentary as a voice of authority. She does not, however, go so far as to separate this practice from the documentary.

In 1993, William Wees proposed the term “found footage films” to encompass the entire filmmaking practice of working with recycled images, and perhaps as a way to distinguish it from “the compilation film” which has been, as we have seen, historically appropriated or co-opted by the documentary. Using a small group of films from the United States—“a relatively small number of films to exemplify a very large and diverse body of work”<sup>97</sup>—Wees finds that generally speaking, all *found footage films* share an underlying desire to examine media and are therefore all “media-referential”, meaning that they call attention to the “mediascape” from which they come. This is similar to Zimmermann’s claim that the “new compilation documentary” operates between the relations of discourse in order to “destroy textual authority”. Wees goes further writing, “By reminding us that we are seeing images produced and disseminated by the media, found footage films open the door to a critical examination of the methods and motives underlying the media’s

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<sup>95</sup>Zimmermann, Patricia, “Revolutionary Pleasures: Wrecking the Text in Compilation Documentary”, *Afterimage* 16(8) (March 1989).

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. Technological developments and new relationships to archives and time since 1989 have continued to transform what is thought of as “compilation” or “found footage” film.

<sup>97</sup> Wees, William C, *Recycled Images* (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1993), 3.

use of images”<sup>98</sup>.

What varies from one found footage film to another is just how critical this examination is, and in practice this means just how much the materials are touched and/or intervened by the filmmaker. He identifies a spectrum of three different “types” of found footage films from the least to the most disruptive: on one side, *compilation* (films made of material which have been left in their entire original form and therefore “untouched”), in the middle, *collage* (defined as montages of found footage), and on the other side, *appropriation* (films which radically change the appearance of the recycled films being used). For Wees, “*collage* has the greatest potential to criticize, challenge, and possibly subvert the power of images produced by, and distributed through, the corporate media”<sup>99</sup>. This is because of the three kinds of found footage films he has identified, *collage* is the only one that maintains the reference to the historical specificity of the original materials while at the same time not depending on the legitimacy of the materials for its new meaning. *Collage* found footage films *interrupt* the recycled images, to borrow Walter Benjamin’s concept, and: “By being interrupted...cultural artifacts are forced to expose their less obvious, ideological functions”<sup>100</sup>. For all of these reasons, Wees believes that *collage* “is the most revolutionary formal innovation in our century”<sup>101</sup>. Wees’ text is fundamental because it shifts the discussion away from documentary film and towards the identification of some of the forms which the *found footage film* can take, while at the same time defining a common ground for these films in the relationship that they establish with the media that they, in the least disruptive cases merely “cite”, and in the most disruptive cases, go as far as “interrupt”<sup>102</sup>.

Since 1993 many things have continued to change and if we open our field of analysis to incorporate films made in Europe, the United Kingdom and Latin America, made using archives coming from police archives, colonial film units in Africa, and home movies and missing person photographs from South America (to name the materials used in some of the films we have selected for our study), the films and the forms of reappropriation become even more diverse. The question then is if these films continue to be media-referential as Wees identified in the early 90s. We believe that they are, but we have to wonder if the “mediaescape” is the same now as it was then. It becomes evident that as media expands not only into our homes –first through television, but then even more invasively into our computer screen and into our hands in “smart” phones—it begins to encompass forms not only used by the State and private corporations, but also forms which might have once belonged to the so-called private sphere, including home movies and

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid: 32.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid: 33.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid: 54.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid: 47.

<sup>102</sup> In the sense proposed by Walter Benjamin and recalled by William C. Wees in *Recycled Images*: “Interruption is one of the fundamental methods of all form-giving. It reaches far beyond the domain of art. It is, to mention just one of its aspects, the origin of the quotation. Quoting a text implies interrupting its context.” William Wees applies this concept to his analysis of the found footage films of Abigail Child, Keith Sanborn, and Leslie Thornton, since they recycle elements “extracted from their original contexts, diverted (or ‘détourned,’ in the terminology of the Situationists) from their original, intended uses, and thereby made to yield previously unrecognized significance”, Wees, *Recycled Images*, 33.

videos. As the mediascape grows, the spaces and the materialities in which discourse takes place begin to widen and proliferate. Zimmermann is visionary in her understanding how media spans from the public to the private sphere and in doing so reconfigures the individual as a collective subject.

Other significant texts in the discussion on reappropriation and the found footage film are Nicole Brénez's 2000 and 2002 essays in French<sup>103</sup>, which not only open up a necessary discussion on how these terms should be translated into other languages, but also propose a variety of new names for –and therefore ways of thinking of–the filmmaking practice. She proposes the translation *remploi* (re-use) which is not to be confused with *the montage film* (which is similar to Leyda's definition of the compilation film, and where she placed the work of Esfir Shub) and makes a distinction between the *remploi intertextuel* or *in re* (a film which imitates another film) and *recyclage* or *remploi in se* (a film which recycles the same object as the original work). It is the latter which Brenez associates with the experimental film<sup>104</sup>.

In his 2008 dissertation on the subject published in 2009, Antonio Weinrichter is interested in further exploring what Brenez called *remploi in se*, “el reciclaje en sentido estricto”<sup>105</sup>, and proposes the translation “metraje encontrado” for his book title (although in the body of the book he returns to the English name, *found footage*). He observes that the debate around what to call this practice resides in a distinction between the documentary institution and the experimental one, where the “montage film” or “compilation film” are considered “legitimate” uses of the archive belonging to the former, while “found footage” or “metraje encontrado” with its “gesture of appropriation” is ascribed to the latter<sup>106</sup>. Having reserved the term “found footage” strictly for films which can be defined as “experimental”, Weinrichter identifies this practice primarily as an *artistic attitude*. Situating the practice within the visual arts –including the Marcel Duchamp tradition of Dada and conceptual art, Surrealism and the *objet trouvé*– allows him to include within his corpus films that had been historically left out of studies on the compilation film (like Leyda's), including Joseph Cornell's *Rose Hobert* (1936) and Bruce Conner's *A Movie* (1958) –films that were, however, included in William C. Wee's study. In fact, what we find as we put aside the compilation film and turn to the *found footage film*, is that many more films and practices can enter the discussion, for example, the *collage* films, but more significantly perhaps are the connections made with the gesture of appropriation in music *sampling*, *scratch*, and *remix* culture, and which make evident just how transdisciplinary the practice continues to be<sup>107</sup>. However, once again, in

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<sup>103</sup> Brenez, Nicole, “Cartographie du Found Footage”, *Exploding Cinema* (October 2000); Brenez, Nicole.

“Montage intertextuel et formes contemporaines du remploi dans le cinéma expérimental”, *Cinémas* 13 (1-2) (Fall 2002).

<sup>104</sup> Weinrichter makes this distinction: “Aludir en este contexto significa reconstruir la apariencia general del fragmento objeto del pastiche, lo que resulta caro; mientras que apropiiar significa tomar literalmente el fragmento e insertarlo en un trabajo propio, lo que resulta considerablemente más barato (éste es el motivo, más allá del gesto duchampiano o warholiano de la apropiación, por el que este recurso es más habitual en el cine y el vídeo de carácter alternativo)”, Weinrichter, 2009: 32, 39.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid: 14.

<sup>106</sup> “Se hace necesario entonces separar la práctica documental y la experimental”, Weinrichter, 19.

<sup>107</sup> Weinrichter observes, “En este sentido, el *found footage* podría empezar a verse como la instancia filmica en el ámbito experimental de un síntoma general de la cultura (pos)moderna”, *ibid*: 153.



Weinrichter's analysis the definition of the found footage film is re-articulated in relation to the documentary film practice, as a kind of filmmaking that becomes separate from the documentary and closer to the experimental realm. Weinrichter chooses to continue to separate these practices in his book, devoting separate chapters to each, although there are many overlaps throughout signaling just how complicated a task contemporary cinema has made this kind of academic classification. In our research, on the other hand, we have found that the distinction between documentary and experimental cinema is not very clear. For many of the filmmakers included in our corpus, documentary film practice can and must be fundamentally experimental; it is in fact within the documentary practice that these filmmakers locate the freedom in film form that are often associated with experimental cinema<sup>108</sup>.

“Archive cinema”, says Jean-Gabriel Périot, a French filmmaker who works with *found footage* and “in-between genres (documentary, animation, experimental)” in films such as *Eût-elle été criminelle...* (2006), *The Devil* (2012), and *Une jeunesse allemande* (2015), in his lecture at Jakarta University in 2011<sup>109</sup>, is made “not only to show to the audience forgotten images from the past, it is also to done them to be seen again but differently, included in a showy visual process, *an editing that appears as editing*”. *Archive movies*, says Périot, “give themselves to the audience as films, as constructions, as representations”. In this lecture, the filmmaker defines what constitutes a visual archive as “any image used by someone who is not the one who shoot or created this image. Or who did it years ago, as when Godard used an excerpt of *A bout de souffle*, his first movie”. He confirms what Weinrichter called a “new archive paradigm”, that is, a change in what is thought of as an archive (While traditionally, the archive was a kind of legal document, Weinrichter perceives that “...hoy se tiende a considerar el archivo menos como un mero depósito material de documentos que como una agencia dinámica, generadora de sentido”<sup>110</sup>.) But for Périot the change in what is considered an archive is parallel to a change in what is considered “documentary” versus “fiction”. For Périot, there should not be a difference between the two; they are both images of discourse and therefore no image is neutral. Once a separation between documentary and fiction is avoided, any and every image becomes a potential archive, waiting to be recycled and reused by a potential filmmaker. He writes, “...this cinema questions representation, questions visual languages, it questions how History is told, how it was told and what it tells and what it hides”. All images, even images that come from other films, can be used in such a way that they can question their own original discourse. To do so, the new montage must “give itself” to the audience as precisely what it is and not obscure or make invisible its editing, its construction. This is interesting because it brings us back to Leyda who observed that documentaries and even many compilation films hide their manipulation of actuality; for Périot, *it*

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<sup>108</sup> For Susana de Sousa Dias, for example, who has a Ph.D. in Art, being a documentary filmmaker means that her films are made with prior research about the places, people, and histories of the subjects of her films. She has a documentary-based research practice which informs her work and with which she creates her films. This is why she prefers the name “documentary filmmaker” to the more general term “artist”.

<sup>109</sup> Périot, Jean-Gabriel, “Archive Cinema”, Jakarta University (2011).

<sup>110</sup> Weinrichter, 2009: 76. “Today we tend to consider the archive less of a mere depository for material documents and more like a dynamic agency”.

*is fundamental that this manipulation be made evident, and not hidden.* It is precisely by showing its own construction that the “archival film” opens the door for a critical spectatorship of media and images in general.

In 2012 Jamie Baron argues that the terms “archival footage” nor “found footage” have never been entirely distinct<sup>111</sup>. She argues that this is because the recycling of archives in cinema has taken different forms, with varying intentions and objectives and, perhaps most importantly, with different technological tools at hand (in 1964 the tools are, undoubtedly, very different from the ones available today). I would add that the variety of archival materials available to filmmakers has changed as well. For example, while in Leyda’s book home movies are entirely excluded from his analysis, today this would be impossible<sup>112</sup>. Baron observes that the insistence of many academics in finding *one single term* to define the practice of reappropriation has emphasized the origin of the materials that are being reappropriated (be they from an official archive or found in a flea market, for example) and less so on what is being done to these materials in the new montage, or on the technologies being employed<sup>113</sup>. She proposes we speak about “foundness” as a way to distinguish between the origin of the materials and, what she prefers to emphasize, which is the experience of the spectator and the effect of these materials on his/her experience. In our study we will emphasize equally the origin of the materials (their original contexts) –including films which recycle all kinds of audiovisual content, that is, we shall not exclude a film because it uses photographs or because it uses Hollywood Cinema, films that use “documents” in the traditional sense and films that uses non-documents– and the technical aspect –i.e. what is done to the images and how– because as we understand these films and the experimental films in particular, understanding these more technical processes is extremely important for understanding the films themselves. It is not so much about what is a “document” and what is not, but rather *what is done to these images* that matters here.

Catherine Russell’s concept of *archiveology* from 2018 refers to the cinematographic practice of recycling archival material to produce knowledge about the representation of history through images, but she limits her definition of the archive to only public and collective documents, excluding all personal and/or domestic images and films<sup>114</sup>. She claims that the intention of these appropriations is not to reveal that the original images are dishonest or false, but

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<sup>111</sup> Baron, Jamie, “The Archive Effect”, *Projections* 6(2) (Winter 2012): 102-120.

<sup>112</sup> Chapter 4 is devoted to the reappropriation of “mug” from home movies and other materials.

<sup>113</sup> Baron turns the emphasis away from the terminology or the origin of the recycled materials and towards the spectator’s experience and to what the spectator recognizes as “found” (regardless of how “found” they really are). She calls this temporal perception of the archive *the archive effect* (118). For Baron, when temporal and intentional disparity are uncertain, the viewer is faced with the question of how much authority to ascribe to the indexical recording. This question is crucial, because it both depends on and determines what we give the status of archival evidence. Whether or not the archive effect occurs for different viewers of the same appropriation film may result in very different experiences and understandings of a single text, and hence, of what constitutes archival “truth.” (Baron, 118-119). These ideas are further explored in her book on the subject: Baron, Jamie, *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>114</sup> Russell, Catherine, *Archiveology: Walter Benjamin and Archival Film Practices* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 5.

rather that they are historical images with anthropological value<sup>115</sup>. For Périot, perhaps, the limitation of what is considered an “archive” is unnecessary because all images, be they “documentary” or “fiction”, public or personal, can have anthropological value. As we can already see, Weinrichter was correct in identifying a *new archive paradigm*. What we discover is that as soon as the paradigm is defined, it changes again; it is as ever-shifting as our media culture. And then again, what is “our” culture exactly? Who do we speak of when we say “we” and “our”? What cultures are left out and what happens to the archive paradigm once they are included?

In Jesse Lerner’s thought-provoking 2017 essay “The Image Belongs to Those Who Work It: Recycled Cinema in Latin America” he asks “how different would a history of found footage filmmaking look if written from a Latin American perspective?”<sup>116</sup>. Turning to the Brazilian poet and playwright Oswald de Andrade’s landmark 1928 avant-garde *Manifesto Antropófago* in which he declared “Só me interessa o que não é meu. Lei do homem. Lei do antropofago”<sup>117</sup> as a historical antecedent for reappropriation and recycling in Latin America, Lerner observes that found footage filmmaking in Latin America, also known as *cine reciclado*<sup>118</sup>, has very different roots from found footage practices in the United States. He writes, “[it] is not just one more strategy available to the Latin American experimental filmmaker, not simply ‘practical because it is so easy to use’, as the Situationists proposed within the European context, but rather like de Andrade’s embrace of the term ‘cannibal,’ it is an anti-colonial gesture of appropriation and resignification, a way of creating an ‘original’ through the reproduction, the illegitimate, the borrowed, and the stolen”.<sup>119</sup> Unlike Joseph Cornell’s pioneering experimental films –which are often cited as the first experiences in found footage filmmaking– and which “lovingly”<sup>120</sup> subvert images from Hollywood cinema, *cine reciclado* is made with an entirely different intention, very far from an *homage*. In Rafael Montañez Ortiz’ *Cowboy and Indian Film* (1957-1958) for instance, the director uses a tomahawk (a type of single-handed ax native to the many Indigenous peoples and nations of North America, and a term that has been adapted from the Powhatan word) to hack a 16mm print of *Winchester ‘73* (Anthony Mann, 1950) in which Rock Hudson plays a Native American. Lerner writes, “Placing the film fragments in a medicine bag, he performed a ritual exorcism inspired by his Yaqui grandfather before splicing together the random fragments, some upside down and others right side up [...]. In contrast to Conner’s sly editing, we have an act of violence, a chance operation, and an act of revenge meted out against decades of Hollywood misrepresentations...”<sup>121</sup>. While Cornell and Montañez Ortiz’s films arguably share the underlying

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid: 22. “In archiveology, images from diverse sources are juxtaposed, and they are also organized and structured so as to produce new knowledge about cultural history, including how that history was filmed and what films it produced”, 25.

<sup>116</sup> Lerner, Jesse, “The Image Belongs to Those Who Work It: Recycled Cinema in Latin America”, in *Ismo, Ismo, Ismo: Experimental Cinema in Latin America*, ed. Jesse Lerner and Luciano Piazza (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017): 116.

<sup>117</sup> De Andrade, Oswald, “Manifesto antropofago”, *Revista de Antropofagia*, no. 1 (May 1928): 3. “I am only concerned with what is not mine. Law of Man. Law of the cannibal”.

<sup>118</sup> In reference to Wees’ “Recycled Cinema”.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid: 120.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid: 114.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid: 116.

gesture of *appropriation*, of taking images from another film and working with them, freely, for one's own purpose, and while Lerner does not mention that Montañez Ortiz studied art in New York City –where he was born– and was therefore familiar with art practices from the United States and Europe (and perhaps not as familiar with the Latin American avant-garde), it is true that the feeling of *Rosa Hobart* (Joseph Cornell, 1937) and *Cowboy and Indian Film* couldn't be more different.

Once again what we perceive is a split in the way found footage and reappropriation are discussed – this time not between a more documentary or experimental approach, but between films that use found footage *lovingly* (to put it simply, but thinking of Joseph Cornell as an example) and films that use found footage as a kind of *revenge* or as a way of conveying a sarcastic or ironic message. This distinction is confirmed by Thomas Elsaesser in his essay titled “The Ethics of Appropriation: Found Footage Between Archive and Internet”, included in the first issue of *Found Footage Magazine* published in 2015, when he writes: “... We understand found footage as an open category of avant-garde or experimental cinema that presents film fragments either animated by nostalgia [...] or driven by apocalyptic themes [...]”<sup>122</sup>. Catherine Russell's *Experimental Ethnography* from 1999 also had focused on found-footage filmmaking in terms of apocalypse culture<sup>123</sup>. Between Russell and Elsaesser we identify precisely the same duality that we have seen throughout our research on how these films have been discussed academically until now. But with Lerner we can begin to find (slight) variations in these binary themes. More than “apocalyptic”, Montañez-Ortiz's film is *anti-colonial*. But more than an “act of violence”, I understand this film as a ritual of purification or cleansing of Hollywood stereotypes. After hearing the director speak about his work<sup>124</sup>, it becomes less of an ironic or apocalyptic endeavor for me, and much more one of liberation and healing.

The films we will focus on in the present dissertation, all films made in the past twenty or so years and therefore belonging to the most recent explorations of the found footage filmmaking practice, do not fit neatly into either of these categories (of love versus irony, nostalgia versus apocalypses), just as they cannot be easily divided into the categories of documentary or experimental film. In fact, what we will argue here is that they often do something entirely different: they resist nostalgia and glamor, use irony in a more subtle manner, and most importantly, turn to *affect*, both in how the materials are used and in the final product. If our argument is convincing, we will have identified a third “type” of reappropriation film in contemporary cinema, one that is grounded in post-colonial, feminist, and Black film theory and which turns towards an affective film practice in order to expose archival and historical wounds and labor towards a *collective healing process*. Perhaps by facing this “new category” or reading

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<sup>122</sup>Elsaesser, Thomas, “The Ethics of Appropriation: Found Footage Between Archive and Internet”, *Found Footage Magazine*, Issue 1 (October 2015): 33.

<sup>123</sup> In her book published after *Experimental Ethnography*, titled *Archiveology*, Russell seems to retract from these terms for understanding found-footage practice. She writes, “In 1999 it seemed as if this mode of film practice was preoccupied with ‘the end of history’ ... Nearly two decades later, as archival film practices have become more prevalent in mainstream culture and in experimental media, I am more optimistic about the cultural role of audiovisual appropriation”, Russell, 2018: 7.

<sup>124</sup> Montañez Ortiz, Rafael. *Museo del Barrio: Virtual Book Launch*, July 30, 2020.

of reappropriation, we might also find other ways of understanding and considering found footage films made earlier, as in the case of *Cowboy and Indian Film*.

## The Face-Image

In many ways, Jacques Aumont's book titled *The Face on Film* published originally in French in 1992 leaves off where this dissertation begins: *in the ruins*. "Perte du visage, par tous les bouts"<sup>125</sup>, writes Aumont in the final pages, *nostalgically*. As both a sort of continuation of and, at the same time, an antithesis to Aumont's book, we propose to look at *the resurrection of the face* in the contemporary experimental film as an image that rises out of the "ruins" –with new possibilities. Rather than speak of an exhumation, which would place the task solely on the filmmaker-investigator, we will choose to speak of a resurrection, in order to bring attention to *the agency of the images themselves*. How has the face resurrected through experimental film? And conversely, how has film resurrected through the appropriation of the face-image? Rather than taking a nostalgic view, it is our hypothesis that the re-appropriation of the face-image in contemporary experimental film reveals a resurrection of film form and that the study of this re-appropriation will teach us something about how cinema has been transforming over time. This work will mark new territory as it is the first study entirely devoted to what we shall call the *face-image*.

Central to this discussion is the subject of *ownership* regarding the archive and the human being/body, of which both the frame and the face represent the smallest units and therefore a representation of both the film and the body. As art critic and writer John Berger has already demonstrated, there is a long tradition of the relationship between seeing and possessing<sup>126</sup>. In *Ways of Seeing*, he reflected on Walter Benjamin's 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and looked at what this reproduction meant for how spectators could see and engage with art today. In itself, *Ways of Seeing* was a groundbreaking television program that demonstrated how television would modify our way of seeing art and seeing ourselves reflected (or not) in art. One of the key forms explored by Berger was the emphasis on the spectator's subjectivity of a work of art rather than on the art expert's interpretation which was often centered on the artist's name and fame, the work's economic value, and the needs and tendencies of the current art market. In his 1991 essay "Uses of Photography" Berger calls for an "alternative photography": "The task of an alternative photography is to *incorporate photography into social and political memory*, instead of using it as a substitute ... Normally photographs are used in a very unilinear way –they are used to illustrate an argument, or to demonstrate a thought which goes like this"<sup>127</sup>.

Multi-media artist Hito Steyerl, creator of the video *How Not to be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational* (2013), has connected questions of property directly with the filmmaking practice (Figure 0.12). She connects cutting in film editing to economic cuts to metaphors and

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<sup>125</sup> Aumont, *Du visage au cinéma*, 193.

<sup>126</sup> Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1973).

<sup>127</sup> Berger, John, "Uses of Photography", in *About Looking* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 62-64.

literal acts of cutting the human body to general economic narratives in film<sup>128</sup>. Instead of proposing a rearticulation of the body, she embraces the radical forms that fragmentation, cutting, and reproduction make possible. She ends her 2009 book *The Wretched of the Screen* with a reflection on the famous scene in *Cinema Paradiso* (Giuseppe Tornatore, 1988) where a man watches a film made from the parts that a projectionist had to censor from fiction films<sup>129</sup>. The roll consists of fragments of kisses, “too provocative to be shown in public”<sup>130</sup>, and which had been collected by the projectionist clandestinely (Figure 0.11). We could say that in this film, the projectionist has appropriated these images that were not meant to be seen. By saving them and putting them together on a reel, he made a new film out of them, which would be seen (at a future moment) by an unexpected spectator. We adopt these perspectives (from Berger and Steyerl) to see past the economic “value” of the close-up and the face in film –demonstrated, for example, in how Mark Cousins praises this type of shot– and in order to propose the possibility of an *experiential value* –intersected by affect, solidarity and memory– (as opposed to cult value and exhibition value) as it is experienced by the artist and spectator in the time of the face-image. Rather than a commodity, we posit that the face-image can be a *treasure* or even an *amulet*<sup>131</sup> that can allow for new and unexpected ways of seeing and experiencing works of art and which serve the filmmaker-spectator’s reckoning with the past, and not necessarily as a justification or nostalgic representation of Western –or rather Northern– cinematographic tradition.

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<sup>128</sup> Steyerl, Hito, “Cut! Reproduction and Recombination”, in *The Wretched of the Screen* (Sternberg Press, eflux journal reader 2009), 177.

<sup>129</sup> “Let’s think of reproduction as this kiss, which moves across cuts, from shot to shot, from frame to frame: linking and juxtaposing. Across lips and digital devices. It moves by way of editing, exquisitely flipping around the idea of the cut, redistributing affects and desires, creating bodies joined by movement, love, pain”, *ibid*: 188.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>131</sup> We use this distinction because it also conveys economic worth, but one that is often unknown. While a commodity is an object that can be bought, sold, and exchanged for another, a treasure is often an object with a worth that is subjective, determined by the person who sees something of value in the object.



Figure 0.11. *Cinema Paradiso* (Giuseppe Tornatore, 1988)

It is our hope that our work regarding *face-images* will contribute to a political way of thinking of the possibilities for experimental cinema and cinema in general and the archival film practice in particular, where filmmaking and montage become tools for not only *freeing* archive images and sounds, but by extension, freeing human experience, history, and storytelling so that we can all as spectators-turned-producers become active participants in our history and film history-making.

Both as consumers or consumed, we live in a time where we are often seen and represented not as people but as *images* (and more recently, algorithms and avatars). However, it would be incorrect to suggest that this is something *new*. For people of color and for women, objectification has long been a reality. At the turn of the 20th Century, orator and abolitionist Frederick Douglass, for example, found freedom in photography because what existed before that was caricature, used to denigrate and reduce him to a stereotype. He participated in his own image-making process, choosing the photographers, as well as the framing, and what would be included and excluded from the image<sup>132</sup>. Today, with the mass proliferation of images around the world, we are certainly in a very different context than the one in which Douglass turned to photography. How can we participate in the materiality of the image in this Century?

Today, in a largely digital culture, BIPOC and LGBTQ artists have been finding ways of countering oppression in image representation through directly participating in image culture. Steyerl, for example, suggests that a way out of objectification is not to resist becoming a thing but *to participate in the image itself*. She writes: “To participate in an image –rather than merely

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<sup>132</sup> Chapter 5 will explore Douglass’ theory on portraiture and imagine ways to connect his writings to experimental filmmaking practices.

identify with it— could perhaps abolish this relation. This would mean participating in the material of the image as well as in the desires and forces it accumulates”<sup>133</sup>. Part of this participation, however, is the acknowledgement of the “bruises” in the image, which “mark the site of history’s impact”<sup>134</sup>. Things can be witnesses, things can speak. “Not even the digital image is outside history”, says Steyerl. “Images are violated, ripped apart, subjected to interrogation and probing. They are stolen, cropped, edited, and re-appropriated. They are bought, sold, leased. Manipulated and adulated. Reviled and revered. To participate in the image means to take part in all of this”<sup>135</sup>.



Figure 0.12. *How Not to be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational* (Hito Steyerl, 2013)

In the case of images that have been reappropriated, the “bruises” on the image are multiplied. According to Mulvey, “Film subjected to repetition and return, when viewed on new technologies, suffers from the violence caused by extracting a fragment from the whole that, as in a body, ‘wounds’ its integrity”<sup>136</sup>. Here she is appropriating the term “wound” from Raymond Bellour<sup>137</sup>, who in turn is inspired by Roland Barthes’ *punctum*<sup>138</sup> as it is applied to cinema. Mulvey adds, “But in another metaphor, this process ‘unlocks’ the film fragment and opens it up to new kinds of relations and revelations”<sup>139</sup>. Aumont also speaks of the ways in which the face has been wounded: “Le visage a souffert partout, il a été mis au rancart, suspecté, dénoncé, épuisé para la publicité, par les arts, par la philosophie, par le documentaire. Nulle part ces ravages n’ont atteint,

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<sup>133</sup> Steyerl, Hito, “A Thing Like You and Me”, in *The Wretched of the Screen* (Sternberg Press, eflux journal reader 2009): 51.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid: 53.

<sup>136</sup> Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, 179.

<sup>137</sup> Bellour, Raymond. “...rait”, signe d’utopie”, in “Roland Barthes d’apres Roland Barthes”, *Ruse Descartes*, 34 (December 2001): 43.

<sup>138</sup> Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida: Reflection on Photography* (Vintage Classics, 1993).

<sup>139</sup> Mulvey, *ibid.*



aussi violemment qu'au cinéma, l'être du visage dans le temps"<sup>140</sup>. While portraits in paintings often include the neck, the shoulders, parts of the gowns and jewelry, the hats on top of the heads, in the shift from painting to photography and then to film, we observe that the face becomes at each instant more and more cut-out from the rest of the body. The *close-up* can be understood as the extreme result of this violence, as a shot which removes all of the surrounding context from the face, leaving it alone and isolated within the frame. The face-image, by consequence, is a double wound. *Bruises* or *wounds* are especially remarkable when perceived on the face-image; applied to these images in particular, alternative metaphors appear as revelations to the "listening" eye. On one level, the violence to which face-images are subjected reflect the violence to which bodies and subjects have also been subjected throughout history. *Not only in life*, but also in the processes of being photographed and rephotographed, cut up not only once (in the framing, editing) but twice (in the reappropriation) on the editing table.

One way of participating in the materiality of the image is through *experimental archival filmmaking*, understood as a practice that opens and intervenes in the archive, affecting and transforming its very materiality –while itself being transformed and acted upon by the materiality of the images and sounds. We will look at films which have done just this and we will look at how these films have turned to faces in particular in order to question and subvert pre-established ideas on identity, identification, and interiority, as well as empathy, nostalgia and recognition. It should come of no surprise then, that many of the films that we will study here are made by people whose ancestors have been systematically reduced by images into objects in order to justify violence and repression enacted upon their bodies, communities, and histories.

As the archive begins to open and as filmmakers begin to find ways of intervening and engaging the archive, finding associations across archives that were once either impossible or invisible, Ranciere's *possessive spectator* becomes Bellours's *pensive spectator*<sup>141</sup> now able to engage with the materials that were once used to contain, control or oppress them. In our analysis, we will also find that these are not opposite sides of the spectrum: a spectator can move between the pensive and the possessive state, especially, perhaps, where the face-image is concerned. On the one hand, the reappropriation of face-images leads to a *thinking with the face-image*, but it also leads to a very material and literal taking of this image, as an act of reparations that are not given, but claimed. A self-reparation(s).

To continue thinking with the image of Dreyer's Joan of Arc, from the "first period" of importance for the face in film theory, and its reappropriation in *Vivre sa vie*, in the second period where the face is re-conceptualized in relation to cinema as mirror, we will now consider a recent reappropriation of this image in the work of the Mexican film collective Los Ingrávidos. In the video *Santa Juana de los Mataderos (Saint Juana of the Stockyards)*, Los Ingrávidos, 2015), freely accessible on the collective's Vimeo page, a scene from Dreyer's film is projected over a close-up of a piece of raw meat (Figure 0.13). On the soundtrack we hear what appears to be a news reporter

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<sup>140</sup> Aumont, *Du visage au cinéma*, 195. "The face has suffered everywhere; it has been cornered, doubted, denounced, exhausted by advertisements, by the arts, philosophy, and the documentary. In no other realm has the face been so violently affected as in cinema, the being of the face in time".

<sup>141</sup> Mulvey makes this distinction in *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, 2006.

announcing someone's death which is occurring before the reporter's eyes. Although no more context is provided, save for what an attuned ear might be able to catch in the poor sound quality of the voice recording, this video is made in the context of the rest of Los Ingrávidos video work, which is to say, in opposition to the aesthetics of Mexican television and mainstream cinema and as critical gestures towards the systematic killing of students and women (*femicidio*) in Mexico. Appropriation here becomes a way of returning to past images and creating associations between these images and new contexts, in this case, Bertolt Brecht's play of the same title from 1931, Dreyer's film from 1928, and the current and ongoing assassinations in Mexico. When a tear falls down Falconetti's cheek, it does so in response to the assassination which is being commented upon in the radio and "occurring" as if before her gaze. Her expression becomes a response to the injustice off-screen.



Figure 0.13. *Santa Juana de los Mataderos* (Los Ingrávidos, 2015)

While *Vivre sa vie*'s Nana looked towards the movie screen to understand her own character's fate through a process of identification (for Béla Balázs, identification was the absolute artistic novelty of cinema<sup>142</sup>), here Joan of Arc (now "Juana de los Mataderos") "listens" to a murder which takes place in real-life Mexico off-screen. The "realities" of the characters cross-over once again, but now the "reality" which faces Juana is the same one that surrounds the Mexican spectator. If Godard manipulated the text and image in *Vivre sa vie* to better fit Nana's predicament, here Los Ingrávidos substitute the original silent soundtrack with an entirely new one, and replace Dreyer's bare walls with the superimposition of a piece of meat. The *carnage* is not of an individual (Joan's), but in reference to the assassination of a collective of students. The well-known image of Joan of Arc is estranged. Instead of "Joan of Arc", she is now "Juana of the

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<sup>142</sup> In his essay "The Creative Camera" originally published in 1930, Balázs writes: "Our eye and with it our consciousness is identified with the characters in the film, we look at the world out of their eyes and have no angle vision of our own. We walk amid crowds, ride, fly or call with the hero and if one character looks into the other's eyes, he looks into our eyes from the screen, for, our eyes are in the camera and become identical with the gaze of the characters. They see with our eyes. Herein lies the psychological act of 'identification'", Balázs, "The Creative Camera", 127.

Mataderos”, or “Saint Joan of the Stockyards” (*Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe*), as Brecht’s book is titled. *Juana* is a spectator, crying when she hears the news of the murders. Her suffering is no longer her own, but rather the suffering of a survivor who is left to witness a horrible and tragic crime. Identification has been replaced with a *critical proximity* to the image<sup>143</sup>. Critical, because there is a distance that will never allow the viewer to identify with Juana and there is no other character (no Nana) to deflect identification; and proximity because these are materials we know, faces we know, murders we know, and –especially in the case of the assassinations—come directly from the viewer’s immediate context.

In contemporary experimental archival cinema, from the face to the face-image, we see a process of *critical healing* begin to take place. What are the images healing from? In the days of early cinema, the fragmentation of the human body anticipated by the evolution of the cinematographic language and the emergence of the close-up –for which war and violence were/are quite real perpetrators– provoked both fear and fascination, expressed in the form of a cinema of attractions. Today, many wars, genocides, and massacres later, the fragmentation of the body –for which the close-up is the best example– is met by the decay of the archive, and with it, the decay of memory in the service of a historical retelling which favors the winners. In *the time of the face-image*, however, a new context is provided for the image through montage and a *healing* can begin to take place *for an image* whose origin was rooted in violence<sup>144</sup>. As we will see, this “critical healing” takes place through a double process of *listening to face-images*, term which we borrow from author Tina Campt and for whom “listening” requires an “attunement to sonic frequencies of affect and impact”, which are “felt rather than heard”<sup>145</sup>, and *defamiliarization*, a term first introduced by the Soviet film critic Viktor Shklovsky<sup>146</sup> and most recently recovered by Grant<sup>147</sup>, who argues that defamiliarization is a form of dehabitualizing film and for allowing spectators to see something “as if for the first time” or as they haven’t seen it before. Through an intricate process of first listening and then defamiliarizing, experimental filmmakers today are opening a new chapter in the history of the face on film which is making faces *seen again* but not only as a visual experience for which the eyes are the first encounter with the image, but rather as an experience with sonic and tactile frequencies. In this new chapter, the face is no longer something that can be seen, but also heard, felt, touched by the spectator, in a conscious and critical film-viewing act. In this period artists are reclaiming faces, not as commercial objects, but as *critical amulets* in a collective process of healing.

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<sup>143</sup> Bruno Latour in an imagined conversation with Donna Haraway: Latour, Bruno. “Critical Distance or Critical Proximity?” Dialogue prepared for a volume in honor of Donna Haraway, edited by Sharon Ghamari. Unpublished. 2005.

<sup>144</sup> When we speak of violence here, not only do we mean the imperialist function of the shutter (Ariella Azoulay), but also the carceral apparatus of the film screen itself, evidenced in gestures of framing and illumination, as well as in the way images and sounds are “cut” together, often working coercively on the spectator for commercial ends.

<sup>145</sup> Campt, Tina, *Listening to Images* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017): 40.

<sup>146</sup> Shklovsky, Viktor, “Art as Technique”, in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. Lee T Lemon and Marion J Reis, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965).

<sup>147</sup> Grant, Catherine, “Screen studies as device?: Working through the video essay”, David Vilaseca Memorial Lecture (University of London, November 19, 2018); Grant, Catherine, “O ensaio audiovisual na era digital: investigação, pedagogia e ativismo” (Conference held at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa, September 26, 2019).

## Objectives and Hypothesis

Our main objective is to identify the role that face-images, as archival images that are reappropriated into new films and contexts, play in contemporary experimental archival films. While other studies on contemporary archival practices in cinema tend to emphasize what has been called the “resignification of the archive”, we believe that something else is at work in these films: it is *not exactly resignification*, which might imply that the new meanings come from their reworking and not from the material themselves, but that the archive is being “listened to” at last, opened in ways previously unseen and unheard, by filmmakers who are actively engaging the material through what are often experimental methodologies, *in collaboration with* the images and sounds themselves.

Our specific objectives include the exploration of the *face-image*, which we will propose here as a guiding concept. Different from what has been previously called “the face on film” or the *close-up*, the *face-image* is an object which is taken from one previous archive/context and put into another, expressively for the purpose of distancing and what we will call “critical proximity”<sup>148</sup> or, a contrary movement that we might call “affective distance”. A second specific objective is to understand how the face-image is being used in a film corpus of contemporary experimental archival films selected from the past two decades (2004-2018), while at the same time placing these uses in relation to practices from earlier periods in film history and cinematographic experimentation. A third specific objective is to identify, if possible, a “new” moment for the face-image in experimental archival cinema today and the characteristics of this image in film history and in a reckoning with the history of images.

To recapitulate, our first hypothesis concerning the face in film theory and film history is that the face is living a new period in film (following the 1920s and 1960-80s periods, identified by Thomas Elsaesser) as a reincarnated form which we shall call the *face-image*. The *face-image* is neither only an image nor only a face, but that it contains qualities and characteristics from the two objects (image and face) which make it unlike other archival images.

Our second hypothesis, which concerns reappropriation and found footage cinema, is that reappropriation today cannot be neatly divided into the classifications of documentary or experimental film, nor can the objectives of these films be understood solely in terms of nostalgia versus apocalypse, nor can the spectator be defined as either possessive or pensive. The face-image, as it is being reappropriated into experimental archival cinema today, becomes the space for another kind of exploration that is both possessive (in the sense of *a commons*, rather than private property) *and* pensive and that traverses both the affective and the critical distance necessary towards a critical healing.

Our third hypothesis is that the re-appropriation of the face-image in contemporary experimental film reveals a resurrection of film form and that the study of this re-appropriation might teach us something about how cinema has been transforming over time. With the reappropriation of the face-image in experimental archive cinema, questions begin to reappear

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<sup>148</sup> Latour, “Critical Distance or Critical Proximity?”.

regarding 1) the image status and 2) the relationship between images and people or society. ¿What do images and people share? ¿In which aspects can we say that the image “lives”? ¿Where does the agency of images lie? I consider the face-image a type of portal to rethink these questions which are relevant to the present as well as the future of images and our lives with images, our co-existence with them.

## Methodology

The methodology employed derives directly from the reappropriation practices we have discovered in our research. When we began to depart from questions regarding documentary vs. experimental, nostalgia vs. irony, we began to pay attention or listen to *what the filmmakers do to the images* –i.e., a certain ethics of care in the selection of and intervention on the materials– as well as to *the agency of the images themselves* –i.e., aspects to the archival images that begin to be uncovered as the materials are reappropriated into cinema. In other words, our research led us to discover and employ a methodology coherent with the one that the filmmakers use in their filmmaking practice. That is, as a practice grounded in an *affective proximity* both between the materials *and* in the way that the filmmaker encounters the materials in his/her practice.<sup>149</sup>

Our methodology therefore includes not only film analysis of the films in the corpus, but also research about the origins and migration of the images themselves, i.e., what Tina Campt means when she asks: “What had to have happened for me to encounter this image?”<sup>150</sup>. “What had to have happened” refers to not only the conditions which made this image possible in the first place (when it was taken, by whom, under what criteria and for what purpose) but also the entire migration of this image, since its creation, until now. Campt works with images she encounters in archives, while we are working with films which reappropriate these images. Consequently, what has “happened” to the images also includes this new reappropriation. Therefore, we will re-

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<sup>149</sup> The concept of “affective proximity”, which is attributed to filmmaker John Akomfrah has been appropriated by fellow filmmaker Arthur Jafa in his discussion on his own work in reappropriation and found footage: “So if you got one layer of objects in affective proximity, and now you’ve got a completely different layer of objects, it’s like two strands of things that are functioning in affective proximity, and then those strands start functioning vertically in affective proximity from one another, and all that stuff is purely accidental. Which is why I think it’s fresh, too, because it doesn’t feel programmatic, it doesn’t feel premeditated. It’s got a certain kind of volatility about it. I think that kind of volatility lends itself to things being seen while they don’t exhaust themselves. It’s operating outside of the realm of what you can consciously control. So that’s something I’m very committed to trying to figure out how to factor in. Because really it’s just a part of black methodology. It’s part of Black methodology so it really doesn’t matter if I’m doing something that’s essentially a documentary like *Dreams* or something like *Love Is the Message*, which is essentially a found footage film, or a narrative feature. The question is how do you bring these things to bear.” in: Da Costa, Cassie. “Interview: Arthur Jafa”, *Film Comment*, May 8 2017. John Akomfrah speaks of “affective proximity” here: Akomfrah, John. “In Conversation with Fawz Kabra”, *Ocula Magazine*, July 5, 2018.

<sup>150</sup> In the original quote Campt asks, “What had to have happened for me to encounter this photograph?” In: Wallis, Brian. “The Sound of Defiance: Interview with Tina Campt”, *aperture*, October 25, 2017. This question is similar to what Georges Didi-Huberman has proposed in his book *Arde la imagen* (2012:18): “cada vez que ponemos los ojos en una imagen, deberíamos pensar en las condiciones que impidieron su destrucción, su desaparición. Es tan fácil destruir imágenes, en cada época ha sido algo tan normal”. The key difference is that while Didi-Huberman emphasizes “los ojos” (the eyes, or the gaze), Campt gives importance to other senses and, in particular, listening, as a method for entering or opening the archive.

elaborate Camp's question –and our methodology for looking at the archival materials reappropriated in the films we study here– for our purposes and propose the following question: *What had to have happened for me to encounter this face-image?*

This question leads us to study not only how the images and sounds are being reappropriated into these contemporary works, but also the back-stories, the behind-the-scenes, the history of the materials that many times these works do not include or mention. In doing so, we discover not only that which is generally called “the context” of the materials, but also we begin to understand what *the person* in the image (the subject) was *going through* when the image was taken. As this becomes known to us in our process, *what is done to the images* in the reappropriation takes on a new meaning and the person, in the image, begins to *speak*. Then it is our turn to *listen*. This is why Camp's call to “listen to images” becomes so powerful for what we are trying to do here. She offers clues as to how this listening may take place in the archive; but there are strategies for “listening” that also take place in the film-viewing process, and in our position as spectators. Steyerl's description of the “bruises” in the image and Raymond Bellour's “wounds” give us strategies for “listening” to the images and “seeing” their history *inscribed in layers/strata* on the image itself (in its new forms). One of the questions that we have sustained throughout the thesis in our examination of the films themselves is *where are the bruises in the face-image and sound?*

Another method for our work might be best described as a kind of “material thinking” with the films themselves. Barbara Bolt proposes the methodology of “theorizing out of practice” and “material thinking” (Paul Carter's term<sup>151</sup>), as opposed to applying theory to practice<sup>152</sup>. Again, the application of this methodology in our research is two-fold. First, it can be observed in my approach to film analysis which prioritizes the films – “how it is, what it is, even that it is what it is, rather than to show what it means”, to use Susan Sontag's words from her 1966 essay “Against Interpretation”<sup>153</sup>– over a pre-established theoretical system of interpretation. All concepts discussed in this dissertation come from the films themselves and are not imposed on the films as a way of interpretation. So therefore, the material I am thinking with are the films themselves. Secondly, by “material thinking” I also refer to a very practical engagement with archives and the practice of reappropriation itself. In the beginning stages of my research, I visited as many archives as I could, including the Anthology Film Archives in New York City and the ANIM archives in Lisbon, Portugal. I also began to collect a small archive here in the city of Guayaquil, where I live

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<sup>151</sup> While for Paul Carter, “material thinking” is “what begins to happen wherever artists talk about what they are doing, in that simple but enigmatic step, joining hand, eye and mind in a process of material thinking” (Carter, 2004: xiii, italics added), Bolt de-emphasizes the “talk” and prioritizes the artist's relation to the materials and processes of practice. She writes: “Material thinking offers us a way of considering the relations that take place within the very process or tissue of making. In this conception the materials are not just passive objects to be used instrumentally by the artist, but rather the materials and processes of production have their own intelligence that come into play in interaction with the artist's creative intelligence”. Therefore she emphasizes the intelligence of the materials themselves, which allow for “material thinking” to take place. See: Bolt, Barbara, “Materializing Pedagogies”, *Working Papers in Art and Design* (2006).

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Sontag, Susan, *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966).

and work, which was born out of the Home Movie Day events that I organized with Martin Baus and our collective Guayaquil Analógico in 2018 and 2019. The practice-based research developed with the collective has given me a technical and artisanal familiarity with analogue filmmaking and film processing, as well as with micro-archival film practices of collection and projection for the community, that has elevated by awareness of what it means to work with analogue archive film materials<sup>154</sup>.

As I moved forward, I also began to reappropriate archival images in my own film practice, materially exploring many of the ideas that I came across in my research. Some of these works are experimental films, including *Retrato lento (Slow Portrait)*, (2018), made with the same archival materials from my film *Comuna Engabao* mentioned in the beginning, and *E Unum Pluribus* (2018), in which I trace a coin of the abolitionist Frederic Douglass over and over again, in a kind of ritual of mechanical reproduction. Other works I made are classified as video essay or videographic criticism, as they recycle images and sounds from other films, including *Walking or Weeping* (2020), *Woody Strode/River Crossing* (2020), *Picturing the Collective* (2021), and *Derry Girls* (2021). I believe that my background in Film Studies and experience as a filmmaker, critic and video essayist have provided a particular point of view for my film analysis, which is very much constructed by someone who works and experiments with the editing of images and sounds.

Another way in which I practiced “material thinking” was through thinking with the texts and images associated with the face in film as moveable, transportable and interchangeable fragments. As I began my research by reading literature on images of the face throughout art history, including painting, photography and cinema, but also in anthropology, criminology, physiognomy; continuing with literature concerning the face on film, beginning from the early 1920s to the present, I collected quotes and fragments directly describing or defining the face, which I then re-arranged on the page. Gradually, new associations began to appear between authors, images, words, and ideas. This was one of the first things that I did, at the very beginning of my research, as a way of brain-storming and connecting ideas. I also began working directly with film stills that I would rearrange on the page in different combinations, finding new associations between films, paintings, photographs, and other types of images. I believe that this re-ordering of the materials (images, texts, authors) has given me the opportunity to visualize and create unexpected associations between films, authors, and ideas.

Finally, I also engaged with the filmmakers themselves, contacting them via email and then interviewing (in person or through email), whenever possible, in order to understand the technical aspects of their experimentations as well as the research, notes, methods, questions, and process behind their films. In many cases, I looked for academic articles or interviews that had already been published by or with these filmmakers and artists. I knew early on that I wanted to include, as much as possible, the filmmakers’ voices and reflections in my research as a valuable resource for understanding the processes and thinking behind the making of these films. My interview questions centered on their processes, in order to understand not only the technical aspects of

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<sup>154</sup> Gills, Libertad, “Cine casero en Guayaquil: Nuevos contextos para una proyección colectiva”, *Fuera de Campo*, 3(1) (2019).

reappropriation but also the vocabulary employed by the filmmakers in the discussion of their work. As well as speaking with filmmakers about their practice, I visited art galleries and museum exhibitions and attended documentary and experimental film festivals and film programs to identify artists, films, and methods of working with face images in art. I participated in seminars, study groups, conferences and other academic and artistic spaces in order to explore contemporary ways of thinking about the archive, images, sounds, and experimental film. All of these encounters and practices make up my chosen hybrid methodology and have enriched my research, learning and life experience throughout my dissertation work.

## **The Films**

The process of constructing a film corpus has been complex but the objective was clear from the very beginning: I am not only interested in experimental reappropriation films that include faces (as archives are growing and becoming more accessible there are many films that fit this profile, and each day more), I am interested in films where the face-image is *the central image of study and experimentation*, that is, where the face-image is the object of artistic and formal exploration. Now, the list of possible films becomes much smaller, but then I am also limiting my study in another way: I am not only interested in films that explore only a technical or aesthetic question, however interesting the result may be, but rather where the question under observation is political. To give an example, there is a nice film titled *Portrait* (Douglas Urbank, 2019) which is a five-minute sequence of faces that have been cut out of different 16mm stills, halved, and then pasted together into a new sequence. We consider this film to be a technical or aesthetic exploration in which there is a visual treatment of the face. This film, even though it is centered on the face-image, has been excluded from our corpus because the question which guides its making might be considered a technical one. Whereas, another filmmaker, for example *strata of natural history* (Jeannette Muñoz, 2012) works with colonial archival images of Indigenous people –they are not only faces, but specific faces, with a context that has been previously researched and chosen by the filmmaker– and explores the face-image but the *question that guides her work is political* (regarding colonization, memory, space, time, experience) and the face-image becomes an image which can contain all of that. Throughout this thesis we will focus on the latter of these practices, but time and again we will come back to films like Urbank’s to refer to specific technical-aesthetic aspects and formal explorations in rephotography and montage.

Our corpus consists of films where the recycled faces have been removed from their original contexts (be they police archives, home movies, Wanted Ads, etc.) and re-contextualized by the montage into a new relationship with historical time. Therefore, we are interested in films that do the work of thinking about the image in relation to history, beyond what the original face was intended to do and/or the intention behind why it was made and for what purpose. The criteria is that the films be made through a methodological process of “listening to images” which can be felt/heard/revealed in how the images are allowed to “speak” in the new montage.



Another criterion is that the films participate in defamiliarization strategies in order to *make the face-images strange*. By this, I mean that the face-images are not exactly as they were in the original archive. They have been interfered either manually, digitally, in the image itself, in the sound, or in the editing, in a process of defamiliarization.

The films that we will analyze in this dissertation include: the 40-minute German essay film *Aufschub (Respite)*, Harun Farocki, 2007) which recycles the Westerbork Archive of 1944; the 11-minute Chile/Switzerland travelogue film shot on 16mm *strata of natural history* (Jeannette Muñoz, 2012) which rephotographs images taken of the Kawéskar in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century; the trilogy of feature-length films made by Portuguese filmmaker Susana de Sousa Dias with the PIDE archive between 2005 and 2016, with special emphasis on *48* (2010) and *Luz Obscura* (2016); the nine-minute video *Valeria* (2016) made with glitched home movie footage by the Mexican film collective Los Ingrávidos; two films made by Mexican artist Annalisa D. Quagliata, the two-minute *Se busca (un mar de ausencia)* (2016) and the three-minute *Ñores (sin señalar)* (2016); the nine-minute *Familiar* (Paz Encina, 2015), made with archival material from Paraguay's dictatorship; *Reckless Eyeballing* (Christopher Harris, 2004, 13 minutes) made with materials of various origins, including Angela Davis' mug shot, a trailer of *Foxy Brown*, and images from *Birth of a Nation*; Ja'Tovia Gary's six-minute *An Ecstatic Experience* (2015), also a collage film, made with materials from diverse sources; 18 minutes from Jean-Luc Godard's *The Image Book* (2018) in which a photograph taken by Dirk Alvermann is reappropriated several times; and a series of three short films made by UK artist Onyeka Igwe, primarily *Her Name in My Mouth* (2017) and *Specialised Technique* (2018). All of the films span between 2004 and 2018, and their durations vary between as short as two minutes and as long as 93.

After having limited the corpus in this way, a few things have been revealed. Many of the films analyzed are made by directors who have explored the face over time and in more than one film, as a question that they return to time and again in their work. This finding reinforces our hypothesis that the face-image is an object of contemplation –and a question– for filmmakers in which the reappropriation (as a form of solution to a problem) can take many different forms. These filmmakers and artists find in the face-image the possibility to *deepen their cinematographic explorations* be it in relation to the image itself, to sound studies, or to exploring the limits of the frame, etc. As a result, many filmmakers included have also written about their work and even contributed to important discussions regarding film studies, colonial studies, documentary studies, and archival studies. The “academic filmmaker” profile comes up repeatedly in our corpus beginning with Harun Farocki and Susana de Sousa Dias; this is even more present in the final Chapter, in the work of Onyeka Igwe, Belinda Kazeem-Kaminski (*Unearthing. In Conversation*, 2017), and Raquel Schefer (*Avo, Muidumbe/Avo, Granny*, 2009), whose films are made in the context of their academic studies and will also be analyzed in relation to Igwe's work in Chapter 7.

Another discovery is that many of the films we have decided to include are directed by women. This is interesting and noteworthy for many reasons. First, because the close-up has been historically associated with women (let us recall, momentarily, the face of Lillian Gish in D.W.

Griffith's films –for which soft-focus was invented, or the faces of Renee Falconetti and Anna Karina). Mulvey and Doane have written about the association between female subjects and close-ups in relation to visual narrative, stardom, and commodification<sup>155</sup>. Therefore, it is very interesting indeed to consider how women work with these *after-images*, not in the position of subjects on screen, but as directors and editors. Secondly, the presence of women directors in our dissertation speaks to, perhaps, the fact that our study focuses on films which might be considered “montage films” or films that are “made in the editing”. In the early days of cinema, montage was historically considered a “woman’s job”. Today, in the age of reproduction, the industry-centered divide of filmmaking into the distinct categories of preproduction, production, and postproduction, are often redundant. In the reworking of archival materials, production can often be postproduction, and vice-versa. It is significant to observe that in all the films included in our corpus, the filmmaker is the editor. This, in itself, brings attention to the importance of montage in our film corpus.

### Description of Chapters and Structure of Dissertation

Each chapter has a double architecture, organized by 1) the typology of face-image that we will study, and 2) a film or body of films in which this typology is aesthetically reworked. We analyze the image’s “past lives”, or what happened to the image from the moment it was created to the moment that it arrives at this new reappropriation. We analyze how the experimental filmmakers works with these images, how they turn them into face-images, how they then “listen” to the face-image and rework it into their new film.

In the introductory Chapter, “**Settela’s Nomadic Face-Image Across Time: Unlearning the Face-Image in *Aufschub (Respite, Harun Farocki, 2007)***”, we raise questions that will be useful for guiding the chapters that follow, namely: what makes the face-image different from other archival images? Can face-images “speak”? What is it about the face that makes viewers feel that they can be interpreted and studied for meaning? And how does the (re)ordering of the face-image (its movement and “nomadic” quality) change what is “seen” and “heard” in the image? This Chapter takes as its object of analysis the migration of the face-image of nine-year-old Settela Steinbach from the Westerbork Archive of 1944, as it has been appropriated over time and throughout film history, starting with *Nuit et brouillard* (Alain Resnais, 1956), then in *Settela, gezicht van het verleden* (Cherry Duyns, 1994), and most recently in *Aufschub*, where we center our analysis. Until 1994, this image was misread by many Dutch as a symbol of what the Germans did to the Jews in The Netherlands, but as a result of Dutch journalist Aad Wagenaar’s research, it was found that the child was actually not Jewish, but rather one of the hundreds of thousands of Sinti (Gypsy) and Roma exterminated in Nazi camps during the war. In this Chapter we borrow

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<sup>155</sup> Mulvey, Laura, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, *Screen* 16(3) (1975); Doane, Mary Ann, “Veiling Over Desire: Close-ups of the Woman” in *Femme Fatales: feminism, film theory, psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Mulvey, 1996.

Ariella Azoulay's call to "unlearn imperialism" and argue that Farocki's film *unlearns the face-image*—as it has been constructed over film history to become a symbol of Jewish extermination—through the mechanisms of *re-ordering* and *repetition*. For Kuleshov, the ordering of images gave the images their meaning, and specifically, as far as the face was concerned, it gave the spectator/reader of the images a way of interpreting/imagining what the face was feeling or thinking. In Farocki's montage practice, the ordering of the images gives the image the ability to *say something else*, to change direction and become an image of speculation, of what may have been possible had the train headed to a concentration camp changed direction. This Chapter enters in dialogue with Thomas Elsaesser, Nora Alter, and Andreja Zivnik's writing on the politics of the face, which in turn draws from Lacan, Foucault, and Didi-Huberman. We complement our study of *Aufschub* with the analysis of sequences from *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* (Farocki, 1988), *Interface* (Farocki, 1995), *Khaira's Smile* (Ariella Azoualy, 2002) and *Henchman Glance* (Chris Marker, 2008). With this introductory Chapter, we begin to understand the face-image as a migratory image that can continue to open questions for the spectator regarding the image and the archive in its multiple and even contradictory readings.

In the second Chapter, we will go back to early photography, in order to make the case that the face-image is a layered image, a palimpsest of juxtaposed geographies and times. "**Face-Image Strata: Material Temporalities, Co-Existence, and Double Exposure as Double Death in strata of natural history (Jeannette Muñoz, 2012)**" looks at the reappropriation of photographic portraits of indigenous Kawéskar kidnapped at the turn of the 19th Century and taken to Germany to be displayed in human zoos. This Chapter draws from Ronald Kay's writings on photography in order to reflect on the relationship between photography and cinema, intersected by questions of disappearance and appearance, death and reanimation, convergence and co-existence. We begin from the understanding that the emergence of photography and eventually cinema is intimately connected to the torture, killing, and exhibition of Indigenous people and animals, and we explore how Muñoz's appropriation of the archive sheds light on this truth while opening the door for other possibilities for decolonizing the archive with cinema's "tool box". How can images turn against their colonial function? While previous and subsequent chapters focus much more on practices of montage, this chapter is dedicated to a practice of appropriation of the archive which requires 16mm filming and *in-camera* editing, including questions of framing and deframing, lighting and opacity, focus and images out of focus, exposure and double exposure. These practices will open up an important reflection on where photography and cinematography meet, as well as where cinematography continues to excavate deeper into questions of representation and image materiality introduced by photography. This discussion is useful not only for Chapters 4, 5, and 6, which all in one way or another reflect on the reappropriation of photographic images, but also more generally in order to understand that the appropriation of photographs in cinema opens up important questions regarding film form. Contextualizing this film within a history of "cine-zoo" (Anat Pick), we believe that this film offers a "way out" of more anthropocentric approximations to the face-image, in order to reveal the intricate ways in which multispecies and multiterritories

continue to coexist, even beyond their “double death” (Deborah Rose). “Double death”, as we have proposed to use it in this Chapter, also becomes a very useful way for thinking about what happens when photographs pass again under the cinematographic camera in acts of appropriation made with in-camera montage. It is especially powerful when the subjects represented in the images are the Kawéskar, who have experienced “double death” in the sense proposed by Rose, and when the film becomes a way of “staying with the trouble” of their untimely double death for profit (Donna Haraway). We complement our analysis of *strata* with the analysis of sequences from *Electrocution of an Elephant* (Edison, 1901), *La course de Taureux* (Myriam and Pierre Braunberger, 1951), *Diarios patagónicos* (Narcisa Hirsch, 1972-73), and *Calafate, zoológicos humanos* (Hans Mülchi, 2010).

The third Chapter, **“Opening Up the Archive, Opening Up the Face: Freeing the Arrested Face-Image in Susana de Sousa Dias’ Portuguese Dictatorship Trilogy”**, turns to the criminal portraits or anthropometric “mugshots” taken during the Portuguese dictatorship which have been cinematographically explored over a decade by filmmaker Susana de Sousa Dias, starting in *Natureza Morta* (2005), followed by *48* (2010), and *Luz Obscura* (2016). De Sousa Dias insists that mugshots are not just portraits: they can be opened up, made to be seen again and for something new to be seen each time. Through cinematic elements like sound and duration, these previously still images begin to move and reveal their time. In the process, pre-established notions of face as presence, face as neutral, face as identification and recognition, and face as fixture, are challenged by the face-image’s transportability, mobility, and shifting temporalities. We include the writings of authors Susana Viegas and Carolin Overhoff who have offered much to the initial analysis of the first two films in a Portuguese context, but also add to the discussion ideas and concepts from Roland Barthes, Viktor Shklovsky, Laura Mulvey and Donna Haraway, to make the case that these films are more than just “evidence” of the fact that the dictatorship has been inscribed on the faces of the Portuguese; these films are also formal explorations in the co-existence of temporalities as well as in defamiliarization aesthetics. We bring in *Disappearing Music for Face* (Mieko “Chieko” Shiomi, 1966), *48 Kopfe Aus Dem Szondi Test* (Kurt Kren, 1960), and *AI* (Lucrecia Martel, 2019) to explore these themes further. These secondary films allow us to posit defamiliarization as a powerful tool for “opening up” the face-image and the archive, and for exploring the intersections between stillness and movement, machine and organism, face and image.

Chapter Four, **“Refusing Nostalgia and Defending Voicelessness in Feminist Avant-Garde and Experimental Film Reappropriations of Faces and Mug shots from Home Movies”**, explores the ideological function of the mug shot and face-image in home movies and posits that contemporary experimental cinema can liberate these images from nostalgia (Frederic Jameson), primarily through a turn away from ocularcentrism and towards an experimentation with sound. Beginning with Patricia Zimmermann and Roger Odin’s writings on the home movie, we make the case that the home movie is inherently ideological. Leaning on Agamben’s definition of

gesture, we agree with Fred Camper that the mugshot is the home movie's defining gesture. We turn to Pooga Rangan's exploration of voicelessness in *Jennifer, Where Are You?* (Leslie Thornton, 1981) and argue that one way to resist the nostalgia imbued in home movies is to disassociate image and sound, thereby defamiliarizing the image. We look at defamiliarization strategies employed in experimental reappropriations coming from Mexico, including *Valeria* (Los Ingrávidos, 2017), *Se Busca, un mar de ausencia* (Annalisa D. Quagliata, 2016), *Ñores (sin señalar)* (Quagliata, 2016), and *Fantasmas del Adiós* (Ximena Cuevas, 2019), and borrow from Hito Steyerl's definition of *glitch* and Legacy Russell's *glitch feminism* to understand digital distortion as a form of refusal. We contextualize these films within Cristina Rivera Garza's concept of *disappropriation* in order to understand reappropriation as a collective citation practice and dialogue with the dead. Finally, we study *Familiar* (Paz Encina, 2016), a film that combines home movie material with police archival images and that provides an interesting connection between the themes explored in this Chapter with those discussed in Chapter Three. We posit that these films reappropriate voiceless face-images in order to bring attention to what is missing in the image and the sound, and in doing so, facilitate a critical reading of the archive.

Chapter Five, “**Black Radical After-Images for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Century: The Fugitive Face in *Reckless Eyeballing* (Christopher Harris, 2004) and *An Ecstatic Experience* (Ja'Tovia Gary, 2015)**” looks at the reappropriations of revolutionary face-images from the 20th Century, namely that of Angela Davis and Assata Shakur. Through the abolitionist lens of Frederick Douglass who developed a theory on portraiture (in photography) in the 19th Century, this Chapter asks how cinema can use its language of domination to break that language from within. We argue that *Reckless Eyeballing* does this through the appropriation of face-images as carriers of gazes. By taking "a chain of looks" between Angela Davis (from her mug shot and FBI “Wanted” ads), Pam Grier (from the Blaxploitation film *Foxy Brown*), and “Gus” (from *The Birth of a Nation*) to the limit, *Reckless Eyeballing* proposes an “alternative cinema” that breaks with Hollywood cinema's uses of domination through cinematographic language. In this film, repetition with a difference becomes a rhetorical strategy and a way to subvert associations made by mass-media images that are often taken for granted by the spectator. The face-image is stripped of its potential *glamour* and beauty (John Berger), rephotographed so many times until the image is no longer even recognizable as a face, and so that the face's *aura* is transposed into the materiality of the image and sound itself. We discuss this film in relation to *BLACK TV* (Aldo Tambellini, 1968), *BLACK PLUS X* (Tambellini, 1966), *Did You Wonder Who Fired the Gun?* (Travis Wilkerson, 2017), *LBJ* (Santiago Álvarez, 1968), and *A Willing Suspension of Disbelief + Photography and Fetish* (Christopher Harris, 2014). We also bring in *An Ecstatic Experience* (Ja'Tovia Gary, 2015), a film that powerfully associates the image of Assata Shakur's face with that of actress Ruby Dee, in an act of radical memory-building and time-crossing between images. Drawing from bell hooks, Tina Campt, Cedric J. Robinson, Frederic Douglass, Angela Davis, and Assata Shakur, this Chapter makes the case for futurity in the face-image as a radical form of reparations in cinema.

Chapter Six, “**The Making of Samantar: Digital Reinscription as Anti-Botox in the Reappropriation of the Face-Image in *Le livre d'image* (*The Image Book*, Jean-Luc Godard, 2018)**”, looks at the face-image of an anonymous Algerian freedom fighter, taken from a photograph by the German photographer Dirk Alvermann and reappropriated (along with fragments from Albert Cossery’s 1984 novel *Une ambitions dans le desert*) into *The Image Book* through multiple processes of digital reinscription. We make the case that these reappropriations further explore and reconfigure questions raised in the previous Chapters regarding ordering, repetition with variation, and re-framing and re-photography of the face-image, as well as introduce other aspects of reappropriation including digital reinscription and the uses of voice-over. What are the elements that are unique to the digital medium? And how do these elements transform, heighten, lower, build, destroy, the face-image and the place of the face-image in the re-inscription of history? How do experimental approximations to digital cinema transform the face-image and open its possibilities for appropriation and resignification in the digital era? Godard’s appropriation challenges pre-established notions of the necessity for archival preservation and timelessness. His archival practice is interested in the rupture of the archive and in making visible the time that has passed. As such, we consider this digital reinscription a kind of *anti-botox* of the face-image. Godard treats the face-image as something that is unstable, unfixed, ever-changing, ever-growing. We understand that what the face may communicate is not only a question of ordering (as both Kuleshov and Farocki explored) but also of the processes through which the image has undergone in its transportation from one archive and one source to another. In this chapter, we enter into dialogue with Roland Barthes, Hito Steyerl, and Serge Daney, among others.

Chapter Seven, “**Reading the Face-Image for Performance: Experimental Autoethnography, Sensory Reenactment and The Third Eye (& Voice) in Onyeka Igwe’s *Aba Women’s War Series***”, asks what becomes possible when the face-image is read for performance, or when it is understood as a “staged face”. Drawing primarily from Fatimah Tobing Rony’s *The Third Eye*, in relation to Barbara Myerhoff’s “third voice” and Zora Neale Hurston’s alternation between “I” and “you” in her writing, we ask what possibilities for experimental filmmaking are opened up by the “third eye” and voice when it comes to the appropriation of archival materials today? How are archival materials “looked at” /and listened to by such an eye/voice? Our Chapter centers on Onyeka Igwe’s *Aba Women’s War Series*, especially *Her Name in My Mouth* (2017) and *Specialised Technique* (2018), films made in an academic framework in which the filmmaker enters in dialogue with the archival materials through a shared “blood memory” with the people filmed by the Colonial Film Unit in Nigeria. We also look at *Unearthing. In Conversation* (Belinda Kazeem-Kaminski, 2017), *Avo (Muidumbe)/Avo (Granny)* (Raquel Schefer, 2009), *It Is a Crime* (Meena Nanji, 1996), and *Halimuhfack* (Christopher Harris, 2016) to explore recent possibilities for autoethnography from a collective and critical position.

## Chapter 1: Settela's Nomadic Face-Image Across Time: Unlearning the Face-Image in *Aufschub* (Respite, Harun Farocki, 2007)

You've got to undo it, like you undo stitching.  
-Arundhati Roy<sup>1</sup>

So you should simply make the instant  
Stand out, without in the process hiding  
What you are making it stand out from.  
-Bertolt Brecht<sup>2</sup>

In an archive without close-ups, suddenly appears an image of nine-year-old Settela Steinbach's face between train doors in a station in Amsterdam on her way to the Westerbork camp in the Netherlands<sup>3</sup>. The source is an unfinished film known as the Westerbork archival footage, commissioned by the camp's commander in chief Albert Konrad Gemmecker<sup>4</sup>, filmed by camp inmate and photographer Rudolf Breslauer on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1944<sup>5</sup>, and granted world document heritage by UNESCO in 2017. This image has traveled the globe, used and misused in multiple contexts and media, including newspapers, schoolbooks, documentaries, history books, exhibitions, and art works<sup>6</sup>. In fact, as scholar Thomas Elsaesser has written, "...the single frame has been reproduced a hundred times on book covers and posters, so much so that it has become, paradoxically, almost as common an icon as Churchill's Victory salute, or –dare one say– James Dean. It is indeed an image to haunt the mind, never forgotten, and which the Jewish community, furthermore, is determined not to have forgotten"<sup>7</sup>. It has been referred to by Cornelia Brink as an "icon of extermination" and included in pedagogue Matthias Heyl's

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<sup>1</sup> Roy, Arundhati, "A Conversation: The Pandemic is a Portal, with Imani Perry", *Haymarket Books* (April 23, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Brecht, Bertolt, "Four Theatre Poems: Portrayal of Past and Present in One", *Bertolt Brecht: Poems 1913-1956*, ed. John Willett and Ralph Manheim (New York: Routledge, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> "...Única imagen de un convoy filmada en plano cercano y único cara a cara en el conjunto de las pruebas conservadas". Lindeperg, Sylvie, *El camino de las imágenes: Cuatro historias de rodaje en la primavera-verano de 1944* (2013), trans. Natalia Taccetta (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2019): 156.

<sup>4</sup> While the majority of the film was forgotten, the images of the train deportations were used as incriminatory evidence in Gemmecker's trial, *ibid*: 134.

<sup>5</sup> Scholar Rebecka Katz Thor notes that many different edits of the film exist, including one version that Commandant Gemmecker allegedly transported to the Hague in 1946 (a statement that has never been confirmed as the material was never found), and two versions that were edited by Wim Loeb, former employee of Breslauer, of which only one has been found. The film that exists is a copy (an edited version), except for a small fragment, and two additional reels contain unedited original material. The film that Farocki reuses is, as she points out, an "edit of edits", and therefore his film "stems from an already constructed narrative and storyline", which makes it different from other works where more remains of the raw material. Thor, Rebecka Katz, *Beyond the Witness: Holocaust Representation and the Testimony of Images*, 2018, 83.

<sup>6</sup> de Jong, Steffi, "Exhibiting: The Witness to History as a Museum Object", *The Witness as Object: Video Testimonies in Holocaust Museums* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018): 150.

<sup>7</sup> Elsaesser, Thomas, "'One Train May Be Hiding Another': Private History, Memory and National Identity", in *The Low Countries: Arts and Society in Flanders and the Netherlands –a Yearbook, 1996-1997*, ed. Josef Delau et al. (Flanders: Flemish-Netherlands Foundation "Stichting Ons Erfdeel", 1996): 9.

list on “six pictures that come to everybody’s mind when thinking about the Holocaust”<sup>8</sup>. Until 1994, this image was understood by many Dutch as a symbol of what the Germans did to the Jews in The Netherlands. Compelled by the face, Dutch journalist Aad Wagenaar began to research the child’s identity and, with the help of experts, found that her name was Anna Maria Settela Steinbach and that the transport was not the one that had departed Westerbork in February for Auschwitz but rather the one that had left on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1944, taking gypsies in Westerbork to the Bergen Belsen camp. As a result, it was discovered that the child was actually not Jewish, but rather one of the hundreds of thousands of Sinti (Gypsy) and Roma exterminated in Nazi camps during the war.

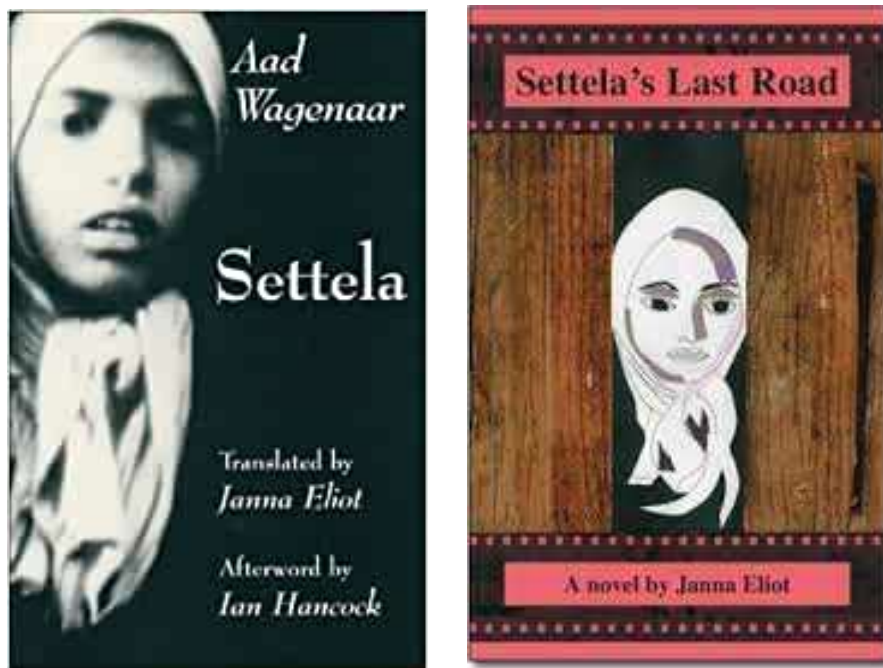


Figure 1.1. On left, *Settela* by Aad Wagenaar (1994), translated by Janna Eliot, who then wrote a fictional novel (image on the right) based on Wagenarr’s research titled *Settela’s Last Road*, published in 2008.

It has been argued by Romani scholars that the story of Settela, of her misidentification and subsequent discovery, “is in some ways axiomatic of the history of the Romani Holocaust in general –unclear, hidden, obscured by resistance to recognise this terrible episode from scholars and researchers for what it was”<sup>9</sup>. The story behind the image is also the story of how the extermination of Sinti and Roma during the Second World War has gone under researched, ignored, and relatively unknown. But the story of Settela’s image is also indicative of the power of faces in the archive, and our desire, as spectators, to read faces, assigning them identities that they very well may not have, turning them into icons and symbols of communities where they do not necessarily belong, becoming overburdened by political agendas and dominant narratives. What we have here is also a story of how images resist over time and across media,

<sup>8</sup> De Jong, “Exhibiting: The Witness to History as a Museum Object”, 151.

<sup>9</sup> Marsh, Adrian, “The Mechanics of Marginalisation; the Gypsies and genocide, 1900-2011 (O Baro Parrajmos)”, Unpublished lecture (2011): 1.



how images come back, like fungi, often when we least expect them, to teach us something new.

In this Chapter, we will look at the migration of this face-image in three different appropriations across cinematic history, beginning with Alain Resnais' *Nuit et brouillard* (*Night and Fog*, 1956), the most well-known documentary to re-use the Westerbork film archive<sup>10</sup>, continuing with *Settela, gezicht van het verleden* (*Settela: Face of the Past*, Cherry Duyns, 1994), a Dutch documentary made for television, and ending with *Aufschub* (*Respite*, Harun Farocki, 2007), a silent found-footage essay film where the material recycled is not really "found" at all<sup>11</sup>. Although Sylvie Lindeperg has also written about the image of Settela across these three films in her very helpful essay titled "Settela: destin d'une « image icône »" from 2011<sup>12</sup>, she centers her text on the conflictive relationship between what the image's photographer intended to document versus the life that the image has acquired in its diverse migrations and forms. We are also interested in how the image has migrated in these three films, however, we will place particular emphasis on the last of these migrations (*Aufschub*) where we believe the image is finally addressed *as an image*, and not only as the image of Settela. We will argue that something changes from one appropriation of the face-image to the next and that this transformation tells us something not only about how we think about the archive and images, but also about the particular power of face-images in the archive. In this first Chapter, we will pose questions about faces in archives in order to explore what might make them unlike other archival images.

This Chapter will ask what makes the face-image a powerful archival image, capable of inciting all kinds of interpretations, questions, and formal explorations. How does the face-image rewrite the "contract" between spectator and film? How does it establish or provoke identification with one group of people while at the same time excluding others? What forms of knowledge(s) does the face-image contain and how is this knowledge used and challenged by film form? We will focus our analysis on key texts written about Farocki's film, with special attention to Thomas Elsaesser's writings and Nora Alter's critique of voice and sound in Farocki's previous work. *How does Aufschub "unlearn" Settela's face-image?* What are the processes, traditions, and histories that must be undone in order to understand this image as the result of a series of imperial practices that continue to reproduce imperial forms of power? At the same time, we will begin to ask if face-images can "speak for themselves", and if so, where does their agency lie? The questions raised in this first chapter will continue to guide the rest

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<sup>10</sup> According to researcher Fabian Schmidt, the Westerbork footage was used in documentaries since 1945. It is only after the appearance of the footage in *Nuit et brouillard* in 1955, however, that it became more regularly used in documentaries and film-essays. Schmidt writes that most of these early documentaries do not name Westerbork as a source, and use the footage in an illustrative manner. He cites two examples, *Auf den Spuren des Henkers* (Schier-Gribowskis, 1961) and *Ein Tagebuch für Anne Frank* (Joachim Hellwigs, 1958). The second, in particular, uses footage from the Westerbork footage to illustrate the arrival of Jews in Auschwitz, which would become a common mispractice, repeated in films like *Mein Kampf* (1960), *The 81st Blow* (1974), *Der Gelbe Stern* (1981), *Pillar of Fire* (1981) and *Genocide* (1982). Schmidt, Fabian, "The Westerbork Film Revisited: Provocance, The Re-Use of Archive Material and Holocaust Remembrances", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, no. 40/4 (2020): 16-17.

<sup>11</sup> Elsaesser highlights this fact: "The Westerbork footage is not 'found footage' and its makers are not anonymous". Elsaesser, Thomas, "Returning to the Past its Own Future: Harun Farocki's *Respite*", *Research in Film and History*, Issue 1 (2018): 4.

<sup>12</sup> Lindeperg, Sylvie, "Settela : destin d'une « image icône »", *Double Jeu* 8 (2011): 127-140.

of the dissertation and we will come back to them, in the following chapters, discovering a new aspect of the face-image each time.

### ***Learning the Symbol: Settela's Face***

Commissioned by the Comité d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale (World War II Historical Committee) and the Réseau du Souvenir<sup>13</sup> (Memory Network), in an effort to eternalize the memory of the dead and transmit “the flame of memory” to younger generations<sup>14</sup>, *Nuit et brouillard* was the first documentary with international distribution to introduce archive footage about the deportations and the Nazi system of labor and concentration camps to a wider audience<sup>15</sup>. It is thirty-two-minutes long and, as is customary with Resnais' documentaries and essay films, the image is accompanied by instrumental music and a continuous voice-over commentary which guides how we look at the images. The text is key in transforming the original archival images commissioned by the Nazi regime into images that, directly following the war, will be used for a very different end, including to incriminate the perpetrators of the crimes. In this case, the voice-over narration, written between Resnais, in collaboration with the historians Olga Wormser and Henri Michel, and in the editing stage, with the poet and former deportee Jay Cayrol, whose voice reads the text in the film. The film shifts between images of the concentration camps from the present (1956) with images of only ten to twenty years earlier when the camps were still active, including a fragment from the Westerbork archive from 1944. Of the nearly 80 minutes of footage shot by Breslauer, most of which was shot at the Westerbork camp and documents the daily activities there, Resnais includes only two minutes from this archive featuring the train station in the Netherlands. Although the images (filmed in 1944) are introduced with a text indicating the year 1933, the archival material is not historically situated. Resnais de-/re-contextualizes the images further by adding images from another transport in Poland<sup>16</sup> and mixes the two so that they appear to come from the same source. The specifics of where and when these images are taken, by whom and under what circumstances, are unimportant for Resnais. Here the Westerbork images are used to illustrate the transportation of millions of people to *a concentration camp* –as one single, uniform image of a camp, more than an actual place with real coordinates on a map<sup>17</sup>. We cannot attempt to cover everything that has been written regarding this film, neither about its historical nor artistic importance<sup>18</sup>. What we would like, however, is to comment on the (brief) appearance of Settela's image in Resnais' film and the impact that this film would have on future appropriations of her face.

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<sup>13</sup> Created in 1952 in order to commemorate the victims and deportees of the Second World War.

<sup>14</sup> Lindeperg, Sylvie, *Noche y niebla: Un film en la historia* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2016): 213.

<sup>15</sup> Schmidt, 1 (702).

<sup>16</sup> Elsaesser, 2018: 7. Also described by Lindeperg, “Settela : destin d'une « image icône »”, 132.

<sup>17</sup> Lindeperg, “Settela : destin d'une « image icône »”, 133. “Tributaire du savoir, de la mémoire et de la sensibilité d'une époque, le cinéaste place en outre les images de Westerbork dans un assemblage de photographies et de plans qui se rapportent indistinctement à la déportation vers les camps de concentration de l'Ouest et les centres de mise à mort de Pologne. Il les met au service d'un récit dominé par la figure du déporté résistant et le modèle concentrationnaire”.

<sup>18</sup> The most important of these books is: Sylvie Lindeperg, *Nuit et brouillard: A Film in History* (University of Minnesota Press: Minnesota, 2014).

In *Nuit et brouillard* the image of Settela Steinbach appears at the beginning of the film and is only shown once (Figure 1.2). This footage is accompanied by instrumental music composed by Hans Eisler, an Austrian composer and close collaborator of Bertolt Brecht, best known for composing East Germany's national anthem<sup>19</sup>. The voice-over narration surrounds the archival material (before and after the image), but in the brief seconds that we see Settela between train car doors, the voice goes quiet, allowing the spectator to see it without commentary. Just as the film creates a singular and mythical camp, opened in 1933 and freed in 1945, without getting into the details about the differences between the camps (which at the time were still quite unknown) nor the particularities of the archival materials used, neither are Settela's identity nor the particularities of her image explored by Resnais. However, the introduction of foreign images to the Westerbork archive in Resnais' reappropriation has a direct effect on how these images are understood by the spectator. As Lindeperg writes, "L'insert de ces images dans *Nuit et brouillard* vient troubler l'ordonnement des plans hollandais; les regards apeurés des enfants appelant celui de la fillette au foulard et lui font signe. Ainsi, dans un geste où l'intuition précède le savoir, Resnais parvient à *inquiéter* les scènes paisibles de Westerbork"<sup>20</sup>. The result of this "disturbance" which Lindeperg claims is unintentional, is that they "conduit à s'interroger sur les acteurs en présence et leurs rôles respectifs dans le camp de Westerbork"<sup>21</sup>.



Figure 1.2. *Nuit et brouillard* (Alain Resnais, 1956). Still from restored version of 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Eisler's music was banned by the Nazi Party and he left Germany in exile after 1933. In 1938 he emigrated to the United States, where he composed music for various documentary films and eight Hollywood film scores, including two films *Hangmen Also Die!* (1944) and *None but the Lonely Heart* (1945) which were nominated for Oscars. His career in the United States was interrupted, however, by the Cold War, when he was blacklisted by the House Committee on Un-American Activities and no longer allowed to continue his work as a film composer. He returned to Austria in 1948 and later moved to East Germany, where he composed the country's national anthem.

<sup>20</sup> Lindeperg, "Settela : destin d'une « image icône »", 132. "The insertion of these images in *Nuit et brouillard* disturbs the organization of the Dutch shots; the frightened looks of the children seem to call out to the little girl with the headscarf, beckoning to her. Thus, in a gesture where intuition precedes knowledge, Resnais manages to *disturb* the peaceful scenes of Westerbork".

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. "...leads to questions about the actors involved and their respective roles in the Westerbork camp".

The film was shown in the United Kingdom, Italy, Belgium, Finland, Austria, Sweden, Israel, Czechoslovakia, South Korea, Indonesia, Thailand, Australia, the Netherlands, the Philippines, and Japan<sup>22</sup>. It was shown at both Cannes and Berlin Film Festivals, out of competition in Venice, and received the Grand Documentary Prize at Karlovy Vary<sup>23</sup>. Through the appropriation of Settela's image, hers becomes the face of a collective tragedy. But while in *Nuit et brouillard*, Settela might be said to represent humanity more generally, following the film's role in the Eichmann Trial in Jerusalem in 1961, and the popularity of the archive<sup>24</sup>, Settela's image became a staple in countless television documentaries centered on the Shoah and specifically on the extermination of Jews in the camps, where the extermination of other ethnicities and races like the Sinti and Romanies were seen as secondary, less important or even non-existent<sup>25</sup>. As Ariella Azoulay has denounced, the trial itself—where the film was shown—further positioned Israel as an imperial agent. What was at stake was the control of the historical narrative:

The trial took place in Jerusalem fifteen years after the deportation of 750,000 Palestinians, a deportation that challenged and threatened the state's claim of sovereignty. The state of Israel in this moment reserved the right to act like other imperial powers and determine who would be counted among its governed (deporting Palestinians of their homeland and forbidding their return), who would be judged and by whom (Eichmann, kidnapped from Argentina and brought to Israel for prosecution), and whose historical narrative would have the right to survive (the extermination of the Jews). Buttressing these claims was among the trial's unstated goals; in this way, the trial "made history."<sup>26</sup>

In the countless television documentaries and Hollywood films that followed, Settela's face-image was increasingly reappropriated as a *symbol* and icon of the suffering of the Jewish people, even though, as we already said, Settela herself was not in fact Jewish. In this way, we can see that although it was not Resnais' original intention, by ignoring the particularities of the image and their original context, this film (and the context of the Trials in which the film was exhibited) paved the way for further misidentifications of the image and, to borrow one of Azoulay's terms, helped to reproduce the image's "imperial potential".

In the face-image's next appropriation, the image of Settela is explored and analyzed by experts keen on discovering something new in an image that many have already seen. In *Settela, gezicht van het verleden* (*Settela: Face of the Past*, Cherry Duyns, 1994), based on Wagenaar's research, the face is extrapolated from the rest of the Westerbork archive, as an enigma to be solved. Functioning as "a detective film disguised as a documentary",<sup>27</sup> *Settela* follows journalist Aad Wagenaar in his search for the truth regarding the identity behind the face. The film begins by mixing present footage of Westerbork with the archival images, much

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<sup>22</sup> Lindeperg, *Noche y niebla*, 193.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> The Westerbork archive became the most-requested material from million-film collection of the Dutch film archives, according to Nina Siegal. "Children of the Holocaust Who Are Anonymous No More", *The New York Times* (May 18, 2021).

<sup>25</sup> For more about the depiction of Romanies in cinema, including documentaries on the Holocaust, see: Iordanova, Dina, "Images of Romanies in Cinema: A Rough Sketch?", *Framework* 44(2) (Fall 2003): 5-14.

<sup>26</sup> Azoulay, Ariella, *Potential History* (Verso Books: New York, 2019): 311.

<sup>27</sup> Elsaesser, "One Train May Be Hiding Another", 9.

in the same way that Resnais had done forty years before. Of course, the time that has passed gives the images a very different emotional effect than the one in *Nuit et brouillard*, when the Holocaust was still fresh in the minds of the audience and when the wounds were still quite open. “Now” –in 1994– time has passed, and yet there is still much that the viewer still does not know about the archive. Duyns turns to historians and experts, principally Koert Broersma, the biographer of Philip Mechanicus, a journalist interned at Westerbork, to look at the 16mm footage on a Steenbeck editing table<sup>28</sup> (Figure 1.3), often rewinding and repeating images, to discover within them the dates and names that will allow Wagenaar to find the truth of when and where the images were filmed and which eventually lead him to uncover the child’s true identity.



Figure 1.3. *Settela, gezicht van het verleden* (Cherry Duyns, 1994)

Duyns’s camera zooms into the Steenbeck monitor as the experts look over the material, and then cuts between different shot scales which draw us closer to the face. It is in these moments where the film does more than *simply document an investigative process*, for it becomes an accomplice in the detective work, moving into the words and numbers, as it does into Settela’s face, as if by looking closer the camera would somehow reveal something we didn’t already know. In the case of numbers and words, this is understandable –the experts are able to see something they couldn’t see in the original image and make out details like names and dates that give them new valuable information– but *what happens when the camera zooms or cuts into the face?* Does this new proximity render visible that which was once invisible to the eye? The zoom here works like a scientific instrument, like a filmic microscope, getting closer to the image in an attempt to discover something previously unseen and unknown (Figure 1.4).



<sup>28</sup> Lindeperg describes these scenes as “mise-en-scène”, implying that they are staged scenes (2011: 136).

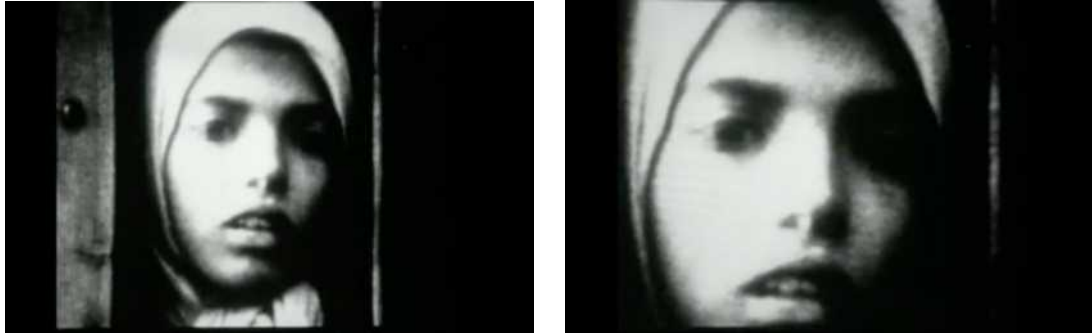


Figure 1.4. *Settela, gezicht van het verleden* (Cherry Duyns, 1994)

Lindeperg describes these scenes as a kind of performance of gestures from the 1966 Michelangelo Antonioni film *Blow Up* (Figure 1.5): “On le voit retourner la pellicule sur les têtes de lecture, puis pratiquer un agrandissement afin de lire le nom de l’informe enregistré sur la valise et impressionné sur le celluloid”<sup>29</sup>.



Figure 1.5. Above: *Settela, gezicht van het verleden* (Cherry Duyns, 1994)  
Below: *Blow-Up* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid: 137. “We see him turn over the film on the editing table and then practice an enlargement in order to read the number recorded on the suitcase and impressed on the celluloid”.

These images, adds Lindeperg, had a great impact in the Netherlands and the Roma and Sinti communities, inaugurating a new mode for the circulation of Settela's image. The Romani artist Kazia (Katarzyna) Pollock, for example, created the collage series titled *Gypsy Holocaust Series* in 2003, in which she reappropriates Settela's face-image. In her artistic statement, Katarzyna writes:

In my artistic expression I travel across boundaries. This also means that I do not adhere to any fixed style or genre of art but 'nomadize' through all the forms, traditions, icons, and images I come across in my life. My art is also both the means and the outcome of my personal struggle for Roma identity. We Romani painters still have to generate something unique and undetachable from our Romani identity, just as we have developed in our music. My goal has always been to achieve something in a new, cosmopolitan, universal scheme, but it remains a long road. The Indian roots, the Holocaust, and our trauma, the hiding, the longing for justice and protection are some ever-returning topics in my work<sup>30</sup>.



Figure 1.6. *Porrajmos - Settela Steinbach* (Kazia Pollock, 2003) - Collages

Settela's face-image begins to circulate within the Roma and Sinti communities in new forms. In Pollock's collages (Figure 1.6), we see the cutting out of Settela's face-image from the rest of the film and even (in the case of the image on the right) cut out from the rest of the frame. It is possible to "take" this image out of the rest of the unfinished film, and to "possess" it, in the way that Laura Mulvey describes<sup>31</sup>. It is through reappropriations like this one,

<sup>30</sup> See Pollock's Artist Statement on the *Signs* journal website: <http://signsjournal.org/katarzyna-pollock-sara-in-a-snailhouse-2002/>.

<sup>31</sup> In "The Possessive Spectator" Mulvey makes the case that with electronic or digital viewing, the nature of cinema changes so that the spectator is now able to hold on to or possess the previously elusive image. This is what she calls "The Possessive Spectator". In: Mulvey, Laura, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006): 161.

recontextualized for the present, that the face-image most powerfully is expressed as an object with a weight that no longer demands or relies on the rest of the archive. We would like to borrow Pollock's description of her own work as "nomadic" to speak of Settela's face-image. Through reappropriation Settela's image becomes *nomadic*, able to migrate from one context to another. Now, this migration and reappropriation is also at the service of the Roma and Sinti communities.

The incessant return to Settela's face in *Settela, gezicht van het verleden*, the repetition of the face-image on the screen –serving as a reflection of the researcher's own obsession and insistence with the image– accompanied by music and a voice of authority, reinforces the image's emotional effect on the viewer and solidifies the image's symbolic quality, arguably already established in Resnais' *Nuit et brouillard*. As Elsaesser observes, "The new truth of the face may have deconstructed the mythic force of the image, but in a sense, it has restored another truth to the image, indeed, intensified its force as a symbol."<sup>32</sup> It is curious that the identification of the individual has only helped to reinforce the face's symbolic quality. Settela is still a symbol; but is she still a symbol of the same thing?

When Elsaesser wrote about *Settela* in the late 1990s, he contextualized this film within a larger Dutch documentary tradition<sup>33</sup>. He expressed his concern with television documentary's –and in general, modern media's– "need of a visual short-hand, not caring what the real 'constructed' nature of such 'representations' of the real suppresses, excludes or simply keeps off-frame"<sup>34</sup>. He continues:

[...] It is not only a question of whether a single image or frame can stand for an entire event, but also whether one human being can give up his or her individuality to become a symbol, and whether one human being can represent a collective, can speak on behalf of others, in a medium where *the single image and the individual voice have assumed a new power, often possessing the aura* once bestowed only on the artist as the socially endorsed witness of society and the work of art as trans-individual, valid testimony<sup>35</sup>.

The danger for Elsaesser is that the "visual short-hand" of modern media can create a lie and participate in the erasure of less visible realities. He writes, "One Holocaust, as we have come to learn at our cost, hides others, one image's symbolic force may obscure another reality"<sup>36</sup>. Duyns's film gives Elsaesser a sensation of hope for modern media, because as he says, "Now when we see the image of 'the girl', we think of Jews and Gypsies, we think of history and its obliteration, we think of the one and the many, and we think of both our national and our European identity<sup>37</sup>." In conclusion, "...There may after all be reason to trust our audio-visual reality, which means to work at it, and work with it, so that one truth can not only cover another but also be recovered by another<sup>38</sup>."

Without realizing it, however, by using the term "Holocaust", Elsaesser was once again

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<sup>32</sup> Elsaesser, "One Train May Be Hiding Another", 10.

<sup>33</sup> "But nowhere else in Europe, perhaps, has the practice of using film as a medium of documentation, for oral and visual testimony, such a long and fertile tradition as in The Netherlands", *ibid*: 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*: 8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*: 8-9.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*: 9.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*: 10.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*.



unconsciously participating in the prioritization certain victims over others, covering one extermination with another. For as Azoulay points out, “The identification of the term ‘Holocaust’ with the extermination of the Jews overshadows the multiple groups targeted by the Nazi extermination plans. This enables the exceptionalization of the extermination of the Jews alongside the exceptionalization of the Nazi extermination plans, thus normalizing centuries of genocide of different peoples”<sup>39</sup>. For historian Adrian Marsh, it is alarming that the *Historical Atlas of the Holocaust*, from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1996, “contains no references to ‘Gypsies’, ‘Roma’ or ‘Sinti’”<sup>40</sup>. In fact, he perceives relatively zero academic concern with the fate of European Gypsies during the war years, “even when knowledge of their persecution and destruction became apparent”. When he wonders why this might be, he suggests that the very fact that no name has been settled on for the Romani Holocaust might provide an answer<sup>41</sup>. But he also points to documentaries and films in shaping popular perception of the Shoah, of which *Schindler’s List* (1993) is a well-known example. The normalization of genocide occurs not only through the words that we use but also, and primarily, through the production, accumulation, and naturalization of images under imperial power.



Figure 1.7. Image designed by Spanish artist Rocio Montoya

<sup>39</sup> Alli, Sabrina, “Interview with Ariella Azoulay: It is not possible to decolonize the museum without decolonizing the world”, *Guernica* (March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

<sup>40</sup> Marsh, “The Mechanics of Marginalisation”, 2.

<sup>41</sup> As Marsh explains, the Romani Holocaust may be more correctly called *Porrajmos* or *O Baro Porrajmos* (“The Great Devouring”), however the term is not universally accepted by all Romani groups. Other terms include *Sa o Mudarimós* or *Sa o Mudaripén* (“The final killing”), *ibid*: 4.

Speaking about photographs included in her book *Potential History*, Azoulay continues: “Those photographs of piles of corpses taken in liberated camps are associated with the extermination of Jewish people, but actually we have no way of knowing whose bodies these are, since different groups were incarcerated and exterminated. They could be African soldiers from the colonies who were taken as prisoners of wars and sent to the camps, they could be Communists, Jews, or Roma people. This helps create a regime of differential sensitivity to violence, predicated on who is targeted, by whom, and under which circumstances”<sup>42</sup>. She proposes the method of “unlearning imperialism”, or the understanding of photographs –and images in general– not as the end products of photography, nor as “discrete objects” that capture a bygone moment to which we can only be spectators and consumers, but principally as a practice “built on already existing imperial practices, structures, and regimes that it continues to reproduce”. It is only by “unlearning” that we, as researchers, can begin to face both “the imperial and non-imperial potential” of the photographic image. For Azoulay, unlearning imperialism “involves different types of ‘de-,’ such as decompressing and decoding; ‘re-,’ such as reversing and rewinding; and ‘un-’ such as unlearning and undoing”<sup>43</sup>.

How to “unlearn” the image of Settela’s face? How to “unlearn” the knowledge that has been naturalized in the image after its numerous reproductions? Harun Farocki’s *Aufschub (Respite, 2007)* shows us some ways in which this unlearning may take place. By returning the image of Settela to the original archive where the image belongs, *Aufschub* returns a contextualization to the image from which Settela had been ripped out or extracted and practices a kind of “unlearning” of everything that occurred to the image since this extraction took place. Documentary filmmaker has used the concept of “extractive storytelling” to describe the “mining stories of others to further a career”:

It struck me that when people come from the outside and 'take'—whether it's anthropologists, academics, artists, journalists or filmmakers—and never consider collaborating with the protagonists or replenishing what's been taken, it's exactly the same practice as extractive industries (mining, hydroelectric or industrial agriculture)—multinational companies who steal the wealth from below the land, never share the proceeds, and in the process destroy the environment<sup>44</sup>.

For Azoulay, the “taking” of objects and knowledge is part of the violent imperial practice of plunder. She proposes that we consider plunder not as a concluded event, but as “an ongoing process that can and should entail different outcomes: rights that provide impoverished people with substantial compensations for their loss and modalities of accessing these objects and integrating and reintegrating them into different worlds, organized around different principles, irreducible to those promoted, preserved, and advocated by imperial museums”<sup>45</sup>. If we consider Settela’s face-image as an object captured through a practice of imperial plunder, and its appropriation into other cinematographic forms as a demonstration of extractive filmmaking and extractive storytelling, then we might understand Farocki’s contextualization of the image

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<sup>42</sup> Alli, “Interview with Ariella Azoulay”.

<sup>43</sup> Azoulay, *Potential History*, 10.

<sup>44</sup> Yates, Pamela. “Profound Communication Only Happens When There Is Persistence: Director Pamela Yates [500 Years]”, *Filmmaker Magazine*, January 24th, 2017; For more on “Extractive Filmmaking”, see: Wissot, Lauren, “Whose Story? Five Doc-Makers on (Avoiding) Extractive Filmmaking”, *International Documentary Association* (September 28, 2017).

<sup>45</sup> Azoulay, *Potential History*, 63-64.

within the original archive as a kind of “return” of the object, and therefore a more ethical form of appropriation. Here the question may arise, where did the original plunder of this image begin? In its first appropriations (in *Nuit et brouillard* and the television documentaries and Hollywood afterimages that followed) or when the image was first shot by Breslauer?

Although both *Settela* and *Aufschub* may be considered *investigative films*, Duyns’s film investigates an identity and the truth of an archive, while Farocki (having seen Duyns’s film and aware of Wagenaar’s research) centers his gaze on looking (again) at the archive itself, providing a critical reading of the material, as well as reflecting on appropriation and cinema itself. In Duyns’s film experts rewind and repeat images on a Steenbeck to discover new clues, often talking over these images to the camera (as experts often do); in *Aufschub*, Farocki rewinds and repeats (silently) to make us see it again in different ways and in a new order. By including a larger part of the original archive, and not only the images from the train station (that we have discussed in *Nuit et brouillard* and *Settela*), Farocki re-contextualizes the image of *Settela* into the wider context in which the image was produced. How the film “unlearns” the image and the part that the face plays in this unlearning will be the focus of the following pages.

### **Unlearning the Symbol: *Aufschub* (Respite, Harun Farocki, 2007)**

Harun Farocki was a Czech-born, German filmmaker, video artist and writer, born to an Indian father and a German mother. When he passed away in 2014, he left behind over 120 films, primarily feature films, essay films and documentaries, that explore image-production in relation to capitalism, consumerism, entertainment, and war technology. He was born in 1944; that same year his family was forced to leave Berlin and move to India. The partition of India followed, and his family finally settled in Hamburg, West Germany. 1944 is also the year when the Westerbork archival footage was filmed, with which he will work decades later in his film titled *Aufschub*.

In this film Farocki does not resort to interviewing eyewitnesses, as Duyns did before him, nor does he film the camp’s current state, as Resnais did in the 1950s and Duyns repeated in the 1990s. He restricts his film to only the Westerbork archive, making the “intellectual and aesthetic program in *Aufschub*... based almost entirely on a detailed rereading of the original source material”<sup>46</sup>. Although it has been said that Farocki leaves the original archive “intact”, this is clearly not the case, as the original archive runs approximately 90 minutes and *Aufschub* has a duration of only 40 minutes. It is clear that Farocki has edited the original material, leaving over half of it out of his film<sup>47</sup>. With the exception of a two-minute introduction by the author consisting of text and still photographs, including a photo of Breslauer himself, which serve to contextualize the images and introduce the archive material to the spectator, the majority of the images in the film are entirely from the archive itself. The most evident “intervention” of the director on the material is the addition of text –in the form of intertitles–

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<sup>46</sup> Kramer, Sven, “Reiterative Reading: Harun Farocki’s Approach to the Footage from Westerbork Transit Camp”, *New German Critique* 41 (3) (2014): 37.

<sup>47</sup> Rebecka Katz Thor comments on the nature of the discarded material: “While the material in many ways seems exhausted, it is curious that Farocki neither comments on the scenes that are excluded, nor on how he made his selection”, Katz Thor, *Beyond the Witness*, 106.

intercut into the soundless image, from beginning to end, which provides a commentary to the images on screen. The remarkable silence throughout the forty-minute film reinforces the impact of the images (and text), while at the same time stripping them bare of the emotional music and authoritative voice over which has too often accompanied them in their previous incarnations<sup>48</sup>. This makes the process of seeing these images a very different one for the spectator who is already familiar with them. The familiar becomes strange through a process of *defamiliarization*.

Settela appears in *Aufschub* twice. The first occurs halfway through the film, in the context of an overabundance of facts and information, very much in line with the Nazi system of operations. The second occurs towards the end of the film, where the informative intertitles are replaced with more interpretative and reflexive titles, characteristic of a “thinking” essay film<sup>49</sup>. Most curious of all is that this image is the only one that produces an intertitle in the first person, when Farocki finally says, “I think”. Although Kramer has provided a framework for understanding these intertitles, we believe that the face-image offers a reading that blurs these categories and makes such a neat analysis impossible.

The first time Settela appears, her image is preceded by a title card which reads, “On May 19, 1944 a train with 691 people left Westerbork” (Figure 1.8). This cuts to an image of a text “74 Pers.” written in white letters on the train car door. There is a jump cut here, and then the hand-held camera pans left and then tilts up, to show us a young child –Settela– whose face looks towards the camera from between the train car doors. Farocki cuts almost immediately to an intertitle which reads “The camp administration was very careful with numbers”, back to the image of “74 Pers.”, then again to an intertitle which reads “A little later, on the departing train, the number has been corrected”, and we see a moving image of the train leaving the station with the number “75” instead of “74”. This image has been paused for our observation. An intertitle informs us “The number ‘74’ has been crossed out and replaced with ‘75’”, then cuts to a close-up (a paused image) of the number crossed out on the train.



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<sup>48</sup> For more on the mutism in *Aufschub*, see: Alter, Nora, “Dead Silence”, In: *Harun Farocki: Against What? Against Whom?* ed. Antje Ehmman and Kodwo Eshun (London: Koenig Books, 2009).

<sup>49</sup> Blümlinger, Christa, *Kino aus zweiter Hand: Zur Ästhetik materieller Aneignung im Film und in der Medienkunst* (Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 2009): 25.



Figure 1.8. The first time we see Settela in *Aufschub*: she is only a number.

Kramer understands the film primarily as an exercise in “reiterative reading”, consisting in what he identifies as three tendencies of “iterational forms”, invoked by Jacques Derrida. The first of these is the tendency that underscores the level of documentation. He writes, “...The images serve as evidence, and a fragment of historical reality is being reconstructed. Farocki supports his finding with two aesthetic interventions: freezing the frame to identify the number on the car, an enlarging the shot to enhance its readability”<sup>50</sup>. These aesthetic forms and this method for reading archival material is not dissimilar to the investigative techniques –zoom, repetition– used in Cherry Duyns’s film. In these moments of Farocki’s film (which provide only the first level of reading the material, as we shall see) as in Duyns’ film, the image is treated first and foremost as historical source material (Figure 1.9). But what Kramer does not see is how these intertitles work *against the images* and *against the people in the images*: they direct us towards the numbers, the documents, and in consequence blind us from seeing the person, and in this case, from seeing Settela. When we see Settela for the first time in *Aufschub*, she is not Settela yet. She is just another nameless face, just another child who was aboard the train that day. She is a number. At one moment, she is one of 74, and in the next, one of 75. In a way, these texts intertitles work in a similar way as the entire Nazi system: they provide cold, hard facts, leaving little room for seeing the people in the images. And what scholar Nora Alter writes about what Farocki accomplishes in his earlier film *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des*

<sup>50</sup> Kramer, “Reiterative Reading”, 51.

*Krieges* (1988) applies here as well: the film shows “that people can look without really seeing”<sup>51</sup>.



Figure 1.9.

Frozen image of corrected train wagon, from *Aufschub* (left) and *Settela, gezicht van het verleden* (right). In both, the frames have been paused for the spectator to discern information (the image as evidence). In Duyns' film, the film zooms even closer into the image and an expert's hand appears to guide our eye towards the number.

After this initial image of *Settela*, which occurs right before the midpoint of the film, the tone of the text shifts. At about halfway through the film, the text stops giving out facts and information, and now begins to interpret the material and the intentions behind their construction. What is interesting about it, however, is that these interpretations, often of the same material, are *multiple* and even contradictory. “These images were intended to ward off the disaster”, reads one title card. “They were supposed to say: don't close the camps!” The images we see are of inmates working the land. A title card reads “‘Meaning’ we are your workhorses”. But then the following title card says, “These images can also be read differently”: “[They] are creating something of their own, their own society, perhaps”. In just a few seconds, we are told two, contradictory ways of understanding the same images. When asked about the commentary in his films, Farocki has said:

...[O]ften I make such playful use of the commentary, I propose this meaning and then another meaning, and then exchange them, as one does when playing cards in a game. They are never the so-called representative illustrations for these ideas. They are never that. There is always a reading of the images, sometimes a provocative reading, where the audience will wonder, ‘surely, this can't be the right commentary to these images?’ Between the images and the commentary there is a parallel, but it's a parallel that will meet in infinity<sup>52</sup>.

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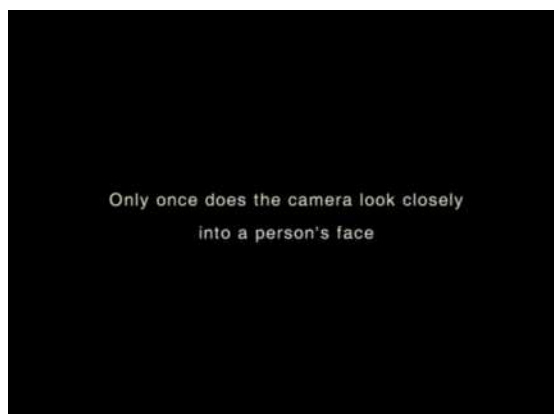
<sup>51</sup> Alter, Nora, “The Political Im/perceptible in the Essay Film: Farocki's *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*”, *New German Critique* 68 (1996): 169.

<sup>52</sup> Elsaesser, Thomas, “Making the World Superfluous: An Interview with Harun Farocki”, in *Harun Farocki: Working on the Sight-Lines*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004): 187.

The parallels are met by perpendiculars, commentaries that work in both horizontal and vertical directions, constructing layers of knowledge between the image and the text. They become a “palimpsest of images, which summon to the surface other image-strata...”, as author Sylvie Lindeperg has observed<sup>53</sup>.

In the final minutes, following the “rarely” seen images from the daily life of the camp, the film returns to the train station and to the *familiar images*: inmates marked with stars on their arms and suitcases in their hands walking towards the train, guards conversing next to the train, a dog, guards closing the train car doors with people peering outside from between the doors, and the train’s final departure. Although we are seeing these images *again*, and many spectators have seen them many times before, this is the first time we are seeing them *after* seeing the less familiar images of camp life. When we see Settela this second time, in the final minutes of the film, something has changed. For the first time, we are able to “see” her.

First, nothing seems to have changed (Figure 1.10). We see the sign that reads “74 Pers.”, same as before, reminding the viewer of when Settela was only a nameless face and a number. Then an intertitle appears that we have not read before: “Only once does the camera look closely into a person’s face”, reflexively calling attention to the camera and to the face-image. What follows is the same image we saw earlier, but this time Farocki cuts into the image right before it pans and tilts up to Settela’s face, and therefore leaves out the camera’s “pause” over the number that reads “74 Pers.”, thereby prioritizing the face over the number. This time the intertitle gives the viewer the *permission* to see the face, to “see” Settela. An intertitle follows the image of her face, providing her name, age, ethnicity, and telling us that she was murdered. The face is given a name, followed by an interpretative text: “The fear of premonition of death can be read in her face” and a hypothesis in the first-person, “I think that this is why the cameraman avoided any further close-ups”. We are then given more facts, “245 Roma and Sinti deported on this train”. If we remember, we will multiply: 100 trains like this one, 245 Roma and Sinti on this single train, makes for perhaps 24,500 Roma and Sinti leaving Westerbork to be killed. Meaning: 24,500 people just like Settela. She is no longer just a number, nor merely an individual; she is recontextualized within a collective, now part of a community.



<sup>53</sup> From Lindeperg’s description of the film included on Harun Farocki’s website: <https://www.harunfarocki.de/films/2000s/2007/respite.html>



Figure 1.10. The second time we see Settela in *Aufschub*: she is given a name, she is part of a community

Although Kramer has categorized this “reading” within the second interpretative and subjective type, we believe that the commentary on this image in particular is quite different from the previous interpretative intertitles. First, the commentary *turns this image into a close-up*, which is a purely cinematographic term. In speaking of this image as a close-up and in terms of its *image-ness*, Farocki draws attention to the realm of cinema as a construction. Then we are told that her face reveals Settela’s fear of premonition of death, which is of course an interpretation of the image. And then there is a hypothesis that the camera avoided close-ups –perhaps– for this reason. What’s more, this hypothesis is introduced by an “I think” –the only one of the entire film. This intertitle is far more personal than the others and also much less assertive. It is driven by a question mark, punctuated by doubt. By ending with a question, the film invites the spectator’s own analysis and reading. What is it about the face-image that calls the



filmmaker to resort to an entirely new way of looking at the images? What does this image contain or offer that the previous images do not? Why and how, precisely, does the face-image generate the possibility for critical contemplation and doubt? We must go back, and apply Azoulay's method of not thinking about the image as an end in itself, but rather as part of larger traditions. In this case, it would be necessary not to go back only to the conditions of production which made this image possible in the first place, the mystery of which has already been the subject of analysis by both Elsaesser and Lindeperg, but also Western conceptualizations of the face, as well as the tradition that the face has occupied in film, both of which can provide other perspectives for understanding the potentials for Settela's face-image in *Aufschub*.

### **The Face is a Politics: A Site of Seeing, Knowing, and Not Knowing**

What is communicated by the face? For scholar Andreja Zevnik, drawing on the writings of both Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan, the face is a product of the inter-linked governing practices of seeing and knowing<sup>54</sup>. As a "surface upon which the practice of knowing aligns with the practice of seeing", the face, more than any other image, calls upon the spectator's desire for interpretation. But what exactly is "meant" by the image depends on the context in which the face is shown; in other words, *how* the face may be interpreted depends on "the scopic field in which the face is made to appear. Only once it is seen (represented) the knowledge about the subject can be revealed<sup>55</sup>". In *Aufschub* layered readings of the archival materials offer different possibilities for "seeing and knowing", as well as multiple and contradictory interpretations of the images.

For Lacan, the face acts as a *mirror*: it draws a distinction between "you" and "I" and sets the foundations for one's existence. The image of a subject is produced by the other's gaze. The subject is located in the world in face-form. For this reason, Zevnik writes: "The face is a *specific idea* which 'gives face' to one's subjectivity<sup>56</sup>". As such, "what we see is not what is portrayed, but *what we project onto it*; thus, what we see is our own gaze, a reflection of our 'face' (our subject position in the world) that is ours in as much as it is of those whose gaze we are subjected to. We look at the photograph not with a desire to see but with the knowledge that the interpretation will be in line with the existing regime of visibility<sup>57</sup>". In this way, the face-image can work to reinforce pre-established ideas of visibility, of what and who belongs to this regime and what and who does not.

For Zevnik, it is precisely the inter-linked practices of seeing and knowing in the face that simultaneously shapes the image for the political subject to appear while others are denied or excluded from political representation<sup>58</sup>. She writes,

...[T]he face is a narrative including 'us', excluding others, and leaving some at the margins, neither here nor there, or, in the extreme, with no political recognition. In such closed political discourse, clear lines between the faces that count and those that do not are drawn. Thus, it is

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<sup>54</sup> Zevnik, Andreja, "The Politics of the Face: The Scopic Regime and the (Un-)Masking of the Political Subject," *Journal for Cultural Research*, 2015: 1.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid: 2.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid: 12.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid: 10.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid: 3.

not only the subject to which political discourses of exclusion speak to, it is the face as its 'material representation' in a particular moment in time, that visually locates the subject and subdues it to political practices. As such, a politics of the face is obscene. It is obscene in as much as it parades as politics of difference, cultural flourishing, while it closes, limits and stabilises meaning and forms of appearance. It authorises itself by discrediting and cutting out the possibility of the world being otherwise. Under a pretext of exposure, health or security it hides, orders, and generalises. It is not by coincidence that psychiatry, medicine, politics, criminology, etc. sought answers to its problems of governing, identifying and predicting that which is to come in the face. The 'face' comes closest to the brain, to the dark soul of an individual; and if that dark soul is to be kept in check that which is closest to it needs governing<sup>59</sup>.

It is through the governance of the face that the subject is both exposed and controlled. We will explore this idea further in Chapter 3 when we look at the mug shot or criminal photographic portraiture in the Portuguese dictatorship trilogy of Susana de Sousa Dias. For now, we would like to emphasize the role that the face plays in the creation of the political subject, a creation that is, of course, mediated and contained within a specific frame and which at the same time, works to exclude other subjects from representation.

For Emmanuel Lévinas, the French philosopher of Lithuanian Jewish ancestry who has developed one of the most well-known and cited theories on the face, the face is an *ethics* that brings individuals together and makes them accountable for one another, through the *face-to-face encounter*. In working towards a definition of the face, he writes:

...the first obvious thing in the other's face is the directness of exposure and [its] defenselessness. The human being in his face is the most naked; nakedness itself. But at the same time, his face faces. It is in his way of being all alone in his facing that the violence of death is to be assessed. A third moment in the epiphany of the face: it requires me. The face looks at me, calls out to me. It claims me<sup>60</sup>.

As the face "calls out to me", "claims me", "requires me", it is the site or foundation, not only for social relations, but of all social existence<sup>61</sup>.

An opposing view comes from Deleuze and Guattari, for whom the face is a *politics*<sup>62</sup>, the face *divides*, "insofar as it delineates who/what is acceptable to the regime and who/what is not"<sup>63</sup>. Because the face distinguishes between an outer appearance and a hidden inner, the encounter with the face is not an ethical one as Lévinas claims, but rather an encounter of distortion<sup>64</sup>. While Levinas considers the face a constant, Deleuze and Guattari claim that, as an over-coded system of signification, "the face is capable of transmitting many meanings based on the needs of the political regime it is located within"<sup>65</sup>. The face is produced –and

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<sup>59</sup> Zevnik, "The Politics of the Face", 13.

<sup>60</sup> Lévinas, Emanuel, *Alterity and Transcendence*, trans. M.B. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999): 163.

<sup>61</sup> Rae, Gavin, "The Political Significance of the Face: Deleuze's Critique of Levinas", *Critical Horizons* 14(3-4) (August-November 2016): 285.

<sup>62</sup> Deleuze and Guattari. "Year Zero: Faciality" (1980), in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987: 201.

<sup>63</sup> Rae, 293. In this essay, Rae proposes that Deleuze develops his theory on the face in relation and opposition to Lévinas. Rae also makes the case that while Lévinas' theory on the face is well-known, very little has been written about Deleuze's writing regarding faces, despite the fact that he returned to this subject many times.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid: 293.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

reproduced, updated— by an assemblage of power and what it communicates depends on what that assemblage of power needs at any specific moment in time.

The reappearance of Settela over time and specifically in the three films which we have analyzed here reveals that the “meanings” assigned to a face-image can vary depending on what is intended by the image’s reproduction and appropriation. In the case of Farocki’s film, we witness two approximations to this image, one that views the image as evidence and the other which acts on interpretation and subjectivity. Neither resolve, however, the fact that for whatever truth is “recovered” by the image (including her name, age and ethnicity), there is much about her that remains unknown. Additionally, neither resolves the fact that Settela was considered by many to be a “Jew” before she was discovered to have been a Gypsy. In the same way that many “Jews” were sent to extermination camps without even being aware that their identity had already been determined by another<sup>66</sup>. We can see how archives then play an essential role in the construction of identities, and the importance of faces in the archive for this very reason.

Zevnik proposes that we understand the face as a *symptom*, defined as a material with a repressed or hidden knowledge. Turning to Didi-Huberman’s writings, she notes that when a symptom is expressed on the face as a form of gesture, voice or spasm, “it causes a rupture not only to the body or to the structure of the discourse, but also to the existing temporality”<sup>67</sup>. She argues that just as faces can be used by politics to govern subjects, where a “politics of the face” works to reinforce patterns and well-predicted lines, creating a narrative which includes some and leaves out many, deciding who has and does not have political recognition, the face also has the capacity to “disturb social fantasies, sovereign narratives and socio-political orderings”<sup>68</sup>. In fact, it is by disturbing and re-ordering dominant narratives that the face acquires its most subversive potential, or to return to Azoulay, its non-imperial or anti-imperial potential.

Two formal strategies are employed in *Aufschub* to find the archival image’s non-imperial potential: 1) the introduction of gaps —or *respites*— with intertitles which work to interrupt, question, confront, and engage the image, and 2) re-ordering the material, which works not only to challenge the linear temporality of the archive<sup>69</sup> but more importantly to “postpone the inevitable”<sup>70</sup>, taking the spectator to a moment in time when the future is still uncertain. By rewinding and returning to the train station, after having shown us the ins and outs at the camp, we can imagine Settela headed in a different direction. In doing so, the film bends linear temporality, offering an alternative to the dominant idea in cinema that one image comes *after* another. The original question has been modified. It is no longer what are the

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<sup>66</sup> Farocki makes the point that in the case of the Jews in the extermination camps, “the identity and image of the other was not clearly drawn”. Elsaesser, “Making the World Superfluous: An Interview with Harun Farocki”, 185.

<sup>67</sup> Zevnik, “The Politics of the Face”, 6.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid: 13.

<sup>69</sup> Antje Ehmman has referred to Farocki’s technique here as “looping”, which does not only comment on the repetition of the shots but rather on the changing order of the shots. She describes the method in the following way: “[H]e presents a sequence, places it in a context with other sequences, conveys information for its understanding, and then later, in part, involves it again, at which point it is newly decrypted.” Ehmman, in Kramer, “Reiterative Reading”, 50.

<sup>70</sup> Elsaesser, “Holocaust Memory as the Epistemology of Forgetting: Rewind and Postponement in *Respite*”, in *Harun Farocki: Against What? Against Whom?* ed. Antje Ehmman and Kodwo Eshun (London: Koenig Books, 2009): 63.

intentions behind the filming and commissioning of this film, but rather: what is the knowledge *within the image*, the knowledge that is independent or separate from what the person filming intended? And how can appropriation shine light on *this knowledge*, how can appropriation not only show it but *make it possible*? After all, appropriation is principally an action of montage and montage is about the ordering of material in a sequence. As Kuleshov discovered in the early 1920s, film as art begins not in the filming, but in the editing, when the filmmaker begins to combine different strips of film (“Through the union of pieces of film in different combinations, and in different orders, different results are obtained”<sup>71</sup>). The filmmaker-editor who works with appropriation has the power to decide that order (as Kuleshov himself explored in “The Kuleshov Effect”). In reversing the order of events, in creating a *respite* for the work in the camps and the solidarity between workers who do not yet know what will happen to them, Farocki returns the future to the past, allowing them to have a parallel future somewhere *off-screen*.

### **A Counter-Example: *A Film Unfinished* (Yael Hersonski, 2010)**

A counter-example might be *A Film Unfinished* (Yael Hersonski, 2010), a German-Israeli coproduction made with another unfinished 1942 German propaganda film titled *Das Ghetto* (“The Ghetto”) depicting the Warsaw Ghetto. It has been promoted by the Israeli Embassy around the world, functioning as an effective propaganda film. In an ethically questionable move, Hersonski projects images from *Das Ghetto* to Jewish Holocaust survivors, asking them to re-live traumatic events in front of the camera. Contrary to what is expected by the director, the survivors recognize themselves in the “propaganda film”. That is, they react to the images as if they were documentary images, and not the recreated and staged images commissioned by Nazi-Germans to depict Jews in an unfavorable light.

Scholar Vicente Sánchez-Biosca studies the migration of these images and their appropriation in different periods of film history in his essay titled “Disparos en el Ghetto. En torno a la migración de las imágenes de archivo” (“Shooting in the Ghetto: On the Migration of Film Footage”)<sup>72</sup> and again in his recently published book *La muerte en los ojos. Qué perpetran las imágenes de perpetrador*<sup>73</sup>. Like the Westerbork archive, this film was not circulated by the people who created it: it remained in the Nazi archives at the Universum Film AG (UFA) and then DEFA<sup>74</sup> unedited and without sound until the end of the 1950s when it appeared in a Swedish production titled *Mein Kampf. Den Blodiga tiden* (Erwin Leiser, 1959), and then again in the French production *Le temps du ghetto* (Frédéric Rossif, 1961). Finally,

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<sup>71</sup> Pudovkin citing Kuleshov, in Leyda, Jay, *Kino: Historia del cine ruso y soviético*: 211. My translation.

<sup>72</sup> Sánchez-Biosca, Vicente, “Disparos en el Ghetto. En torno a la migración de las imágenes de archivo” *Secuencias* 34 (2012).

<sup>73</sup> Sánchez-Biosca, Vicente, *La muerte en los ojos. Qué perpetran las imágenes de perpetrador* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2021).

<sup>74</sup> From the DEFA website: “The DEFA Film Library was founded on September 23, 1993 in Amherst. The University of Massachusetts Amherst co-founded the institution with its home base in the German Studies Department. DFL is regarded as the world’s only archive and research center outside Germany that is committed to the cinematic heritage of East Germany. In October 2013, the DEFA Film Library acquired the exclusive cinema exploitation rights of the DEFA film stock in the United States and Canada. It also offers non-exclusive screenings of DEFA films to Goethe-Institutes. DFL also produces and distributes films on DVD with English subtitles for the North American market.”

the archive was picked up again in 2010 with *An Unfinished Film*, in a display of what Sánchez-Biosca describes as an almost physical and sentimental fascination with the raw archival material.

What is interesting about the film, for our purposes, is how the archival images work against the intentions not only of the Nazi propagandists who filmed them, but also against the intentions of the director whose very film seems to go against what she herself has proposed. Although the film is openly critical of the fictional qualities of the Nazi propaganda film, *A Film Unfinished* itself resorts to reenactment, staging, artificial lighting, and non-diegetic music and sound effects. Entirely contrary to Farocki's reworking of the Westerbork archive, Hersonski creates a completely new soundtrack for the silent archive which could be (mis)taken by many as the archive's original sound. Furthermore, music is added to the film to direct and strengthen specific emotional reactions in the spectator.<sup>75</sup> Despite the many strategies of manipulation employed by the director on the archival material, Hersonski seems to insist that "enemy material" cannot accurately reflect the victim's reality. But what her film seems to prove is the exact opposite. As the survivors watch the footage created and also staged by the perpetrators, they recognize themselves in the images, looking for their family members, and reacting emotionally to what they are seeing. Writer and critic Alan Pauls in his presentation of the film at Fundación PROA in 2013 in Buenos Aires asks, "Can an image filmed by the perpetrator reflect the victim's reality? The director says it's not possible, the victims say that it is". He adds, "The image has a life of its own"<sup>76</sup>. Perhaps Hersonski is unable to see this herself due to the cloudiness of vision provoked by what Sánchez-Biosca calls "a wave of fascination with the archive"<sup>77</sup>. This is something to keep in mind as we move along in our dissertation, for it is something that occurs often not only in the appropriation of archival images in documentary films, but also and perhaps more so with archival images of faces.

In a very different gesture, the archive in *Aufschub* is not turned towards the victims in a morbid and sensationalist attempt to create a spectacle out of pain, but rather towards the filmmaker, in a critical act of seeing and listening. It is worked on, manually, in the editing table. It is looked upon, "listened to", and contemplated in the editing process. As a result, one of the variations of "seeing and knowing" that is explored formally in the film is personal. The second time that Settela's face appears in *Aufschub*, Farocki inserts *himself*.

### **Looking Back: *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* (Harun Farocki, 1988)**

To understand the significance of the employment of the first person in *Aufschub*, we must go back to a film which is considered in many ways its precursor: *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* (*Images of the World and the Inscription of War*, 1988). For Elsaesser is it important that "Both films...share a key date: May 1944. This was the month of the Allied reconnaissance flights over Aushwitz-Birkenau that play such a central role in *Images of the*

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<sup>75</sup> Sánchez-Biosca centers his critique on the film's voice-over which, as he says, "aunque no intrusiva, atenúa la angustia de los momentos muertos y discurre entre dos aguas: el respeto a la materia y la inclinación a tutelarla" ("Disparos en el Ghetto", 50).

<sup>76</sup> In Alan Pauls' presentation of the film in Buenos Aires, he asks: "¿Hasta qué punto la imagen del verdugo puede reflejar la realidad de la víctima? La directora dice que no es posible, las víctimas dicen que sí. La imagen tiene una vida propia", Pauls, Alan, "Presentación de *A Film Unfinished*", Fundación Proa (17 de agosto, 2013).

<sup>77</sup> Sánchez-Biosca, "Disparos en el Ghetto", 56.

*World*, but equally the month in which Breslauer shot his film and the train departed for the selfsame destination of Auschwitz”<sup>78</sup>. Both films share this key date, but also an underlying question regarding the relationship between image-production and what can be seen –and not seen– in images.

Nora Alter describes *Bilder* as “an extended investigation into the nature of *vision* and *visuality*”<sup>79</sup>, through an interrogation of photographic processes of image-making and in relation to how these images are used across as diverse disciplines as “fine arts, engineering, architecture, artisanal and assembly-line production, city planning and urban renewal, military science and practice”<sup>80</sup>. In *Bilder* the images under analysis include but are not limited to aerial footage of the IG Farben industrial plant taken by the Americans in 1944. This material is intercut with other archival materials, including computer-generated images, to form a critical essay film on images, war, and technology. For Alter, essay films can be rather tricky however, as they can offer “the appearance of its own self-criticism, threatening to silence the critic’s voice in advance”<sup>81</sup>. This is why she argues that this film requires a “reading between the lines” from the spectator/critic, a “reading” that must resist, she insists, the voice-over provided by Farocki<sup>82</sup>. Why a woman’s voice? asks Alter, and Why is the voice often accompanied by “the minimalist tinkling of a piano?”<sup>83</sup> How does *Bilder*, subject to the same visual regime as photography, *also* deceive and obfuscate –like the images Farocki interrogates– not only through sight but also with the aid of sound?

She analyzes three sequences in particular, placed strategically throughout the film, and in which in all three cases the photographed subjects/objects are women. In the first sequence, which occurs at minute 38 and lasts for about 70 seconds, Farocki shows us an SS photograph of what is considered to be a Jewish woman taken at Auschwitz. Through hard cuts, the image is amplified so that the viewer is firmly centered on the woman’s gaze back at the camera (Figure 1.11).

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<sup>78</sup> Elsaesser, “Returning to the Past its Own Future”, 10.

<sup>79</sup> Alter, “The Political Im/perceptible in the Essay Film: Farocki’s *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*”, 166.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*: 168.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*: 172.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*: 172.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*: 175.



Figure 1.11. *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* (Harun Farocki, 1988)

The “highly controlled/controlling” female voice-over speaks, creating an imagined narrative around how the anonymous woman in the photograph might have felt as she was photographed:

*The woman has arrived at Auschwitz; the camera captures her in movement. The photographer has his camera installed, and as the woman passes by he clicks the shutter –in the same way he would cast a glance at her in the street, because she is beautiful. The woman understands how to pose her face so as to catch the eye of the photographer, and how to look with a slight sideways glance. On a boulevard she would look in the same way just past a man casting his eye over her at a shop window, and with this sideways glance she seeks to displace herself into a world of boulevards, men, and shop windows<sup>84</sup>.*

What strikes Alter is Farocki’s ventriloquizing through a woman’s voice that is never seen/made visible (while his hands, on the other hand, appear throughout the film touching the photographs).

In the second sequence commented by Alter, which actually occurs before the one already mentioned, Farocki looks at a series of photographs taken in 1960 by French soldier Marc Garanger of unveiled Algerian women. The images are first shown as “head shots”,

<sup>84</sup> Farocki, Harun, “Commentary from *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges*”, *Discourse* 15(3) (Spring 1993): 86.

invisibilizing both the black border/frame of the original photographs, the white pages of the books they are taken from, and Farocki's gaze (Figure 1.12).



Figure 1.12. *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* (Harun Farocki, 1988)

The “disembodied” female voice-over begins:

*How to face a camera? The horror of being photographed for the first time.*

*The year 1960 in Algeria: women are photographed for the first time. They are to be issued with identity cards.*

*Faces which up till then had worn the veil<sup>85</sup>.*

As Farocki's hands flip through pages of the book, now we see the borders of the images –that is, we see their materiality as photographs in a book (Figure 1.13).



Figure 1.13. *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* (Harun Farocki, 1988)

The voice continues:

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<sup>85</sup> Farocki, “Commentary from *Bilder*”, 80.



*Only those close have looked on these faces without the veil– family and household members.*

*When one looks into the face of an intimate, one also brings in something of a shared past.*

*The photograph captures the moment and thus crops away past and future* <sup>86</sup>.

At this point, the film cuts to images from another source, to make an association perhaps, between one set of ID photographs and another. In this case, the images are of present-day (in the 1980s) German police photographs of women suspects or men disguised as women (Figure 1.14).



Figure 1.14. *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* (Harun Farocki, 1988)

*These images are left uncommented, notably without the voice-over that has accompanied the photographs taken by Garanger.*

Now, we come back to the images of Algerien women, as we see Farocki flip through Garanger's book of photographs, and the voice-over repeats information that has already been provided (Figure 1.15).

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<sup>86</sup> Farocki, "Commentary from *Bilder*", 80.

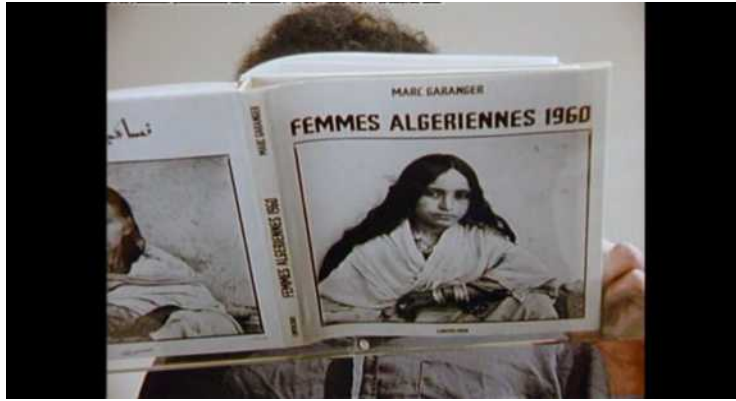


Figure 1.15. *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* (Harun Farocki, 1988)

*In 1960 in Algeria, a conscript soldier named Marc Garanger photographs the faces of women who have never before been photographed. They are to be issued with identity cards.*

*Faces which up till then had worn the veil<sup>87</sup>.*

The camera cuts in and frames the photographs of the Algerian women at an angle, using the frames from the original publication. As the voice over begins, Farocki's hand comes into the frame, covering first the mouth, then the eyes (Figure 1.16).



Figure 1.16. *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* (Harun Farocki, 1988)

<sup>87</sup> Farocki, "Commentary from *Bilder*", 80.

*The veil covers the mouth, nose, and cheeks and leaves the eyes free. The eyes must be accustomed to meet a strange gaze. The mouth cannot be accustomed to being looked at. A mouth, to be able to taste something, must come close to its object. The eye, to be able to see, can remain at a distance from its object*<sup>88</sup>.

His hand “veils” the women and “unveils” them again. The camera cuts into extreme close-ups of the faces, fragmenting it according to images of the mouths and the eyes (Figure 1.17).



Figure 1.17. *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* (Harun Farocki, 1988)

Alter criticizes this sequence for their lack of political specificity. These photos were taken during the Algerian war and the women –Berbers– were photographed “by the military police because they are suspected criminal, or more precisely, ‘terrorists’ carrying bombs”<sup>89</sup>. By connecting these photographs of Algerian suspected “terrorists” with present-day German terrorist suspects, Farocki suggests a connection between the two. As Alter writes, “Whether ‘Jew’, ‘Algerian’, or ‘German’, these are all ‘enemies’ to somebody”<sup>90</sup>. What Farocki understands in his decision to link these images, is that the representation and identification of the “enemy” occurs in the production of images and, at least since the days of Césaire Lombroso’s theory on criminology which continue to influence how criminals are thought about today, in the production of *face-images* in particular. The “artistry” of Granager’s beautiful analogue photographs in stunning black and white contrast (and in contrast to the perhaps less beautiful present-day computer-generated images) does not take away from their colonial and imperial power.

The third sequence analyzed by Alter comes from the last ten minutes of the film, which lasts about 15 seconds, in which Farocki focuses on a female prisoner in a photograph taken at a Nazi concentration camp (Figure 1.18). In this case, the photograph is filmed in two shots, first a wider one where we see the entire image, followed by a slow fade into the second, closer shot, to see the woman’s face. The female voice-over says:

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<sup>88</sup> Farocki, “Commentary from *Bilder*”, 80.

<sup>89</sup> Alter, “The Political Im/perceptible in the Essay Film”, 182.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

*Among the shaven heads, a girl who smiles. In Auschwitz apart from death and work, there was a black market, there were love stories and resistance groups<sup>91</sup>.*



Figure 1.18. *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* (Harun Farocki, 1988)

*Aufschub* also draws attention to the smiles in the Westerbork archive as a way of pointing out the paradoxical nature of the archive, and the inevitable distance between what the images show and what we *know* or understand from the image with the distance of time. But while in *Aufschub* smiles are pointed out through depersonalized texts, in which there is no clear “author” besides Farocki himself, in *Bilder* the annunciations are pronounced by an anonymous woman reader, a voice-over, who speaks Farocki’s but is neither seen nor introduced. For Alter, it is not only the invisibility of the woman reader but also the *sentimentality* of the voice-over that is out of line and borderline *kitsch*. Why include a female voice-over and why have her speak of women posing for the masculine gaze, being horrified by being photographed, or about potential love stories in a concentration camp?

A film that reflects upon the “smile” in a non-sentimental way is Ariella Azoulay’s two-minute *Khaira’s Smile* (2002). The film takes a closer look at photographs of Khaira Abu

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<sup>91</sup> Farocki, “Commentary from *Bilder*”, 90.

Hassan, a Palestinian woman who was delayed at Israeli checkpoints for about ten hours while in labor (Figure 1.19). A few hours after it was born, her baby died. The film is introduced by a text that reads: “Khaira Abu Hassan, who lost her baby while waiting at an IDF roadblock, *cannot control her smile* and places it as a barricade before attempts to understand her or identify with her. *The smile is a kind of boundary that the occupied can place with the occupier*”<sup>92</sup>. This introduction is followed by multiple frames of an extreme close-up of Hassan’s mouth, edited together so that they overlap, and the image acquires the illusion of movement. Accompanying these images, we hear a soundtrack of sirens, children screaming, a baby crying, and a woman laughing. Hassan’s “voice” is expressed as on-screen text: “I carried him for several months”. The screen cuts to a moving image, taken from a moving vehicle, arriving at an IDF roadblock. An Israeli police officer speaks in the distance: “We were clearly instructed not to let anyone through. [...] Pregnant women are a problem. [...] Any woman with a bit of a belly could be a problem. [...]”. Various photographs of Hassan (taken in a sequence of shots) are passed over quickly with the camera. Now we hear the photographer who took Hassan’s photograph: “From the moment I lifted up the camera, she couldn’t stop smiling. I waited for her to stop smiling... because *the smile didn’t correspond with the story*. I asked the translator to ask her to stop smiling.” Hands –perhaps Azoulay’s– flip through the series of photographs, as proof of what the photographer is saying: “She didn’t stop smiling”. A doctor gives his “expert” opinion, while strangely smiling himself: “If a premature delivery would happen at checkpoint the baby would die most probably. He can arrive dead, or he can arrive with asphyxia and have brain damage”. The photographer, arms crossed, says showing annoyance: “Maybe she didn’t want to stop smiling in front of an Israeli cameraman. To her, he (speaking about himself) may not be any different from the soldier”. The soldier speaks again: “He looked at her through the window, of course. He didn’t ask her to get out [...] and he saw that her belly wasn’t big enough, she was very calm, so how could she be pregnant?”. Text appears on screen, in quotation marks, again of Hassan’s “voice” expressing her devastation. The photographer speaks, “Her smile faded, but not completely. In the photograph that I finally decided to publish, she’s smiling a bit less.” Now we see her smile again, in extreme close-up, and again hear a woman’s laugh, as though coming from the image itself.

The film asks, why did Khaira smile? While Farocki interprets the smile of a camp prisoner as a sign of potential “love stories and resistance stories”, Azoulay interprets the smile as a form of resistance to the Israeli imperial power. Both are *interpretations*, impossible to prove, since Hassan is never interviewed herself and therefore never actually asked about her smile. *Others* speak about it, *for* her. There is a clear distinction between how the male soldier, photographer, and doctor’s voices are represented (in camera) and how Hassan’s voice appears (as text, and therefore hard to say if she actually said those words, if they were recorded by an Israeli journalist, modified in the translation, or if they are fictionalized by Azoualy). In any case, the question arises of who gets to speak and who does not. While in Farocki’s film, “man is image and woman is voice”, in Azoulay’s film the opposite occurs: woman is in the image, man is the voice. We will never know what Hassan’s smile “means” –if it means anything at all– because we will never actually hear from Hassan. Film itself is shown to be, as photography, the extension of an imperial power. Hassan’s smiling and laughing face –made

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<sup>92</sup> Texts from the film. Italics added.

in the editing by the combination of images and sounds— taunts the Israeli officers, prolonging the enigma that the image has perpetuated.

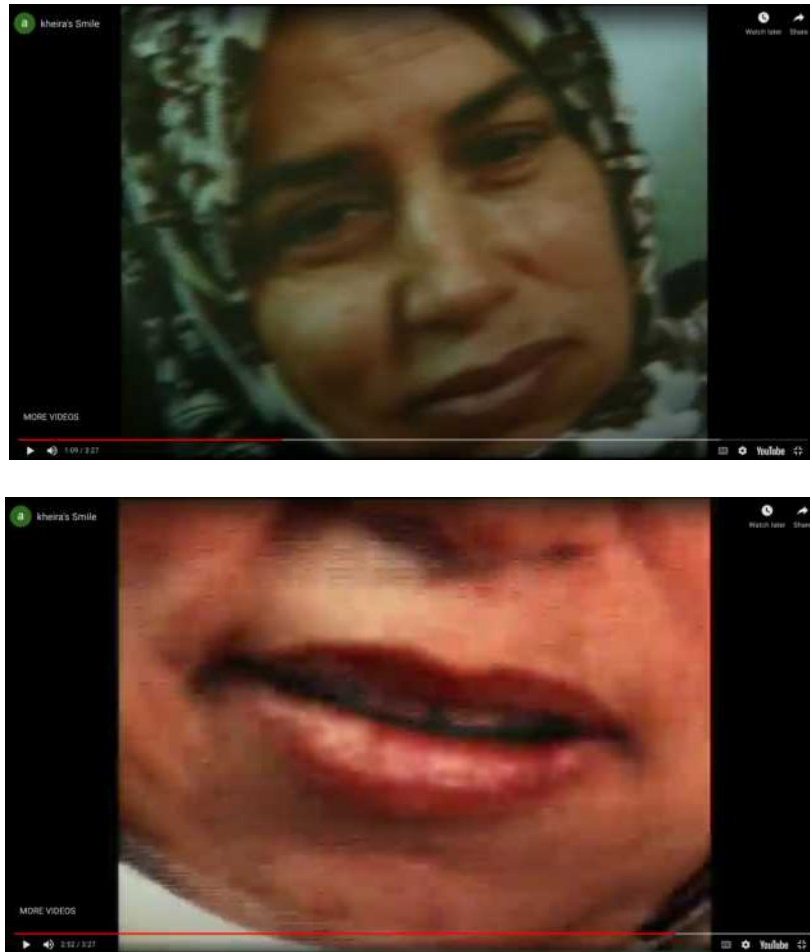


Figure 1.19. *Khiara's Smile* (Ariella Azoulay, 2002)

The choice of a female voice in *Bilder* is a provocation meant to show the spectator that there are *other ways* of looking at these images. But the disembodied female voice comes off as a man trying to imagine what a woman might feel or say, resulting in what Alter finds to be an artificially sentimental narrative. For Alter, the two existing readings of the first sequence prior to her essay (one by Kaja Silverman, another by Thomas Keenan) were embedded in theoretical orientations (in the former, Lacan; in the latter, Heidegger) that altered how the critics saw – and in some cases, could not quite see– the sequences. For Alter, both analyses are insufficient, but also are indicative of a certain reticence of critics to be critical with the essay film, because these are films that work into their narrative a pretense of self-criticality. Regardless if this is the case or not, it is helpful to keep this in mind in our analysis and to be cautious of how face-images can be used and ventriloquized by filmmakers for their own purposes. It poses the question of the relationship between criticism and the face-image as it is reappropriated into the essay film. Something that Alter does not emphasize however, is that these images are repeated throughout the film, and each time they reappear they are working towards the construction of a certain vocabulary and memory for the spectator, aiding in his/her construction of meaning from the montage. In this sense, it is important that the images re-

appear because, as in *Aufschub*, their meanings alter and vary, depending on what comes before and after. It is also important because as they re-appear associations become possible between the images; they are no longer individual faces, but images that can “look” across history at one another, as they share something that binds them, as in the images of the Algerien women and the German “terrorists” on the computer screen.

In one scene, for example, uncommented by Alter, Farocki cuts one close-up of an Algerian woman from a photograph with a close-up from the SS photograph (both are close-ups made by Farocki, in his framing of the images) (Figure 1.20). The voice-over says:

*What is no longer possible to believe in is once again idealized. 1960, in Algeria: the colonies. 1944, in Auschwitz: the human being as labor power*<sup>93</sup>.



Figure 1.20. *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* (Harun Farocki, 1988)

In this montage, Farocki creates a dialogue between the two face-images, something that he will continue to explore in his later work, converting each image into a potential representation of “what is no longer possible”: colonies and labor power, and the *nostalgia* that each image represents for, on the one hand, French colonizers, and on the other, German Nazis.

As we continue it is important to remember Alter’s critique of Farocki’s use of the female voice, as we will come back to combinations of face-image and voice in subsequent chapters, perhaps most explored in Chapter 6 in our discussion of Jean-Luc Godard’s *Le livre de image* (*The Image Book*, 2018). Alter’s critique of Farocki reminds us of what film critic

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<sup>93</sup> Farocki, “Commentary from *Bilder*”, 88.

Serge Daney says about Godard:

Godard's strange feminism: he puts the woman (the voice, the sound) in the place of what articulates the law (*la pensée de manche*, of which we've understood that it is invested with a phallic character) and of what gives life. Perversion. It's not clear that feminist demands are satisfied with this "place" the men no longer want, with this "power" which they've let drop. They don't necessarily gain by it (even if the man reaps his profit of masochism: being the *metteur en scène* who says how he wishes to be punished, what type of cruel mothering he enjoys.) They didn't necessarily gain by it when, at the time of *La Chinoise* and *Le Vent d'est*, they were put in the place of a discourse (Marxist-Leninist) which nobody wanted any part of. Anne Wiazemsky's voice (and the bourgeois class-being it connoted) made it impossible for anyone to identify with this discourse and this truth<sup>94</sup>.

For Daney, this "strange feminism" gives women the place "the men no longer want", when the discourse that is repeated is already out of fashion. Being ("put", by the man-director) in this place, the woman speaker is not able to establish the viewer's identification, and therefore unable to be the receiver of empathy. In the following section, we will see how this problem is responded to in *Aufschub* through the non-gendered use of text. Text (as opposed to voice) becomes a strategy to articulate image and sound into one, in what might be, perhaps, a more honest expression.

### **Positionality, Complicity, and the Potential for Doubt**

Elsaesser proposes that we understand Farocki's "doubt" in the second viewing of Settela in *Aufschub* –his hypothesis for why the cameraman avoided close-ups– as a response to Nora Alter's critique of *Bilder*, but he does not say exactly how this works nor if it is sufficient. What's more, Elsaesser has a different memory of Farocki's commentary than what is actually said in the text<sup>95</sup>. According to Elsaesser, Farocki "speculates that Breslauer avoided close-ups of the people getting into the trains, out of respect for the victim's dignity"<sup>96</sup>. In fact, Farocki says something a bit different: "The fear or premonition of death can be read in her face. I think this is why R.B avoided close-ups". Farocki's text could be understood as Elsaesser understands it or as the exact opposite: that Breslauer avoided faces so as to *hide* the fear on the passenger's faces. Perhaps it is a question of translation. Or perhaps the variation depends on whether we believe that he filmed these images "just following orders" or if he did so for his own reasons. Since this is something we cannot know for sure, the interpretation of the image changes depending on the spectator's understanding of the context in which the images were produced. It is what we do not know about the archive which allows the filmmaker to contemplate different possibilities for the image.

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<sup>94</sup> Daney, Serge, "The Therrorized (Godardian Pedagogy)", *Cahiers du cinéma* 262-3 (January 1976), trans. Annwyl Williams, Bill Krohn, and Charles Cameron Ball, *Diagonal Thoughts* (August 6, 2012).

<sup>95</sup> How the filmmaker-spectator sees the archive is invariably affected by his or her own experience. Elsaesser remembers "incorrectly" or not exactly what was actually said, because the meaning has passed through his own experience and knowing. He associates this film with Farocki's previous work and cannot but make the connection that Farocki is somehow responding to the criticism he received. This also says something about how we see films and the fact that the spectator will come to a film with his and her own "knowledge". The face-image, as a governing practice of seeing and knowing, is an image that magnifies this experience, and makes it even more evident. But the practice is common to the spectator's experience, every single time an image is seen. In studying the face-image in particular, we can understand the intricacies of the cinematic experience.

<sup>96</sup> Elsaesser, "Returning to the Past its Own Future", 11.



When seeing stands for knowing, or when what is seen (a photograph, a face or an archive, for instance) is credited as “evidence” and the face is credited with truth the image is “caught in a paradox”, says Didi-Huberman<sup>97</sup>. In this process of representation, the image “slips away from itself, despite itself”. For “[on] the one hand, they produce meaning and appear as obvious, whereas on the other hand, they conceal, escape and render mythical that very same surface”<sup>98</sup>. As a result, the face or the photograph allows for an “endless flight of knowledge”, even as it is an object which has been “detained for observation, fixed for objectivity”. The paradoxical relationship between the face’s ability to hide and reveal knowledge is complemented, then, by the paradoxical relationship between stillness (of observation) and movement (of knowledge)<sup>99</sup>. For all of the readings that Farocki offers the archival images in *Aufschub*, the face-image as a slippery, unattainable and ultimately unbounded image, manages to slip out of his grasp.

I believe that it’s possible that *Aufschub* responds to Alter’s critique of Farocki’s use of images and voice in *Bilder* in two ways, 1) through a change in voice, from “ventriloquizing” to the introduction of the “I” form and 2) through the subtle yet recognizable identification of Farocki, *not with Settela*, but with Breslauer, the male camera operator. If we look closely at how Farocki poses the question, “The fear or premonition of death can be read in her face. I think this is why R.B avoided close-ups”, he is hypothesizing about Breslauer’s reading of the image, and not about how Settela may have felt when it was taken. This is an important distinction. While in *Bilder* Farocki’s female voice-over spoke “for” the women in the photographs, here Farocki assumes the first person to suggest what Breslauer may have been thinking. He is careful not to ventriloquize exactly, but he is still “concealing” his own message “in a code”<sup>100</sup>.

Settela’s face-image becomes the perfect excuse for establishing subjectivity. For Lacan, the face acts like a “mirror” in which the spectator can define himself in relation to the other. In *Aufschub*, Settela’s face-image opens the door for Farocki to insert his own subjectivity. He does not dare ventriloquize for Settela this time; instead, he positions himself with the cameraman responsible for the images. In other words, instead of positioning himself with the clearly defined “victim”, he puts himself in the more uncomfortable place of image-creator, both hired by the Nazis *and* murdered in the camps. As someone who often worked

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<sup>97</sup> Didi-Huberman, Georges, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the photographic iconography of the Salpêtrière* (London: The MIT Press, 2003), 59.

<sup>98</sup> Zevnik, “The Politics of the Face”, 8.

<sup>99</sup> This dichotomy between movement and stillness is expressed throughout Farocki’s work in his choice to often include photographic stills within the moving picture. In *Aufschub* this relationship is made visible in the pausing and *suspension* of moving images which creates a photographic effect on the cinematographic image. Farocki in interview with Elsaesser: “There is just too much movement in the world. When I make a film, I have to compete with all this movement. So, I try to reduce the level of expectation a little, slow things down a bit. I use still images, in the hope that afterwards, the moving image will acquire a different value.” TE responds: “In that sense, as a photographer, you are always responsible for arresting time at that precise moment. And then the burden is for you to explain to us why you are arresting it, in other words, you raise a strong expectation of reading that image, of making that image say something, that it would not necessarily have said if it had just slipped past us. There is a kind of force that the image acquires. This seems very characteristic of your film-making, even in your other films.” Elsaesser, “Making the World Superfluous: An Interview with Harun Farocki”, 186.

<sup>100</sup> This is what Alter says about *Bilder*: “This is also part of Farocki’s own message. But, let me stress, it is not only thematically but also *formally* and *aesthetically* concealed in a code, almost exactly like the numbers used by the Auschwitz resistance group”. Alter, “The Political Im/perceptible in the Essay Film”, 189.

for advertising companies and then recycled the material he was paid to film into his own found footage essay films, Farocki could identify perhaps more honestly with Breslauer than with Settela. In positioning himself with Breslauer and wondering what *he* was thinking (and not what Settela was thinking at the moment of being photographed), Farocki also participates in the “unlearning” of an image which has been used over time and in its numerous reproductions in order to create a generalized notion of “we” that is deceptively exclusive. As *Nuit et brouillard* had already said in its closing, “If anyone is responsible it is all of us”. By positioning himself more closely to the perpetrator and not the victim, and by looking at the image as only he (and we) can see it, that is, from a distance, Farocki “unlearns” that which has been attributed to this iconic image of Settela and ignored in the missing counter-image (which would be of Breslauer filming/looking at Settela). This knowledge goes much deeper than the identification of her name.

Farocki’s positioning with Breslauer might just be a more honest expression of solidarity with the people exterminated in the camps. As professor and author Tina Campt has said in relation to the mass mobilizations in the United States (and around the world) after the assassination of George Floyd in 2020, *complicity* is much more powerful than *empathy* because it is a “much more honest relationship to White Supremacy”<sup>101</sup>. As spectators watch the ten-minute video of his murder filmed by 17-year-old Darnella Frazier, perhaps they see themselves (and their family and friends) in police officer Derek Chauvin, rather than Floyd, and understand that they too are complicit in his and the murder of so many Blacks every year across the United States. Elsewhere I have written: “The question between responding from a place of comfort versus discomfort, or empathy versus complicity, seems to come down to an issue of identification” which suggests, as Virginia Woolf asks in her novel *Three Guineas*<sup>102</sup> written in the winter of 1936-37, as a letter-response to the question of “How are we to prevent war” that to begin to answer this question we must begin by questioning the notion of “We”<sup>103</sup>. But more than identification, perhaps, it is a question of *positionality*. The face-image opens the possibility for such a question to be explored.

Elsaesser understood the digital media age not as a technological rupture, but as the occasion to undergo “thought experiments” in the hope of retracing and reimagining alternative histories for the cinema, alternative histories which could even be pushed along with the help of counterfactual history, if necessary. “[...] That is, to identify different points in the past, where a given technology either could have had, or was imagined to have had, a different future from the one that eventually did occur”<sup>104</sup>, explains Elsaesser in an interview. “[...] Which in turn made us aware of the elements of chance and contingency, the moments of apparent failure that contained seeds of unrealized possibilities, and thus the importance of factoring into any history of media also those events and elements *that did not happen, but could have happened, or those events that did happen, but whose impact fades or was subsequently suppressed*”.

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<sup>101</sup> Campt, Tina, “John Akomfrah in conversation with Tina Campt, Ekow Eshun, Saidiya Hartman”, Lisson Gallery (virtual talk on June 18, 2020).

<sup>102</sup> Woolf, Virginia, *Three Guineas* (Hogarth Press, London, 1938).

<sup>103</sup> Gills, Libertad, “Negotiating Images: The Viewing Booth by Ra’anan Alexandrowicz”, *La Furia Umana* Issue 39 (October 2020).

<sup>104</sup> Elsaesser, Thomas, “Film History as Media Archaeology: an interview with Thomas Elsaesser and Vladimir Lukin” (Amsterdam University Press, 2016): 10.

These *alternative genealogies of the cinema* would “reveal the normally hidden power structures involved in the dominant or victory of certain media, standards and norms, and thus of a certain version of history, technology and progress”<sup>105</sup>. The face-image, as it is being appropriated in experimental found-footage filmmaking today, has the potential to invoke reflections of this kind. It can provide the time and the space for alternative historical and philosophical narratives.

In the case of *Aufschub*, the “dominant” media, standards and norms that are being critically reconsidered here not only concern the dominant migrations of the Westerbork archive, but also traditional documentary forms which have resulted in the spectator’s dependence on archives as evidence and on voices and texts as expressions of authority. Documentary aesthetics extend well beyond the cinematic space; it informs our way of seeing and interpreting what we see outside of the screen. Farocki proposes an alternative documentary aesthetic in which the filmmaker creates the space for repetition and reiterative readings, self-critical subjectivity, and the possibility to doubt. At the same time, he is aware of his own participation in the form and conscious of his power to create ideas in montage. What flourishes, over time, is a politics of care within the archive which can allow for a more personal reading, as well as the possibility for the filmmaker to be wrong. In *Aufschub*, the repetition of the face-image calls forward Farocki’s first expression of the “I” in text form and with it –perhaps paradoxically– an opportunity for solidarity.

What happens in the appropriation of Settela’s face-image over time gives us a method for understanding how archival cinema has changed throughout film history. In its contemporary forms, the archive has become a much more contemplative and private space, in the sense described by John Berger in his discussion of public versus private uses of photographs. For Berger, “Photographs are relics of the past, traces of what has happened. If the living take that past upon themselves, if the past becomes an integral part of the process of people making their own history, then all photographs would re-acquire a living context, they would continue to exist in time, instead of being arrested moments”<sup>106</sup>. The archive today is not (only) a source of truth or a mystery to be solved, it is also a malleable, rewindable, pausable, interruptible, *living* material which can be intervened –even in the most minimalist way– and in our touching of it, it can make us see something entirely new. The coming back to this face-image over archival cinema history has offered us the ability to see how our relation to the archive has transformed over time. The image, once treated as a document of objectivity and truth, can now be freed from those limitations of fact (which are often tainted by fiction and mystification) and serve a more contemplative purpose for the filmmaker who appropriates it. The face-image goes from being an image of truth and certainty to an image of thought, experimentation and, necessarily, doubt. In short, an image that has the potential to be unlearned.

## **Listening to Face-Images**

Throughout his filmography, Farocki’s preoccupation is with the image itself. He understands

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<sup>105</sup> Elsaesser, “Film History as Media Archaeology”, 11.

<sup>106</sup> Berger, John. “Uses of Photography”, *About Looking*, New York: Vintage International, 1991: 61.

the image as a thing that is produced or manufactured by a certain technology and in a certain time period, and whose very nature changes over time. He is particularly interested in images of war perhaps because it is known that the development of cameras and cinema is directly related to the industrialization of war. His films, often essays, explore the direct relationship between cinema, technology, and war or industrialization. He believes that by studying images produced in times of war one can understand where the image (and the technology) is “headed”.

According to Farocki, “[a] process of human self-abolition is underway”<sup>107</sup>. The future of the image is a machine-generated *interface* and will not include the participation of humans in their production. What draws him to the Westerbork archive, then, must be multi-fold: on the one hand, the conflicting nature of the production of the images themselves (i.e. the disparity between the intentions of the commander who commissions it—Albert Gemmeker—and the person who executes it—Rudolf Breslauer—and how these different positions are made visible—and invisible—within the material itself), and on the other, the possibility to juxtapose the part of the archive that is rarely seen with the part that is familiar (because it has been reproduced so many times before), and in doing so, defamiliarize the familiar, make it strange, as way of “unlearning” all that the image has been made to say over time, so that the images may finally begin to “speak” on their own. One way to resist the dehumanization of images—and against the lack of close-ups—and the forthcoming self-abolition of humankind, is for the filmmaker to insert his own “voice”, his own tentative and doubtful “I”. But of course, there are other ways as well...

More close-ups in the film could have shown the inmate/passenger’s fear in their faces, as Farocki suggests at the end, but close-ups would have also functioned to highlight the smiles of the workers in the camps. Close-ups would have made this material even more difficult to mold into something it is not, that is, into one uniform and clear message of what the camps were and what this material “represents”<sup>108</sup>. *What does an archive without close-ups mean for how we understand history?* Farocki seems to believe that archives without close-ups can be used too easily to illustrate the dominant war ideology; there is too much distance in these archives, too much of a separation between the spectator and the subject photographed. Close-ups provide a *counterpoint* to the machine-generated image: but exactly what these close-ups may *say* or *do* is not easily determined nor controlled. The found footage filmmaker who decides to work with face-images, to recover them from the past, dust them off and bring them forward from the past into the future, faces the distinct possibility that these face-images may *say* and *do* things that might be in direct contradiction with the rest of the film. For these images, unlike most others, function on *their own terms*. Whether real or imagined, these terms affect the way that the spectator thinks of them. And it is here where the face-image—and how it is seen by the spectator—can enter in direct conflict with the rest of the archives and images that are being recycled in the same film. The *knowing* that these images provoke is different from the one that the other images can afford. Farocki has also been unable to resist the desire to ascribe his own sentimentality to the face-image; the resistance that it can provoke in a critic like Alter is testament to how these images have been slippery for Farocki as well, camouflaged in a self-critical essay film, only to be critically questioned years later.

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<sup>107</sup> Elsaesser, “Making the World Superfluous”: 184.

<sup>108</sup> *Nuit et brouillard*, on the other hand, presents or reinforces this uniform, unquestionable image of the camps.

Face-images are unlike other archival images. The face-image asks that the filmmaker engage in a specific kind of *listening*: we are not suggesting that these images have *only one thing to say*, just the contrary, we are suggesting that the filmmaker who works with these images takes upon him or herself the additional task of having to *listen*. Listening to images “requires an attunement to sonic frequencies of affect and impact”, writes Tina Campt in her analysis dedicated to (soundless) photographic archival material. “It is an ensemble of seeing, feeling, being affected, contacted and moved beyond the distance of sight and observer”<sup>109</sup>. She proposes a method of “listening to images” when “their affects register at a frequency that is felt rather than heard”<sup>110</sup>. This method goes beyond sight in order to create “alternative modalities for understanding the archival temporalities of images” which she refers to throughout her book as “the grammar of the archive”<sup>111</sup>. When it comes to moving pictures, it can also take the form of what Farocki proposes here, to put the image after (and before) one image, and then to put it after (and before) another; to put the image next to a certain kind of text, and then to put it next to another. The ordering and re-ordering of the images, or their sequence, modifies the image’s potential. Farocki’s “listening” takes place at the editing table; by re-structuring the archival temporalities of the image, or the grammar of the archive, he also delays the future, and in the words of Elsaesser, “returns the past its own future”. This “listening” comes with practice, however, it is not necessarily achieved at once.

### **Counter-Images, Counter-Faces: *Interface* (Harun Farocki, 1995)**

In 1995<sup>112</sup> Farocki made a 24-minute film in which he explores a method for thinking about images that he calls *the counter-image*. A counter-image is an image that comments on another image; in *Interface* (Harun Farocki, 1995) Farocki uses video editing technology, as well as computer and television screens, to put one image next to another, creating a critical composition of looking in the process. In this film, Farocki returns to images from his own work, including the photographs of Algerian women filmed in *Bilder*, from 8 years earlier. As he watches the monitor, resting his face on his fist, we hear the disembodied female voice-over that Alter had criticized. Then, the voice goes away, and we continue to see Farocki looking at the images from his film, but now without the female voice-over. *He* begins to speak over these images, referring to himself in the third person, to describe what he wanted to do (then) when he covered their face-images with his hands (Figure 1.21).

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<sup>109</sup> Campt, Tina, *Listening to Images* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), 54.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid: 40.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid: 88.

<sup>112</sup> Film released one year before the publication of Alter’s critique of *Bilder*.

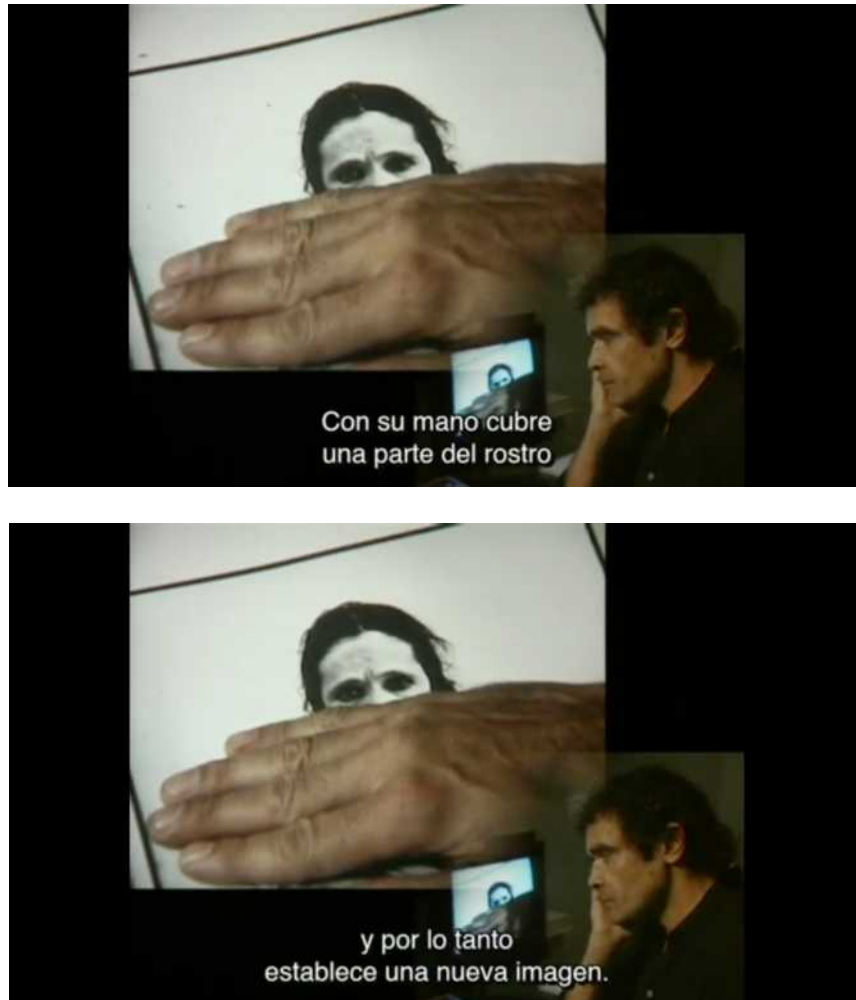


Figure 1.21. *Interface* (Harun Farocki, 1995)

After this now *embodied* male voice-over, Farocki goes quiet. He sits in front of the screen, watching, without saying a word (Figure 1.22). He does not share what he thinks *now* about these images from *then*; he simply, and silently, participates in the act of *just looking*. While these images are close-ups of the Algerian women from the photographs, the smaller screen with Farocki watching these images is of him in profile. These images complement each other formally, in the typical anthropometric format of frontal and profile perspectives. It might be said, then, that they “complete” one another, even if they are face-images of two different people. In their simultaneity, they create a kind of composite of faces, or a face / counter-face. There is a continuity from one screen to the other.



Figure 1.22. *Interface* (Harun Farocki, 1995)

The counter-image is a reworking of the classical editing method of shot-counter-shot<sup>113</sup>. What Farocki develops, inspired by the work of other filmmakers, primarily Jean-Luc Godard, is a relationship between images that is created not through editing one shot after another, but having different images occurring at the same time on the screen. If we are to recall our discussion on the Kuleshov Effect from the Introduction, this concept of counter-image and *soft montage* provokes a very different form of spectatorship. The “seeing” that it requires is a double and therefore critical one. The idea is that images build off one another, providing diverse points of view. The effect is a palimpsest of images that, in their plurality, create multiple readings at once. But while this undoubtedly occurs in the image, it is wise to consider what is happening to the sound. After all, Alter’s criticism stems from Farocki’s less self-critical use of sound, including image and voice-over. In *Interface* Farocki assumes a third person to speak about himself, perhaps because looking at himself now, some time after *Bilder*, and in image form, *he* is in fact a character, a performer, acting for the camera and for the audience. He is speaking about his image, his double. We will return to how to read for performance in

<sup>113</sup> For Farocki’s writing on the mechanism and function of the shot/counter-shot, see: “Shot/Countershot: The Most Important Expression in Filmic Law of Value”, *Imprint: Writings*, ed. Susanne Gaensheimer and Nicolaus Schafhausen, trans. Laurent Faasch-Ibrahim (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2001).

the face-image in the final Chapter, but it can be said that Farocki is already doing just that in this film.

In the following and final section, we will look at a possible counter-image for Settela's face-image, proposed in images filmed by Leo Hurwitz and reappropriated/edited by Chris Marker.

### **A Counter-Image to Settela's Face-Image: *Henchman Gance* (Chris Marker, 2008)**

Only one year after *Aufschub*'s release, filmmaker Chris Marker (collaborator of Alain Resnais on many films, including *Nuit et brouillard*) made a film titled *Henchman Gance* (2008), in which he cuts together images filmed by Leo Hurwitz during Eichmann's trial in 1961<sup>114</sup> with images from *Nuit et brouillard*, a film which as mentioned earlier was screened in the trials and which Eichmann was made to see<sup>115</sup>. Marker's film puts these images together, one after the other, while the video time code advances in real time. Settela's image passes briefly by, as it did many years earlier in the original film; after all, she was never the centerpiece of this film. While Resnais focused on the construction of the camp-image, Marker's attention is on Eichmann<sup>116</sup>.

Free of commentary (aside from the commentary of the original film) and further narration, and without the employment of the first person, the film forces the spectator to watch *Nuit et brouillard* again, with Eichmann, and to pay close attention to his gestures, the movement of his hand, his eyes, his mouth, his brow. Without zooming or cutting in, we are left to watch from a distance. The exercise is quite perplexing since, with the exception of a few very minor movements which might be read (by someone looking for it) to signal sadness or regret, the face remains seemingly unchanged throughout. At the time of the trial, in fact,

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<sup>114</sup> About the filming of the trial: "In 1961 Capital Cities Broadcasting Corporation hired the American filmmaker Leo Hurwitz to film the trial against Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem. The American company had signed a contract with the Israeli state which allowed them to document the trial as a whole. It was one of the first trials in history to be videotaped. The trial was broadcast on American television and in thirty-seven other countries, but not in Israel, since the country did not have a television network at the time. The fact that Israel could not broadcast the trial has been used as an argument that the state of Israel could not have had any propagandistic interests in the trial being filmed. Still, it may as well have worked the other way around: Ben Gurion explicitly wanted to remind the world of the Holocaust. He stated after the trial that he wanted it to achieve three things: to inform the world's opinion about the Holocaust, to educate the unknowing Israeli youth, and to gain support for the Israeli nation state. The reasoning behind the decision to film the trial is uncertain, but it is clear that the initiative came from the USA. However, in the court decision on the matter, the judges quoted the British lawyer and philosopher Jeremy Bentham: 'where there is no publicity, there is no justice.' They went on to quote another British lawyer, Lord Halsbury, saying that the court should make its proceedings public in order to 'communicate to all that which all have the right to know.'" Katz Thor, *Beyond the Witness*, 85. The 16mm footage filmed by Leo Hurwitz has been preserved by the Steven Spielberg Jewish Film Archive of Jerusalem. Lindeperg, *Noche y niebla*, 208.

<sup>115</sup> Similar to the device employed by Yael Hersonski in *A Film Unfinished* to the elderly survivors-now spectators of the archival images. While for Hersonski the viewing is intended to stimulate the spectator's memory and for their testimony to contrast what the images show, in Eichmann's Trial these images assumed a "punitive role" as a form of "visual punishment". Lindeperg writes, "En esta primera cara a cara de los verdugos con los films sobre los campos, las imágenes parecían haber asumido una función punitiva: con la atención sobre los espectadores nazis, los testigos del proceso se abocaron a medir los efectos de un castigo visual, como si los acusados hubieran estado equipados con la 'máquina de vigilar los ojos abiertos', más tarde imaginada por Kubrick en *La naranja mecánica...*", Lindeperg, *Noche y niebla*, 209.

<sup>116</sup> This footage of Eichmann has also "migrated". Eyal Sivan's film *The Specialist* (1999) is composed exclusively of 350 hours of footage recorded during Eichmann's trial in 1961.



journalists were quite disappointed by Eichmann’s “insensitivity”. They take note of his (lack of) reactions: “he does not bat an eyelash”, “he does not take his eyes off the screen nor cover his face with his hands”<sup>117</sup>. Whereas *Aufschub* pointed towards the variety of possible interpretations of an image, here the lack of dramatic expression points towards our *inability* to read this face and the futility of making an attempt. As the spectator watches *Nuit et brouillard*, and then watches Eichmann watching, they are put in Eichmann’s place as spectator. Again, the identification provoked by the face-image’s mirror quality is a controversial one, as the film takes on the perpetrator’s gaze and the spectator and Eichmann are placed in a similar relation to the film *Nuit et brouillard*. The difference, of course, is that the spectator *watches the watching*, unable to change the course of history but able to change his/her place in relation to that history: from actor to critical spectator. The film at last offers a *counter-image* missing from Resnais’ original film: “the Nazi”, as both perpetrator and victim, now in the role of witness, *watching* and *listening* to the image; an unlikely participant in the unlearning process. In fact, after writing this I read that Leo Hurwitz went through great trouble to be able to film both Settela’s face-image and Eichmann watching the screen at the very moment that she appears in *Nuit et brouillard*<sup>118</sup>. Apparently in the original footage a shot exists which contains the two face-images: Settela’s and Eichmann’s. As I have not seen this material, I can only imagine what such a shot-counter-shot might look like. Instead of one image after another, we can imagine it as the two face-images side by side (Figure 1.23).



Figure 1.23. Shot-counter-shot in *Henchman Glance* (Chris Marker, 2008)

In the following chapters, we will take a look at the different forms that the *listening* to the face-image may take and how the *what is heard* is modified by how the image is *touched* by the filmmaker, including by what comes before and what comes after, by the sound and

<sup>117</sup> Described by Lindeperg, *Noche y niebla*, 209.

<sup>118</sup> “Instalado en su oficina delante de los monitores que transmitían las imágenes desde cuatro cámaras dispuestas en la sala de audiencias, el realizador elegía, siguiente la técnica de edición en cámara, lo único que será registrado. Para filmar la proyección, privilegió el cara a cara entre el acusado y la pantalla instalada cerca del banco de testigos. Mientras el rostro de la niña aparecía de cabo a rabo en las pruebas de Westerbork, Hurwitz busca volver sobre Eichmann para establecer un juego de miradas entre la víctima y el criminal nazi. Pero el plano es tan breve que registra un fragmento corto de la imagen siguiente que muestra a los oficiales antes de bascular sobre la otra cámara. Mientras *Noche y niebla* es enseguida proyectada en el curso de la misma sesión, Hurwitz se prepara. Consigue su balance, produciendo un perfecto contracampo desde el rostro del acusado hasta el de la pequeña deportada. El cineasta americano tomaba, así, diecisiete años después de los hechos, la mirada arrojada sobre las víctimas por uno de los responsables de la deportación de los judíos”. Lindeperg, *El camino de las imágenes*, 165.

text, and by what is done to the face-image itself, including re-photography, re-framing, and both direct and digital intervention on the material. Gestures of solidarity *towards the archive* and *towards the other in the archive* which in *Aufschub* takes the form of rewinding, pausing, and creating respites, are attributed by Elsaesser to Farocki's work ethics and politics<sup>119</sup>. We would like to situate these gestures within a wider contemporary practice of affective archival practice in recent found footage filmmaking, which we will continue to explore in the following Chapters. This exploration will be considerate of the limits that care, solidarity, identification, empathy, and complicity may have and how these limits are discovered, formally and aesthetically, in the treatment of the face-image.

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<sup>119</sup> Elsaesser, Thomas, "The Future of Art and Work in the Age of Vision Machines: Harun Farocki," in *After the Avantgarde: Contemporary German and Austrian Experimental Film*, ed. Randall Halle and Reinhild Steingröver (Rochester 2008), 47f.

## Chapter 2: Face-Image Entanglements: Material Temporalities, Co-Existence, and Double Exposure as Double Death in *strata of natural history* (Jeannette Muñoz, 2012)

A friend came to see me in a dream. From far away.  
And I asked in the dream: “Did you come by photograph or train?”  
All photographs are a form of transport and an expression of absence.  
-John Berger<sup>1</sup>

For many European writers and intellectuals of the twentieth century, the *erosion of man* originates with the Holocaust. As we saw in the previous Chapter, Settela’s face, the face of a child filmed between the doors of a train destined to a concentration camp was taken as a symbol of that fatality. Paradoxically, in the discovery of her non-Jewish identity, Settela became, for Elsaesser, an even stronger symbol for European identity. He writes, “Now when we see the image of ‘the girl’, we think of Jews and Gypsies, we think of history and its obliteration, we think of the one and the many, and we think of both our national and our European identity, hopefully in a new light”<sup>2</sup>.

For many people in the world, however, the threat of erosion of their cultures, autonomies, and bodies began much earlier with the colonization of their territories and in the power relations which resulted from that initial colonization. What role did the production, accumulation and naturalization of photographic images play in this process? In her Introduction to *Anthropology and Photography* published in 1992, Elizabeth Edwards writes that photography was in many ways symbolic of the unequal relationship created by “the colonial situation” and sustained “through a controlling knowledge which appropriated the ‘reality’ of other cultures into ordered structure”<sup>3</sup>. Specifically, photography “represented technological superiority harnessed to the delineation and control of the physical world, whether it be boundary surveys, engineering schemes to exploit natural resources, or the description and classification of the population”<sup>4</sup>. Scholar Ariella Azoulay is more unequivocal in her declaration that the photograph, and the camera *shutter* in particular, developed “as an imperial technology”<sup>5</sup>. She extracts the idea of “shutter” as a synecdoche for a movement which begins an imperialist process or cycle. She writes, “Photography developed with imperialism; the camera made visible and acceptable imperial world destruction and legitimated the world’s reconstruction on empire terms”<sup>6</sup>. As an imperial technology, photography is the final stage in

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<sup>1</sup> Berger, John, and Jean Mohr, *A Seventh Man* (New York: Verso, 2010), 17.

<sup>2</sup> Elsaesser, Thomas, “‘One Train May Be Hiding Another’: Private History, Memory and National Identity”, in *The Low Countries: Arts and Society in Flanders and the Netherlands – a Yearbook, 1996-1997*, ed. Josef Delau et al (Flanders: Flemish-Netherlands Foundation "Stichting Ons Erfdeel", 1996), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Edwards, Elizabeth, “Introduction”, in *Anthropology and Photography: 1860-1920*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Azoulay, Ariella. *Potential History* (New York: Verso Books, Kindle Edition, 2019), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

the imperial process of extraction and plunder, from where people and communities are separated from their material possessions, their land, their families, their histories and culture.

Art critic Ronald Kay views photography as an extension of the colonization of indigenous communities and the photographic lens as an extension the colonizing eye:

Las vistas fotográficas del interior del desierto, las instantáneas panorámicas de la selva o de los extremos de la Antártida, no son reflejo de su consuetudinaria tendencia, sino que implican abruptas irrupciones en el continente desconocido, allanamientos y violaciones visuales de un espacio tramado por mentes otras, aborígenes. Estas tomas son señales ópticas de puntos geográficos descubiertos; constituyen piezas de prueba de su real (y no fantástica) existencia; son la noticia documentada de su conquista. A la vez connotan el inventario de lo por dominar, por ocupar, por explotar. Son en cierto modo *blancos*. Gráficamente, la toma fotográfica en el Nuevo Mundo efectúa una toma de posesión<sup>7</sup>.

The “toma” (in Spanish) or “take” of the photograph brings about a colonial “take” or possession. In the process, the colonial “other” is “taken”, possessed by the photographer in image, just as his and her lands and resources are extracted and looted to support the economies of the colonizing empires. In the case of the “global” system of *human zoos*, which will be one of our subjects in this Chapter, the “toma” or “take” of the photograph of the aboriginal “other” occurs after the literal kidnapping of native people from their lands.

The “international mechanism” of human zoos functioned in Hamburg (1874), Amsterdam (1883), Paris (1878 and 1889), Chicago (1893), Barcelona (1896), Brussels (1897), Osaka (1903) and Wembley (1925), based on a model that became generic<sup>8</sup>. This model or “concept”, possibly inspired by Carl Hagenbeck in Hamburg, Germany, as the highly profitable amalgamation of naturalizing and exhibiting human beings in “open enclosure”<sup>9</sup>, that is, in sets/recreations of their “natural habitats”, was quickly adopted by the Jardin Zoologique d’Acclimatation de Paris where it became an immediate economic success<sup>10</sup>. Grounded in ancient roots of human exhibition, and following the “discovery” of the New World and the colonial expansion of Europe, as well as the commercialization of “exotic exhibitions” throughout the 19th century, an *iconographic grammar* began to form in the construction of “a corpus of imagery of the Other which manufactured and permanently defined that Other”<sup>11</sup>. In this strange hybrid context of science and entertainment, highly lucrative human zoos began to develop across Europe (and other parts of the world). In total, there were between thirty-five and forty thousand “exhibits” in a period that lasted about a century<sup>12</sup>. These exhibitions were “an occasion to produce special sets of photography” (at a time in which the medium was developing quickly and where the technology was also part of the spectacle), in which the Other was “‘organized’ into albums or ‘galleries’ of ethnic groups, usually represented by two

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<sup>7</sup> Kay, Ronald, *Del Espacio De Aca: Señales para una mirada americana. A propósito de la pintura y la gráfica de Eugenio Dittborn* (Santiago: Metales Pesados, 1980), 29.

<sup>8</sup> Blanchard, Pascal, Gilles Boetsch and Nanette Jacomijn Snoep, “Introduction”, in *Human Zoos: The Invention of the Savage*, ed. Blanchard, Boetsch, and Jacomijn Snoep (Paris: Fondation Lilian Thuram and Musée du Quai Branly, 2012), 20.

<sup>9</sup> Schneider, William H, “The Jardin d’Acclimatation, Zoos and Naturalization”, in *Human Zoos: The Invention of the Savage*, ed. Pascal Blanchard, Gilles Boetsch and Nanette Jacomijn Snoep (Paris: Fondation Lilian Thuram and Musée du Quai Branly, 2012), 133.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid: 132.

<sup>11</sup> Blanchard, Boetsch, and Jacomijn Snoep, 24.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid: 40.

photographs of each individual, frontal and profile”<sup>13</sup>, following a classification system designed by Francis Galton in 1878 (five years before he coined the term “Eugenics”) and further developed by Thomas Henry Huxley and John Lamprey in Britain.

How to work with images produced in this context when they symbolize the conquest and destruction of indigenous communities, as well as the ideology of White Supremacy founded on the construction of identities based on race? How can these images be reworked so that they can convey something different from or counter to their original purpose? This is especially a challenge, perhaps, for artists who share a “blood memory”<sup>14</sup> with the subjects represented in the images and whose “response-ability”<sup>15</sup> towards the subjects becomes an integral part of their artistic practice. How can artists become *response-able* when working with images that were taken to serve the interests of colonization and extermination of indigenous people? And what role does the face-image play in this practice?

Our question is not only how these images can turn against their original colonial and ideological function, nor will we assume that their appropriation is always realized with this intention, but specifically what role the *face-image* plays in this turning. If images have agency, where does this agency lie in the face-image? And furthermore, how can contemporary reappropriations of the face-image re-direct our thinking about images and cinema, including the relationship between image-working, seeing and knowing? In this Chapter, we study *strata of natural history* (Jeannette Muñoz, 2012), a film that reappropriates photographs taken of indigenous Kawéskar men and women and that are rephotographed by Muñoz in 16mm film. We will reflect on the relationship between photography and cinema, intersected by questions of disappearance and appearance, death and reanimation, convergence and co-existence. We begin from the understanding that the emergence of photography and cinema is intimately connected to the torture, killing, and exhibition of Indigenous people and animals, and we will explore how Muñoz’s appropriation of the archive sheds light on this truth while opening the door for other possibilities for decolonizing the archive with cinema’s tool box.

While the previous and subsequent chapters will focus on practices of montage, this chapter is dedicated to a practice of appropriation of the archive which requires filming and *in-camera* editing. These practices will open up an important reflection on where photography and cinematography meet, as well as where cinematography continues to excavate deeper into questions of representation and image materiality that are introduced by photography. This discussion will be useful not only for Chapter 4, on Susana de Sousa Dias’ Trilogy on the Portuguese Dictatorship which works primarily with archival photographic mug shots, as well for Chapter 5 in which we will incorporate Frederick Douglass’ theory on portraiture and photography to appropriations of the face-images of fellow revolutionaries/fugitives Angela Davis and Assata Shakur, and for Chapter 6, on Jean-Luc Godard’s appropriation of a photograph taken by German photographer Dirk Alvermann of an Algerian freedom fighter in *Le livre d’image* (*The Image Book*), but also more generally in order to understand that the appropriation of photographs in cinema opens up important questions regarding film form.

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<sup>13</sup> Blanchard, Boetsch, and Jacomijn Snoep, 28.

<sup>14</sup> Graham, Martha. *Blood Memory: An Autobiography*. New York: Doubleday, 1991.

<sup>15</sup> Concept expressed in: Haraway, Donna J. “Storytelling for Multispecies Justice and Care”, El Premio Nuevo León Alfonso Reyes (online conference), March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021.

## The Photographs: Historical Context, Technological Aspects, Migration

Filmed in Berlin (and partially in Santiago) in both black and white and color 16mm film, *strata of natural history* (2012) is an experimental silent film which can be classified as travelogue, diary and/or city symphony<sup>16</sup>, and which participates in the search for “persisting and invisible traces” of the Kawéskar natives in Berlin<sup>17</sup>. As a Chilean artist and filmmaker living six months in the German capital, Jeannette Muñoz makes the film in order to “...desvelar los diferentes *estratos* o citas históricas que me incumben como chilena”<sup>18</sup>. The project begins with Muñoz’s discovery of photographs of Kawéskar habitants of la Patagonia taken in 1881 in her visit to the Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology, and Prehistory (Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte)<sup>19</sup>. These photographs are re-appropriated into the film as one of the many layers or *strata* –the *strata número uno*<sup>20</sup> or *ground zero strata*– of what is not seen but which nonetheless plays an important part of the history of that place. As images that are insisted upon by the filmmaker<sup>21</sup> –they are introduced at the very beginning, return in the middle, and again at the very end– these stand out among the other layers in the film as phantasmagorical visions of indigenous peoples whose “presence” remains in Berlin, despite the fact that their death has been invisibilized and silenced in the cityscape.

In order to examine how these photographs are appropriated it is important to first understand the origin of these images. As already mentioned, these images date to 1881. That year, eleven Kawéskar, also known as the Alacalufe, Kaweskar, Alacaluf or Halakwulup, were kidnapped from their native land of Chilean Patagonia<sup>22</sup> by the German fisherman and businessman Carl Hagenbeck, and taken to his zoo in Berlin, where they were given German nicknames and exhibited alongside other groups of indigenous natives and exotic animals, behind two-meter-tall cages<sup>23</sup>. The youngest Kawéskar was the first to pass away on the journey to Berlin. After Germany, the remaining men and women were exhibited in the Jardin d’Acclimatation in Paris<sup>24</sup>. Once there, they were photographed by Pierre Petit and these

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<sup>16</sup> Sen, Arindem, “Pliegues escondidos: sobre *Strata of Natural History*”, in *Jeannette Muñoz: El paisaje como un mar*, ed. Francisco Algarín Navarro (Barcelona: Lumière, 2017), 104.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Agudo, Vanessa, Francisco Algarín Navarro, and Blanca García, “Entrevista con Jeannette Muñoz: Las piedras pueden ser pan y la arena azúcar”, in *Jeannette Muñoz: El paisaje como un mar*, ed. Francisco Algarín Navarro (Barcelona: Lumière, 2017), 40. Translation: “...unveil the different strata or historical citations that concern me as a Chilean”.

<sup>19</sup> Jeannette Muñoz: “En Berlín, busqué en los estratos de la ciudad la parte que relaciona las ciencias naturales y la historia que me incumbe como chilena. Visité el archivo de la Sociedad para la Etnología y la Antropología de Berlín. Es una institución antigua, tiene más de 100 años de historia. Ahí encontré las fotografías de habitantes de la Patagonia chilena (k)awéskar y mapuche, junto a reportes de los estudios biológicos. Este hecho está invisibilizado en toda Europa y es un estrato entre muchos otros, visibles y no visibles en la ciudad”, *ibid*: 50.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*: 62.

<sup>21</sup> We will return again many times to the theme of insistence (and repetition). The face-image seems to have this power over many artists.

<sup>22</sup> Although the Kawéskar are a nomadic people, they have been known to live in the Brunswick Peninsula, and Wellington, Santa Inés, and Desolación islands of the western area of Tierra del Fuego.

<sup>23</sup> Báez, Christian, and Peter Mason, *Zoológicos humanos: fotografías de fueguinos y mapuche en el Jardin d’Acclimatation de París, siglo XIX* (Santiago: Pehuén, 2006), 15-17.

<sup>24</sup> According to Báez and Mason, humans were first introduced to Paris’s Jardin d’Acclimatation in August 1877. Along with the display of exotic species, including giraffes, camels, elephants, baby rhinoceros and ostriches, 14 Africans (Nubians) were also included in the exhibition. The economic success of the exhibition resulted in the

images circulated, as postcards (a popular format for these types of images at the time), and sold for approximately half a franc, which at the time was a great amount. In Paris, many of them began to fall ill. After Paris, they were taken to Zurich, and a young woman who had been named “Grehte” by the Germans died during the journey. Once in Zurich, as many of them were seriously ill, they were seen by a doctor and diagnosed with syphilis, measles and tuberculosis. Only four of the initial 11 survived and returned to Chile; the remaining men, women, and children, died in Zurich<sup>25</sup>. Their skeletons were kept at the University of Zurich until 2008, when documentary filmmaker Hans Mülchi and researcher Christian Báez established contact between the University and Kawéskar descendants, namely the community leaders Celina LLan Lián y Haydeé Águila, who become active participants in the retrieval of the bodies<sup>26</sup>. They traveled to Zurich with the filmmakers to recover the remains of her ancestors who were finally able to return to their homeland and receive a proper ceremonial burial<sup>27</sup>. This process is documented in the film *Calafate, zoológicos humanos* (Hans Mülchi, 2010)<sup>28</sup> and although *strata of natural history* does not mention it, this story is also part of Muñoz’s film. As we have seen already in the previous chapter, many contemporary found footage and essay films do not necessarily “give credit” to the work done by previous researchers, including documentaries and other audiovisual content. (Thomas Elsaesser, in fact, was left puzzled by *Aufschub*’s lack of credits in this regard<sup>29</sup>.) However, it is undeniable that *Aufschub* builds upon the previous research and the same can be said for *strata of natural history*, which does not *need* to mention the source of the photographs, their history, nor the documentary made in 2010, but which somehow incorporates key information from these

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subsequent inclusion of 6 Inuit from Greenland. After the deduction of expenses, this exhibit generated 57.963 francs (approximately 170,000 dollars today), *ibid*: 19. In 1880 the addition of fueguinos. According to one of the interviews documented in Mülchi’s documentary and according to records kept at the time, this exhibit was visited by half a million people over a period of a few months.

<sup>25</sup> Following the deaths, the Hagenbeck organization subsequently made sure that everyone included in its “shows” was vaccinated. In fact, the vaccination became part of the marketing of the exhibitions, to quell the anxieties of the public who feared contamination. Blanchard, Boetsch and Jacomijn Snoep, 38.

<sup>26</sup> Similar stories of restitution include that of the “Hottentot Venus” whose remains were returned to South African in 2002, the “Banyoes Negro” whose mummified body was returned to Botswana in 2000, and the Tambo Aboriginal whose body was repatriated to Australia in 1994. Blanchard, Boetsch and Jacomijn Snoep, 49.

<sup>27</sup> Upon the return of the remains, the president of Chile formally apologized for the state having allowed these indigenous people to be taken out of the country to be exhibited and treated like animals. (Source: Wikipedia). In the documentary, however, it becomes clear that the bodies of the Kawéskar continued to be “used” beyond their death. In this case, they are finally used politically for Chile to be able to clear its name and show itself to be a country focused on human rights. As we are privy to the behind-the-scenes bureaucratic obstacles which almost disrupt the process of returning the remains, and the outright resistance of some of Chile’s representatives to the process, we understand that if it were not for the insistence of key players, including the Zurich University professor, the Kawéskar leaders, the researchers, and the filmmaker in charge of the documentary, the remains would likely still be in Zurich today.

<sup>28</sup> Available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8MyDeDpGAs>

<sup>29</sup> “In a subsequent email change, Farocki wanted to know what I could tell him about a film made at Westerbork, the transit camp run by the SS during the Nazi Occupation of the Netherlands. I replied by telling him about Cherry Duyns’ *Het gezicht van het verleden* (1994) (...) I also sent him an essay I had published in 1996 on Duyns’ film and Wagenaar’s detective work (...) A year later, (...) Farocki presented me with a package of DVDs, comprising a good part of his oeuvre. I was delighted and quite moved. Among the DVDs was also *Aufschub*. On re-seeing this (to me, familiar) Westerbork material, and reading Farocki’s ‘silent film’ commentary, my response was puzzlement, tinged with perplexity. No mention of Cherry Duyns’ film, barely a word about Aad Wagenaar”. Elsaesser, Thomas, “Returning to the Past its Own Future: Harun Farocki’s *Respite*”, *Research in Film and History*, Issue 1 (2018): 1-2.

resources in the formal and aesthetic decisions which define this film. (This is, perhaps, after all, what “migrating” means).

Before we get into how these photographs “migrate” to Muñoz’s film and what the filmmaker does to these images (two contrasting methodological points of view, as the first looks at what the images “do” in this film and the latter at what the filmmaker “does” to the images), we will first at the original photographs from 1881. Let us turn to a photograph (of a photograph) that comes directly from Muñoz’s scrapbook (an important part of her filmmaking practice), shared with me by the director herself (Figure 2.1). The text which has been cut-out and pasted on the image by Muñoz are the German-given names of the 11 Kawéskar who were kidnapped and displayed in the human zoos in Berlin. The image is a black and white photo of one of the Kawéskar natives, including his torso, arms, and head. In this case, the man in the photograph was given the German name “Capitano” and, according to the researchers filmed in the documentary from 2010, he was considered the “leader” of the group. He was kidnapped with his wife –“F. Capitano”, or “Frau Capitano”– and they both passed away from illness on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1882 after arriving in Zurich.

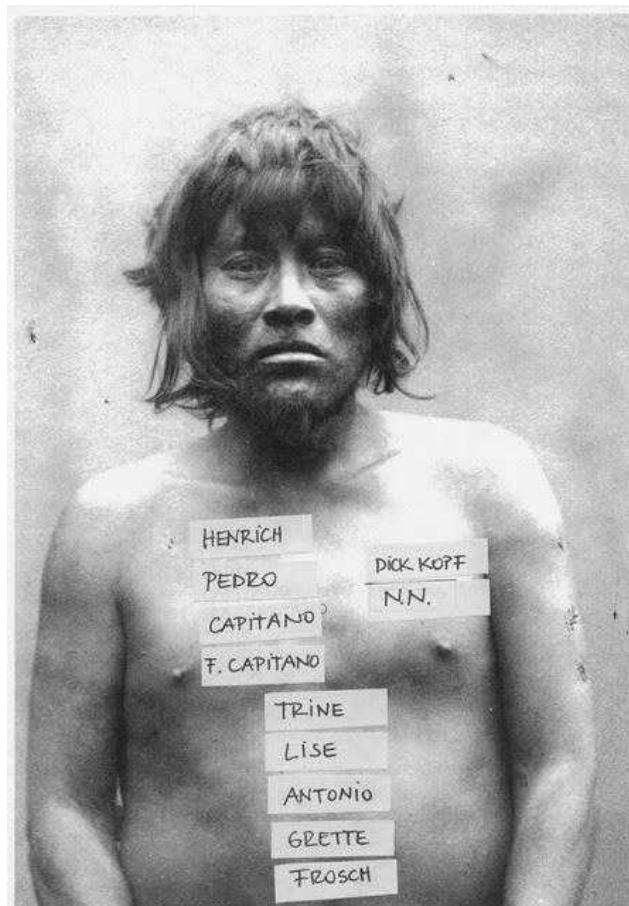


Figure 2.1. Source: Jeannette Muñoz’s archives

The return-gaze in his eyes is striking, as are the German “names” –fictional names, of course– of his people (some of them perhaps family members) written on his chest, which suggests a family tree contained in his body. His look at the camera travels through time, touching not



only the current spectator but anyone who will look at this image until it ceases to exist. The effect is reminiscent of a passage quoted at the beginning of this Chapter: “A friend came to see me in a dream. From far away. And I asked in the dream: ‘Did you come by photograph or train?’ All photographs are a form of transport and an expression of absence”<sup>30</sup>. In another photograph shared with me from Muñoz’s scrapbook (Figure 2.2), we see the collection of photos to which this photograph belongs, many of which appear in Muñoz’s film. To see the photographs in this way also allows us to contextualize the images within a larger framework. Suddenly, we understand that the photograph, however unique or spellbinding by the individuality of the subject photographed, is part of a ruled system of classification.



Figure 2.2. Source: Jeannette Muñoz’s archives

While photographs are indeed “a form of transport”, they have technical characteristics which vary according to the time period and conditions in which they were produced. As described in the appendix to *Anthropology and Photography: 1860-1920*, concerning all analogue photographs, prior to digital photography:

The photographic image is created by the light reflected off an object, channelled in a controlled way through a lens and falling on light-sensitive chemicals, usually silver salts, which are suspended in emulsion on a support, usually glass or film [...]. As a result of exposure the chemical compounds are altered as the reversed image of the subject is reflected on the plate. The degree to which the chemicals are altered depends on the amount of light reflected off the object, the size of the camera aperture, the length of the exposure time and the sensitivity of the chemicals themselves. The resulting negative is then ‘developed’ to bring out the latent image, surplus light-sensitive chemicals are removed and the image ‘fixed’<sup>31</sup>.

Considering the year that the photographs were taken, it is possible that the photographic process used for these images was the wet collodion plate negative process, which was dominant from the mid 1850s to c. 1880, and would be replaced by a dry gelatin plate process by the mid 1880s<sup>32</sup>. While the former process produced high-quality, reproducible images,

<sup>30</sup> Berger and Mohr, *A Seventh Man*, 17.

<sup>31</sup> Edwards, Elizabeth, “Photographic Techniques: An Outline”, in *Anthropology and Photography: 1860-1920*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 265.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

created on site by the photographer, the latter could be processed any time after exposure, and although they did not have the sharpness of wet plates, they soon became the dominant form of photography of the time, contributing to the increase in amateur photography, including that by anthropologists<sup>33</sup>. Whether these are wet or dry plate photographs, however, the positive process of the images does seem to be the albumen print format, which was the predominant printing paper of the period, c.1850-90<sup>34</sup>.

The Kawésqar are known to have been photographed on two occasions and by two different photographers: by Carl Gunther for the Berlin Anthropological Society in Berlin and by Pierre Petit at the Jardin d'Acclimatation in Paris<sup>35</sup>.



Figure 2.3. Two photographs of the Kawésqar, taken by photographer Pierre Petit at the Jardin Zoologique d'Acclimatation, Paris, France. Source: Société de Géographie. Paris, France.

While Petit's photographs captured the Kawésqar in the "native habitats" designed for Hagenbeck's show (which, in the case of the Kawésqar, was nowhere near their reality, since they were represented as terrestrial indigenous despite being canoeists<sup>36</sup>— Figure 2.3), Gunther's photographs are shot against a bare background, taken in a relatively controlled environment. In a few images (particularly in the profile shots) we can observe a chair in the background, and in one we see the man leaning his arm on the back of the chair. In the majority, however, the chair is not visible.

We can compare these images to two photographs taken at the society by Gunther within a similar studio context<sup>37</sup>, published in Alexander Sokolowsky's 1901 *Menschenkunde. Eine Naturgeschichte sämtlicher Völkerrassen der Erde* (Figure 2.4). When published three

<sup>33</sup> Edwards, "Photographic Techniques", 265.

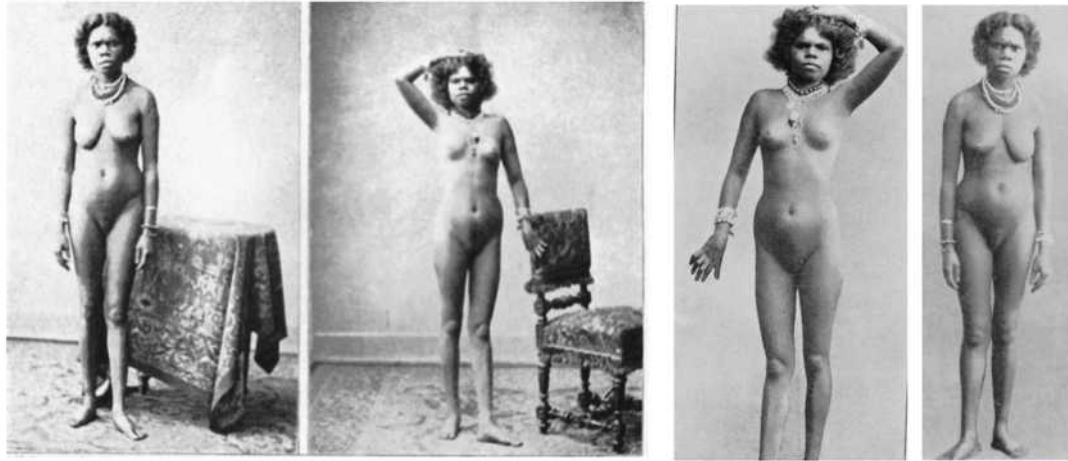
<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Pimentel Melo, Carolina, "Monstruos en cautiverio: fotografía de fueguinos en zoológicos humanos y racismo", *Revisa Sans Soleil: Estudios de la imagen*, Vol. 7 (2015): 103-115.

<sup>36</sup> Báez and Mason, *Zoológicos humanos*.

<sup>37</sup> This comparison is proposed by Rothfels, Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo*, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 103.

years later in 1904 for the German-Russian gynecologist Carl Heinrich Stratz's *Naturgeschichte des Menschen* (*Natural history of man*), however, new versions of the same pictures removed the chair and the rugs, to achieve a “natural nakedness” through technological manipulation (Figure 2.5)<sup>38</sup>.



Figures 2.4 and 2.5. Background Removed.

Left: Australian Women, 1884. From Alexander Sokolowsky, *Menschenkunde. Eine Naturgeschichte sämtlicher Völkerrassen der Erde* (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1901).

Right: From Carl Heinrich Stratz, *Naturgeschichte des Menschen: Grundriss der somatischen Anthropologie* (Stuttgart: F. Enke, 1904).

As author Nigel Rothfels observes in *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo* published in 2002, “the point [is] the total elimination of any cultural context for the figures. These people have been removed from their native lands and photographed in a German studio, but now even the context of the studio itself has been removed”<sup>39</sup>. Notably, Muñoz works with Gunther’s photographs and not Petit’s. She works with images in which the context has been purposefully removed or minimized.

In addition to being photographed, the bodies and particularly the heads (skulls) of the Kawéskar were measured for scientific research purposes. At this time in science, of central importance was the discussion regarding theories of evolution and the classification of races<sup>40</sup>. In the tradition of anthropometric analysis, cranial measurements took precedence, and the following measurements were attained: the skull’s length and width; the height of the ear; the length and breadth of the face; the height, width, and length of the nose; and the separation of the eyes<sup>41</sup>. After the skull, the body itself was measured, including body height, arm span, shoulder width and height, length of upper and lower arms, length and width of hands and feet, and lengths of legs (to knee or pelvis)<sup>42</sup>. After the body measurements, the skin color of the subjects was identified (using a French scale prepared by the Société d’Anthropologie de Paris), as well as their eye color and hair type<sup>43</sup>. Of little importance were the subject’s clothes

<sup>38</sup> Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts*, 103.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid: 98.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid: 99.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

or tools. Anthropologists like Rudolf Virchow, a critic of Darwin's theory of evolution, president of the German Society for Anthropological Studies and founder of the Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology, and Prehistory (where these images were found by Muñoz many years later) who measured the Kawéskar in 1881 as he was often invited by Hagenbeck so that he could carry out anthropological research, as well as many more like him, were concerned with gathering *body data* above anything else. Rothfels quotes at length from the notes taken by Virchow during one of his visits to conduct "anthropological research" at Hagenbeck's "exhibits". From these notes, we understand that the people being measured resisted these intrusive acts which were done, of course, without their consent and without them knowing how this information would be used. Writing about the difficulty in conducting his studies on a group of Inuit from Labrador whom he "studied" in November 1880, an event that had already appeared in the papers, Virchow noted:

You have now seen how shy the daughter [of Frau Bairngo] is; she looks like a wild animal which has been caught. Her mother has none of this frightened nature, but she is so extraordinarily mistrustful that one notices with every step she takes in a place with which she is not familiar how the new environs cause the impression of highest anxiety. It was very difficult to conduct the measurements on her, which had proceeded with the others quite simply. I began with the simplest and attempted to convince her so gradually that there was nothing bad about it; but every new act immediately aroused again her anxiety, and as soon as the body measurements began, she began to quiver and fell into the highest agitation. When I wanted to determine her arm spread and stretched her arms out horizontally— something which certainly had never happened in her life before, she suddenly became hysterical<sup>44</sup>.

Taken into account the only half of the encounter which was written into text, archived, and which remains to this day (the other half, the young woman's account, was never recorded nor considered of importance), we can begin to understand that the process of having their photograph taken was, at the very least, a painful and traumatic experience. Not only were the measurements invasive, they were also quite extensive. From Léonce Manouvrier's account – as a teacher at the School of Anthropology who visited the exhibition of inhabitants of Terra del Fuego five times in Paris in September 1881 in order to take measurements– we can gather that he was able to take approximately *fifty measurements on each individual*<sup>45</sup>. It is important to include this information regarding the taking of the measurements because it is part of the image's origin and therefore it is knowledge contained in the image which allows us to explore the image in ways that extend beyond what is only visible to the eye.

The photographs (and measurements) of the Kawéskar continued to travel, even if their subjects did not. These photographs became part of the institution's permanent collection and were used extensively for decades<sup>46</sup>. In fact, Gunther's photographs became the basis for many anthropological works of the time, including Johannes Ranke's *Der Mensch* (1911), Friedrich Ratzel's *Völkerkunde*, and Hermann Ploss and Max Bartels's *Woman: An Historical, Gynaecological, and Anthropological Compendium* (1935) or more popular works such as (the already mentioned) Carl Heinrich Stratz's *Naturgeschichte des Menschen: Grundriss der somatischen Anthropologie* (1904) or Alexander Sokolowsky's *Menschenkunde, eine*

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<sup>44</sup> Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts*, 99.

<sup>45</sup> Schneider, "The Jardin d'Acclimatation, Zoos and Naturalization", 136.

<sup>46</sup> Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts*, 100.

*Naturgeschichte Sämtlicher Völkerrassen der Erde* (1901)<sup>47</sup>. Many of these images, not only those photographed by Gunther, were used to reinforce and as “evidence” of racial ideas based on White Supremacy. Rothfels comments on his own encounter with these images in different contexts:

The shows are still with us, although in many different forms. On the one hand they can be seen reasserting themselves in the passionate, memorable, and yet somehow disturbing photographs of the Nuba and the Kau made by Leni Riefenstahl –photographs that would serve to begin a craze of picture taking by tourists in Africa. On the other hand, echoes of the show can be found in late-twentieth-century documentaries of indigenous peoples and the modern ‘freak shows’ airing as daytime talk shows on U.S. television. Sometimes, it seems, evidence of Hagenbeck’s people shows can be found in what would seem the most unlikely of places. In a recent visit to the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., for example, I found myself standing before a picture of Maggak, the woman exhibited with her husband and two children in the 1878 ‘Eskimo Show’. In a display on Nazi racial ideology, designers had composed a wall of photographs of ‘racial types’ which had presumably been taken from books on race written during the Third Reich. Maggak’s picture, along with those of a number of other participants in the shows, is used in the exhibit<sup>48</sup>.

In other ways, the images acquired a life of their own and this notion is less abstract when we understand that analyses that were never completed on the actual subjects of the pictures were eventually conducted on their photographs<sup>49</sup>.

This “life” continues in the work we will study in this Chapter, though not in quite the same way as its use in anthropological research. It cannot altogether be said, as Berger claims about paintings, that these images are “essentially still and silent”<sup>50</sup>, for although they lack movement and sound, these images “speak” beyond their silence, in the sense that Campt defends in her book *Listening to Images*<sup>51</sup>. Muñoz “listens” to these images and reappropriates them into a cinematographic context. In *strata of natural history*, Muñoz will rephotograph photographs from this archive in order to recontextualize these images within a time and space that is non-linear and unfixed. In doing so, she will focus her gaze on the faces, turning the photographs that once included the torso, chest, and arms, into images resembling close-ups. In the process, our attention will be drawn to the subject’s gaze. New associations will be made between the subjects in the images, history and geography, that will attempt to reverse the process by which these people were taken from their lands to be photographed and to die. Like *Aufschub*, *strata of natural history*, is a silent film. However, the film proposes a resounding system of layers and co-existence between images, across histories, geographies, and time.

### **Deframing, Opacity, an Image Out of Grasp**

In the 19th Century, *Natural history* is integrated into the field of Anthropology as a domain dedicated to the classification, description and inventory of natural objects and organisms,

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<sup>47</sup> Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts*, 102.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid: 142.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid: 102.

<sup>50</sup> Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1973).

<sup>51</sup> Campt, Tina, *Listening to Images* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017).

including animals, fungi, and plants, in their natural environment<sup>52</sup>. *Strata*, a concept borrowed from geology, traditionally integrated to natural history, and which refers to a layer or a series of layers (plural: stratum) of rock in the ground, becomes a cinematographic element in *strata of natural history* for understanding the levels or layers that cut across or through both places and images and which are related to geography, history, the materiality of the image, and personal experience<sup>53</sup>. As critic Francisco Algarín Navarro has described, strata is “what remains in the same place”<sup>54</sup>. They are the “layers of the past that are in that place”. “Strata” also refers to the layers of *time* within the images, including the time involved in the making of the film. It is precisely through time, and a process of leaving, waiting, and coming back to the places, that the film’s layers begin to unfold<sup>55</sup>. As such, Muñoz’s films are constructed from the perspective of her own experience in a specific place, an experience which evolves or grows over time<sup>56</sup>. In an interview, she has spoken about the Mapuche culture as one “rooted in place”<sup>57</sup>. It is clear that “place” is also at the center of Muñoz’s filmmaking practice.

In order to understand Muñoz’ process working with these images, we must also speak of layers or “strata” in the mode of production of these images. These layers take place in the filming and in-camera editing by the artist, who always works alone in the filmmaking process, thereby participating in an entirely “personal” kind of filmmaking. One layer or *stratum* concerns her approximation to these photographs via her 16mm camera, in the framing, camera movement and light exposure. What is apparent at first glance is that these images have been fragmented from the original photograph in order to emphasize the subject’s faces. As we saw previously, the photographs are of the entire body. However, as they are used in the film, they are treated as *close-ups*.



Figure 2.6. *strata of natural history* (Jeannette Muñoz, 2012)

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<sup>52</sup> Ortega Gálvez, María Luisa, *Ciencia y Civilización: La Expedición de Bonaparte y el Egipto Moderno*, Ph.D. Dissertation (Madrid: Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 1997): 378.

<sup>53</sup> Agudo, Algarín Navarro and García, “Entrevista con Jeannette Muñoz”, 72.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid: 61.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid: 50.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid: 71.

This (Figure 2.6) is the first single exposure shot of “Capitano” in *strata of natural history* and it appears about 7 minutes into the film (the film’s duration is 11 minutes). This image, which may at first appear to be still, or filmed with a tripod, is actually filmed by-hand. About the process of filming these photographs Muñoz says:

Las fotos, en realidad copias en papel, están fijas. Yo me paseo con la cámara por ellas tal como lo haría con los ojos. De pronto noto que en la ciudad [las personas fotografiadas] están invisibles así que las subexpongo, yo las actualizo así que se vuelven luminosas, luego vuelven a desaparecer. Reaparecen como un latigazo o como un destello casi imperceptible. Son las condiciones de mi búsqueda.<sup>58</sup>

This sequence consists of several images of this photograph, taken with slight modifications of framing and exposure and shown in fragmented shots. One of these is out of focus, and then appears again on the edges of the frame. It is difficult to center this image, difficult to decipher, and impossible to see. The camera –and the filmmaker holding it– visibly struggles to get the image into view. The image seems to run away from the filmmaker or from the spectator, in an act of defiance towards the camera and towards the gaze.



Figure 2.7. *strata of natural history* (Jeannette Muñoz, 2012)

The photograph, filmed by Muñoz out of focus and decentered (Figure 2.7), is an example of what film theorist and critic Pascal Bonitzer calls *décadrage* (“deframing”), or “the deviant framing”, and which he defines as “a perversion, one that adds an ironic touch to the function of cinema, painting, even photography, all of them forms of exercising the right to look”<sup>59</sup>. Less analyzed than the close-up and other forms of figure fragmentation on the screen, deframing is nevertheless an “exemplary cinematic effect” because of “movement and the diachronic progress of the film’s images, which allow for its absorption into the film as much as for the deployment of its ‘emptiness effect’”<sup>60</sup>. It draws attention to itself, says Bonitzer,

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<sup>58</sup> Jeannette Muñoz and I have exchanged an online correspondence about her work over the past three years, beginning in 2018 and again in 2021.

<sup>59</sup> Bonitzer, Pascal, “Deframings”, *Cahiers du Cinéma, Volume 4 1973-1978: History Ideology, Cultural Struggle*, ed. David Wilson (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 200.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*: 199.

because while classical painting has trained the eye to focus immediately on the center, in an image that has been deframed, the eye finds nothing there. The eye must “turn back to the periphery where something still flickers, on the point of disappearing”<sup>61</sup>. Deframing is one of the main devices of modernist cinema, of a “*fading* representation”, writes Bonitzer, which in cinema can have more possibilities than in painting. He cites *Six fois deux* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1976) as an example of this, adding, “In this sense deframing is not divisive, fragmentary (it is so only from the point of view of a long-lost classical unity) but, on the contrary, a multiplier, a generator of new arrangements”<sup>62</sup>. In *strata of natural history*, deframing works to multiply the possibilities of looking at these photographs. Like *Aufschub*, it engages with the fact that there are several ways of looking, just as it also “highlight[s] the arbitrariness of this curious directorial gaze”<sup>63</sup>.

Deframing is only one of the devices used by Muñoz. When the face-image appears again (Figure 2.8), the aperture has closed, so that the image appears in shades of black and gray, emphasizing the image’s –and the subject’s– own *opacity*, in the sense proposed by the writer, poet, philosopher and literary critic from Martinique, Édouard Glissant, as a mechanism against reduction (and stereotype) and for difference: “The opaque is not the obscure, though it is possible for it to be so and be accepted as such. It is that which cannot be reduced, which is the most perennial guarantee of participation and confluence”<sup>64</sup>.



Figure 2.8. *strata of natural history* (Jeannette Muñoz, 2012)

In *strata of natural history*, deframing and opacity work to challenge the image’s perceived accessibility. If the original photographs were taken to make these subjects *known* (at least “scientifically”) through a “process of reduction”, and in order to satisfy an “old obsession with discovering what lies at the bottom of natures”, to quote Glissant<sup>65</sup>, Muñoz’s film seems to

<sup>61</sup> Bonitzer, “Deframings”, 200.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid: 201.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid: 200,

<sup>64</sup> Glissant, Édouard, “For Opacity”, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 191.

<sup>65</sup> “Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components. For the time being, perhaps, give up this old obsession



suggest that this “knowing” –as far as photography and cinema are concerned– is always inscribed by the limits of the frame, which can be disfigured and re-figured into new forms (and other knowings) by future appropriations of the image<sup>66</sup>. This “knowing” is equally challenged by the lack of transparency of the image (“Is not this transparency whose aim was to reduce us?” asks Glissant) where the opacity of the subject –who cannot be reduced into “a truth he would not have generated on his own”<sup>67</sup> – enters a political dimension.

Suddenly the opening and closing of the camera’s aperture act as a “latigazo” or lashing on the images, as “almost imperceptible flash”<sup>68</sup> across the image –and across the subject thereby represented (Figure 2.9).



Figure 2.9. *strata of natural history* (Jeannette Muñoz, 2012)

The treatment of these images seems to recall –or rather recreate– the original photographic act. The flash of light across the image covers the subject’s body in white light and resonates with Kay’s words “Por la herida abierta por la luz se mantiene en el plano fotosensible para siempre el contorno de la imagen estrellada sobre la extensión del negativo”<sup>69</sup> and “...un pasado que nunca existió renace incesantemente a través de los cuerpos incinerados por la luz en el negativo”<sup>70</sup>. The effect also emphasizes the subject’s duality of invisibility and visibility;

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with discovering what lies at the bottom of natures. There would be something great and noble about initiating such a movement, referring not to Humanity but to the exultant divergence of humanities. Thought of self and thought of other here become obsolete in their duality. Every Other is a citizen and no longer a barbarian”, Glissant, 190.

<sup>66</sup> Author Allan Cameron observes that contemporary found footage films that rework Hollywood narrative films can resort to the fragmentation of the face in order to foreground its spatiotemporal function, or “the face’s importance as a point of spatial articulation”. He writes, “The face, these works remind us, *faces*. By teasing apart and rearranging the relationship between cinematic faces and spaces, they turn cinema back on itself, bringing it face to face with its own complex ambiguity”: Cameron, Allan, “Face, Frame, Fragment: Refiguring the Space in Found-Footage Cinema”, in *Screen Space Reconfigured*, ed. Susanne Ø. Sæther and Synne T. Bull (Amsterdam University Press, 2020): 149. Muñoz arguably does the same here, but for the ethnographic photographic image (not the Hollywood image).

<sup>67</sup> Glissant, “For Opacity”, 194.

<sup>68</sup> Muñoz, Jeannette. Personal Interview. September 7th, 2018.

<sup>69</sup> Kay, *Del Espacio De Aca*, 20.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*: 24.

the flashing light forcefully makes the subject appear, and in the process, makes him “seen” by the spectator.

The effects of the deframing, opacity, and sudden flash of light (these last two achieved by a modification of the aperture) call attention to these images as *afterimages*, in this case, former photographic images which have “passed again” through a new apparatus, now the cinematographic machine. However, unlike the original photograph, which as we have mentioned before was a “forced portrait” based on an anthropometric system in which the photographer behind the camera was invisibilized in the name of a supposed “objectivity”, here the cinematographic apparatus is shown to be partial, human, flawed, as it visibly struggles against the image in its attempt to film it and make it pass it through a camera again.

It is important to stress that these effects are created *in-camera*, meaning that the process of filming these images reflect the *thinking* of the filmmaker as she works with the images. These are not decisions made “in the editing” –as was the case, for example, in *Aufschub*. Very differently, Muñoz’s process occurs in *her looking* at these images through the camera. Unlike *Aufschub*, where the principal experimentation lies in rethinking what comes before and what comes after, in the gaps between the images, and in how the text modifies the spectator’s understanding of the archival images, here the experimentation lies within the cinematographic image itself, in the photograph-turned-*fotograma* of the archive that has been filmed by Muñoz by a camera passing over them just like her eyes would<sup>71</sup>. As an artist who enters cinema by way of analogue photography, Muñoz’s experimentation lies within the image itself. While in *Aufschub* Farocki resorts to introducing an “I” into his text to make his presence “felt”, here such an “I” would be redundant, as the entire image has been already passed through the self, in the camera work which acts as an extension to and in coherence with the filmmaker’s own body.

### **Double Exposure and Co-Existence of Temporalities**

A second layer or strata in the process are the *superimpositions* that are also created *in-camera* and through *double exposure*. As Muñoz describes, “La sobreexposición actualiza la idea de la coexistencia. Están ahí, les hice invisibles por un momento, pero siguen perteneciendo de algún modo al mundo de lo invisible e intangible”<sup>72</sup>. She describes this process further:

La película se articula desde la experiencia cotidiana de viajar, averiguar y encontrar lugares y documentos en torno a un hecho histórico conocido. Las conexiones de este acontecimiento con otros hechos históricos conocidos, plasmados en sitios específicos, se desvelan como capas que coexisten pero que no es posible visualizar si no estás atento. La sobreimpresión es un recurso fotográfico que me sirve para mostrar esa coexistencia.<sup>73</sup>

Here, notably, the “touching” is not only of the filmmaker’s bodily experience in the same space in which the face-images have been recorded, or the touching of co-existing realities or histories, but also a very *tactile method* of putting one image over the other, in order to create a

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<sup>71</sup> Muñoz, Jeannette. Personal Interview. December 18th, 2018.

<sup>72</sup> Agudo, Algarín Navarro, and García, “Entrevista con Jeannette Muñoz”, 64.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

relationship between images and across time. These images literally “touch” one another in the act of the superimposition, but again, this “touching” occurs in-camera as one image is shot and then the camera rewinds to shoot another one over the same strip of film.

The superimpositions in themselves also contain different *stratas* of co-existence. One is the co-existence of the Kawéskar, photographed over one hundred years ago, with the places which they passed on their arrival to Berlin (Figure 2.10)<sup>74</sup>. Superimposition in these moments work to connect the present with the past, but more importantly, to make the spectator see the past that is still there, *in the place*, unseen but not unfelt. What is superimposed on the cityscape, hidden in the pillars and building structures, are the faces of the Kawéskar, which seem to be watching from the architecture. “[Las fotografías] detallan cuidadosamente los encuentros que los etnólogos y antropólogos mantuvieron con las personas kaweshkar, secuestradas entre los años 1880 y 1890. Pero la película no trata de aquello, la película sólo muestra los lugares en donde las personas secuestradas estuvieron. Ése fue mi punto de partida”<sup>75</sup>. Barely seen, the Kawéskar are nevertheless *there*, made visible by the camera and by the camera’s ability to superimpose images from different times. Muñoz says that, “Los muros son las antiguas celdas. Es una cárcel que fue transformada en parque. Me parece muy interesante el cambio de uso y la idea de conservar las celdas y los muros como testigos del pasado”<sup>76</sup>. The idea that is communicated throughout the film is the underlying presence of the indigenous people within the very architecture of the city. The cityscape, including the architecture and construction, becomes a “witness” to the city’s colonial past.



Figure 2.10. *strata of natural history* (Jeannette Muñoz, 2012)

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<sup>74</sup> In these cases, the film seems to be responding to documentary filmmaker Hans Mülchi’s wish, as expressed when he arrives at the Jardin d’Acclimatation for the first time to visit the site where the Kawéskar were exhibited in Paris: “Sería interesante encontrar algún elemento que pudiera conectarnos directamente con esa época...”. Here, the “element” is the place itself, connected to the “presence” of the Kawéskar represented in a photograph.

<sup>75</sup> Agudo, Algarín Navarro, and García, “Entrevista con Jeannette Muñoz”, 63-64.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*: 65.

Something similar occurs in *Diarios patagónicos 1* (*Patagonian Diaries 1*, Narcisa Hirsch, 1972-1973). Shot on Super 8mm, this film begins with superimpositions of faces of children from Patagonia over the Patagonian rural landscape (Figure 2.11). It might be important to mention here that while Muñoz is an experimental Chilean filmmaker living and working in Europe (and made this film in Berlin), Hirsch is an experimental Argentine filmmaker who was born in Berlin in 1928 and arrived in Argentina in the 1930s. That is, their personal migrations are reversed. In both cases, their particular gazes as women filming in territories that are not entirely their own come across in both films, and in their subjects. But while in *Diarios*, faces and landscapes occur in the same temporal and spatial reality, in *strata* the coexistence of the people and the landscapes are not exactly harmonious. In one film, the people and faces filmed are part of the landscapes; in the other, they are not. Muñoz's superimpositions represent a juxtaposition that, although fact, is not quite right. This is not where these images *belong*, but it is where they were taken, where they've been entrapped, as in a cage. Muñoz makes visible the fact that these women and men were kidnapped and taken far from their lands. Without having to say it explicitly, the spectator can feel the distance, both in time and space.



Figure 2.11. *Diarios patagónicos 1* (*Patagonian Diaries 1*, Narcisa Hirsch, 1972-1973)

On a second level, the superimpositions in *strata* work to emphasize the co-existence of the Kawéskar with people photographed, by Muñoz, in the present, in the very same spaces where the Kawéskar were exhibited. In other words, the superimpositions not only connect subjects to a place, but also to other subjects and other times. In Figure 2.12, for example, the Kawéskar face-images (frontal and profile view) are superimposed on images, filmed in black and white in 16mm, of tourists at the Berlin zoo, taking pictures of the animals. The framing is such that the tourist's camera is directed towards the Kawéskar in the photograph, in a hundred-year-old "reenactment" of sorts of the moment that the photograph was taken.



Figure 2.12. *strata of natural history* (Jeannette Muñoz, 2012)

These superimpositions challenge temporal and spatial conventions of the classical ethnographic film. As scholar Fatimah Tobing Rony has pointed out, race was an invention of the nineteenth century and the defining problem for early anthropology<sup>77</sup>. Ethnographic cinema, understood by Rony as a series of paradigms that moves across genres, enabled

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<sup>77</sup> Rony, Fatimah Tobing, *The Third Eye* (Duke University Press: Kindle Edition, 1996), 10.

viewers to “travel through dimensions of space, time, and status”<sup>78</sup>. For anthropologist Johannes Fabian, anthropology is premised on notions of time which deny the contemporaneity –or “co-evalness”– of the anthropologist and the people that he or she studies<sup>79</sup>. In Muñoz’s film, however, contemporaneity is made possible visually through the co-existence of images from different times. In this case, double exposures and superimpositions are the forms and means proposed by the artist to respond to the ethnographic image’s “problem of time”.

Let us compare Muñoz’s superimpositions here to a brief scene taken from the 2010 documentary *Calafate* where photographs of the Kawéskar are cut together with moving images of people “looking”, in order to create a false *raccord* between the images (Figure 2.13). This is a rare moment of experimentation in what is an otherwise more informative documentary film. In this sequence, the filmmaker tries to recreate the counter-image to the Kawéskar portraits, for the spectator to imagine, perhaps, the Kawéskar’s point-of-view as they are being looked at by the Berlin zoo visitors.



Figure 2.13. *Calafate* (Hans Mülchi, 2010)

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<sup>78</sup> Rony, *The Third Eye*, 10.

<sup>79</sup> Fabian, Johannes. *Time and the Other* (1983) (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

This sequence not only illustrates the position of the Kawéskar as subjects of the White colonialist gaze, but also point to the quite uncomfortable position of having the gaze returned. As Rony has observed, “Perhaps with a third eye, the performers at the fair were aware of being viewed as objects of ethnographic spectacle, and resisted this status by subverting the illusion of scientific voyeurism”<sup>80</sup>. She understands the “staged performance” of the humans exhibited as a threat to the expected “authentic” display of daily activity, and cites examples throughout early ethnographic film of displays of parody and humor as potential forms of resistance. But she also makes the case that the ambiguity of boundaries between observer and observed were “part of the fascination”<sup>81</sup>. Certainly, as this sequence is used in this documentary, it becomes an unexpected montage of the “chain of looks” which classical ethnographic cinema has long denied even if they were very much part of the reality of the exhibition of humans in zoos.

The cinematographic relationship between times and across gazes in *strata of natural history* does not take place in a more traditional shot-counter-shot, as it does in *Calafate*, with the bifurcation of the native and the tourist, but within the image itself. The image, then, is *symbiotic* insofar as two images co-exist within it in mutually beneficial ways. As Muñoz has commented in an interview, “En mi trabajo fotográfico había investigado la inevitable narración que surge de dos imágenes fotográficas adyacentes, lo que siempre me pareció muy cinematográfica”<sup>82</sup>. Here, the relationship between images is explored within the single frame. The experimentation is not in the montage between frames, but in the montage within the frame, which is made in-camera. *This is the way that Muñoz responds to the problem of time*; that is, the time that separates the Kawéskar and modern-day Berliners in history and which makes it difficult to “see” them in relation. (We will come back to this question of co-existence in Chapter 4, in the work of Susana de Sousa Dias, who finds another way, principally through fades and sound editing, to make a co-existence within the image possible).

### **From Cages to Frames: The Cine-Zoo as a Cinema-Specific Idea**

A third strata of co-existence in Muñoz’s superimpositions, and one that we would like to dedicate much of the rest of the chapter to, is between humans and animals, and eventually, between the zoo and cinema. Although travel films have long associated indigenous people with animals, as a way to define the former as equivalent to the latter and therefore inferior to White Europeans, in this Chapter we believe that Muñoz’s film places humans and animals within a shared frame in order to comment on the image itself as an oppressive space of contradiction.

In order to understand the historical significance of the coexistence between humans and animals in Muñoz’s images we must first backtrack to the historical relationship between cinema and animals, and cinema and zoos. It is telling, of course, that the financial success and novelty of Europe’s human zoos began to decline with the arrival of cinema since, as Báez and Mason observe, they catered to the same public, “hungry for access to the exotic”<sup>83</sup>. But what

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<sup>80</sup> Rony, *The Third Eye*, 41.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Agudo, Algarín Navarro, and García, “Entrevista con Jeannette Muñoz”, 31.

<sup>83</sup> The anthropozoological exhibitions were strongly impacted (most likely financially) by the arrival of cinema since they both sought the same public, avid for accessing “the exotic” (“...ambos buscaban al mismo público,

was this public looking for, exactly? For Rony, “cinema took over from the world’s fair many of the functions of the native village exhibition”<sup>84</sup>. In fact, one of the earliest cinematographic depictions of the Inuit is footage produced by Thomas Edison in 1901 of the “Esquimaux Village” at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo. This film, titled *Esquimaux Village*, shot by Edwin S. Porter, takes the exhibit space as a kind of set, in which children run in and out of an igloo engaged in a race with four dogs. The Edison films catalog emphasizes the film’s technical achievements: while the people and dogs run over the ice and snow at “a high rate of speed”, the picture is “perfect photographically”, and “the figures stand out clear and sharp, throwing a most perfect reflection on the pond”<sup>85</sup>. At the end of the film, a boy on the sled and the dog pulling the sled pause to look at the camera (Figure 2.14). The sled has stopped right in front of the camera, in what has obviously been a staged and most likely rehearsed performance.



Figure 2.14. *Esquimaux Village* (Thomas Edison, 1901)

Just as the racialized other’s body was an object of scientific study, the animal body as pure moving image has long been a fascination for cinema<sup>86</sup>. Thomas Edison’s *Electrocuting*

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ávido por acceder a ‘lo exótico’”), Báez and Mason, *Zoológicos humanos*, 23. With cinema’s arrival, the human zoos became less novel and less lucrative, although the practice continued as it was until the 1930s and in other, perhaps more disguised forms, until as late as 2005, *ibid*: 21.

<sup>84</sup> Rony, *The Third Eye*, 108.

<sup>85</sup> “Esquimaux Village”, Library of Congress Website: <https://www.loc.gov/item/00694348/>.

<sup>86</sup> According to Anat Pick, the animal continues to provide the ideal disposable body as a cinematic ‘attraction’. Her essay titled “Executing Species: Animal Attractions in Thomas Edison and Douglas Gordon” (2015) examines cinema’s “real and symbolic instrumentalization of animals” in Thomas Edison’s *Electrocuting an Elephant* (1903) and Douglas Gordon’s *Play Dead; Real Time* (2003). She proposes that the intersection of humans, animals and technology gives rise to what she calls “the cinematic animal” and claims that Edison’s film is pivotal in this convergence. Gordon’s film is seen as a continuation of the practice of “animal framing and taming that convert ‘wildness’ into cultural currency” (319). She finishes the essay wondering if in posthuman cinema “interspecies relations can be forged and made visible in ways that transcend the power dynamics that have thus reproduced the animal as a distinctly vulnerable and violable spectacle, in a manner that is descriptively posthuman and yet normatively anthropocentric”. We believe that Muñoz’s film is an example that this is in fact possible. Although *strata of natural history* is far from being a posthuman film, it does propose a multispecies and non-anthropocentric image of the co-existence between humans and animals. Pick, Anat, “Executing Species: Animal Attractions in Thomas Edison and Douglas Gordon”, in: *The Palgrave Handbook of Posthumanism in*



*of an Elephant* (1903) a one-minute document of the elephant's death, produced only two years after the images of the Inuit, is one of the earliest examples. This film belongs to the "cinema of attractions", term coined by Tom Gunning<sup>87</sup>, and which encompasses films made between 1895 and 1906<sup>88</sup>, which for Lisa Cartwright, in this case, might more accurately be dubbed a "cinema of repulsion"<sup>89</sup>. In the film, a four-ton elephant captured in Africa and brought to the United States, where she had lived in captivity for twenty-eight years, is electrocuted by an apparatus built by the Edison Manufacturing Company (Figure 2.15). Cartwright argues that as well as documenting the death of an elephant –an unnatural death, provoked by humans– the film "also documents public fascination with scientific technology and its capacity to determine the course of life and death in living beings..."<sup>90</sup>. She sees this film and the documentation surrounding its production<sup>91</sup>, as "evidence of a widespread popular interest in the power of technology to regulate and discipline bodies" and the motion picture's function "as a means for lay-audience participation in the 'scientific' pleasure of conducting visual analysis and thereby vicariously exerting control over a living being's life and death"<sup>92</sup>. It is especially noteworthy for Cartwright, that the object of this public "experiment" was "a specimen of colonial plunder inserted within a spectacle designed to entertain fantasies of *colonial authority*"<sup>93</sup>. The elephant "Topsy", as she was named by her captors, "became the object of displaced Western anxieties about resistance to colonial authority"<sup>94</sup>, just as King Kong, made thirty years later, "foreshadows the fear of the postcolonial Other as monster"<sup>95</sup>.

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*Film and Television*, ed. Michael Hauskeller, Curtis D. Carbonell, and Thomas D. Philbeck (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>87</sup> "Cinema of Attractions" is a term coined by Tom Gunning in 1976. In *Cinema of Attractions: Reloaded*, Gunning mentions the importance of the 1970s avant-garde filmmakers' appropriations of films from early cinema on his own interest in these films, specifically in the work of Ernie Gehr, Hollis Frampton, and Ken Jacobs. He writes: "Speaking personally, the influence of the fresh perspective on early cinema opened up by these filmmakers played a key role in not only refocusing my attention on this period, but re-contextualizing the films, liberating them from the teleological approach that classed them as "primitive" attempts at later forms". Gunning, Tom, "Attractions: How They Came Into the World", in: *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006): 35.

<sup>88</sup> Scholar Wanda Strauven claims that "Despite the fact that the cinema of attractions was clearly thought of as a time specific category of film practice (and more specifically of spectatorship), its real attraction consists of its applicability to other periods of film history, to other similar practices beyond early cinema (and even beyond cinema)", Strauven, Wanda. "Introduction to an Attractive Concept", in: *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 20.

<sup>89</sup> Cartwright, Lisa, *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 14.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*: 18.

<sup>91</sup> In an earlier version of the previously cited text, Cartwright describes the production behind the electrocution, including: the electrical apparatus that executed the elephant was of Edison manufacture and operation, and the electrocution was a public event which took place before an audience of 1,500. In addition, she examines documents written by reporters who attended the event, including a report which states that the electrician who threw the switch activating the electrocution "narrowly escaped death" himself: "As he threw the last switch he got the full force of the current through his arm and down his right side to the calf of his leg". Of course, Edison did not leave this task to himself. For Cartwright, "the report evidences a fascination with this linking of technician and subject via the (literal) power coursing through the apparatus". After reading on, we might agree that Bazin would have preferred the film to show both the electrician and the elephant in the same shot. Cartwright, Lisa, "'Experiments of Destruction': Cinematic Inscriptions of Physiology", *Representations* No. 40 Special Issue: Seeing Science (Autumn 1992), 148-149.

<sup>92</sup> Cartwright, *Screening the Body*, 18.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>94</sup> Cartwright, *Screening the Body*, 18.

<sup>95</sup> Rony, *The Third Eye*, 15.



Figure 2.15. *Electrocuting an Elephant* (Thomas Edison, 1903)

As Berger wrote in his very influential essay titled *Why Look at Animals?* “...In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, public zoos were an endorsement of modern colonial power. The capturing of all animals was a symbolic representation of the conquest of all distant and exotic lands. ‘Explorers’ proved their patriotism by sending home a tiger or an elephant. The gift of an exotic animal to the metropolitan zoo become a token in subservient diplomatic relations”<sup>96</sup>. (We can understand Chile’s permissiveness with the kidnapping of the 11 Kawéskar –and two Mapuche families, and more– in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and their less than eager participation in the return of the remains in the 21<sup>st</sup>, as an example of these relations<sup>97</sup>.) However, “like every other 19<sup>th</sup> century public institution, the zoo, however supportive of the ideology of imperialism, had to claim an independent and civic function”, writes Berger, to which the zoo claimed to be “another kind of museum, whose purpose was to further knowledge and public enlightenment”. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, zoos underwent a new transformation, this time into cinema and onto the screen.

From as early as 1903, cinema took the place of zoos as vehicles for the exhibition of colonial authority and ‘scientific’ pleasure in the exertion of control over the living body where death, especially where animals were concerned, was not only a likely, but an expected, outcome. We can pause here to wonder what kind of spectator is required or made by films like this one? To begin, we may ask what kind of spectator is required for a zoo visit. For Berger:

Visitors visit the zoo to look at animals. They proceed from cage to cage, not unlike visitors in an art gallery who stop in front of one painting, and then move on to the next or the one after next. Yet in the zoo the view is always wrong. Like an image out of focus. One is so accustomed to this that one scarcely notices it any more. [...] *You are looking at something that has been rendered absolutely marginal*; and all the concentration you can muster will never be enough to centralize it<sup>98</sup>.

<sup>96</sup> Berger, John, “Why Look at Animals?”, in *About Looking* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 21.

<sup>97</sup> This relationship is documented in *Calafate, zoológicos humanos* (Hans Mülchi, 2010).

<sup>98</sup> Berger, “Why Look at Animals?”, 23-24. This quote connects well to Bonitzer’s writing on “Deframing” and to Muñoz’s decision to deframe the image (discussed on pages 111-112).

If zoos neutralize visitors so that they “scarcely notice” what is wrong about seeing animals displayed in completely unnatural environments, cinema goes one step further, as it turns the spectator into an active participant and accomplice of the cruelty inflicted upon the filmed animals. If zoos, in the words of Berger, “cannot but disappoint”<sup>99</sup>, cinema makes sure to be everything but disappointing<sup>100</sup>. For Cartwright, the “cinema of attractions ultimately seem to demand a spectator for whom disavowal undercuts the immediacy of the sight of a body that refuses self-regulation. The mode of the physiological motion study thus seems to appear, incongruously enough, in the popular cinema, where it invites the spectator to participate in the ‘scientific’ fascination with the execution of ‘life’<sup>101</sup>. If there is an ideal spectator here, it is surely one that identifies with the colonizer and not with the colonized<sup>102</sup>. As these images are often quite difficult to bear, it becomes clear that once the novelty aspect is overcome, the “colonialist spectator” is constructed by the films and by the images that work on the viewer, over time and later, through narrative elements, numbing them down to no longer noticing the more “repulsive” aspects of the images on the screen.

According to Cartwright, “More than documenting the elephant’s death, the one-minute *Electrocuting an Elephant* documents the technological implementation of a life and death process”<sup>103</sup>. For Bazin, the fact that death is played on it is what “makes the [bullfighting] ring into something more than a theater stage”<sup>104</sup>. That is, the possibility of death is what makes it cinematic. In fact, it is the possibility of death and, more precisely, of filming death which has inspired many of Bazin’s central ideas on montage and realism. In his enthusiasm for the possibility of filming death, we can draw a line between the cinema of attractions of early cinema and post-war realism championed by Bazin.

Writing about *La course de Taureux* (Bullfight, Myriam and Pierre Braunberger, 1951), a film made as a “way to honor and promote bullfighting”<sup>105</sup>, Bazin cherishes the “practically uncut takes in which the framing of man and animal is never tighter than a medium shot or even an American shot”<sup>106</sup> (Figure 2.16). He calls particular attention to the work of the film’s editor and co-director Myriam Braunberger<sup>107</sup> who works with “diabolical skill” to “conceal the articulation of the shots” so that the spectator cannot distinguish the edits. Contrasted with the Kuleshov effect where “what counts is the meaning given to the smile by the collision of images”, here the editing achieves what Bazin calls “physical realism” or “the adaptation of

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid: 28.

<sup>100</sup> As Rony points out, it was not always the case that cinema lived up to this promise. She writes that “the inevitable ennui of the viewer [of “racial films”] soon approached that of a zoo visitor”. Ethnographic films did not have any “surprise” elements as they, just like the zoo, allowed audiences to see what they are expecting to see: anthropology. “To avoid this resemblance to the experience of the zoo [...] Hollywood turned to the use of sets as well as organized scenes of spectacle. As Bazin explains, the exotic film in the 1930s went into “a decline characterized by a shameless search after the spectacular and the sensational. It was not enough merely to hunt the lion, the lion must first gobble up the beasts.” Rony, *The Third Eye*, 52. This mannerist turn led to King Kong, *ibid*: 154.

<sup>101</sup> Cartwright, *Screening the Body*, 16.

<sup>102</sup> Rony identifies many layers of spectatorship identification, including that of the colonialist.

<sup>103</sup> Cartwright, “Experiments of Destruction”, 149.

<sup>104</sup> Bazin, André. “Death Every Afternoon” (1949). in *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema*, ed. Ivone Margulies (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 30.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid: 27.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Myriam is credited as co-director as well, but in Bazin’s essay is only treated as the editor, and he refers to her by her first name, while he refers to the male director by his last.

editing technique to the aesthetics of the camera pen”<sup>108</sup>. What is striking here is how Bazin’s views on editing are inspired by films where animals play a key role in their relationship to man.



Figure 2.16. *La course de Taureux* (Bullfight, Myriam and Pierre Braunberger, 1951)

For Bazin, writes Serge Daney, “the essence of cinema becomes a story about animals”<sup>109</sup>. In the essay titled “The Screen of Fantasy (Bazin and Animals)”, Daney describes Bazin’s “fundamental law”: that “whenever it is possible to enclose two heterogeneous objects in the same frame, editing is prohibited”<sup>110</sup>. According to Bazin, cutting, or editing, should only be used when absolutely necessary. The prohibition of editing and fragmentation, writes Daney, is “not only, as has often been said, the exploitation of depth of field, the birth of cinemascope, or the ever-greater mobility of the camera in an increasingly homogeneous space but also, and above all, the nature of what is being filmed, the status of the protagonists (in this case men and animals) who are forced to *share the screen*, sometimes at the risk of their lives.”<sup>111</sup> This is why, Daney writes, for Bazin “the essence of cinema becomes a story about animals”. It is the *sharing* of the screen between humans and animals, where the frame is “the shared space of their ‘life and death struggle,’ real or simulated”<sup>112</sup>, which determines or urges the necessity for the single shot. How else would the danger be communicated? How else would the spectator understand that something –or someone’s life– is at risk? For Bazin it is the *possibility of filming death* that “‘in certain cases’ prohibits editing”<sup>113</sup>. This is what Daney calls “Bazin’s eroticism”: “You have to go to the point of dying for your images”<sup>114</sup>.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid: 28.

<sup>109</sup> Daney, Serge. “The Screen of Fantasy (Bazin and Animals)”, in *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema*, ed. Ivone Margulies (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003): 32.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid: 32-33. Italics added.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid: 36.

<sup>113</sup> Daney, “The Screen of Fantasy”, 33.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid: 37.

It is curious that one of the newspaper articles printed after the execution of the elephant in Edison's film dedicates a few lines to the electrician in charge of the throwing the switches. Apparently, this electrician "narrowly escaped death" himself: "As he threw the last switch he got the full force of the current through his arm and down his right side to the calf of his leg". For Cartwright, "the report evidences a fascination with this linking of technician and subject via the (literal) power coursing through the apparatus"<sup>115</sup>. We can assume that Bazin would have preferred that Edison have included the nameless electrician in the shot, or he would see Edison's failure to do so as a sign of the early, primitive or pre-modern cinema that it is. Compared to, for example, *The Circus* (Charlie Chaplin, 1928) where Chaplin and the lion co-exist in the same frame for the sake of the sight-gag (Figure 2.17).



Figure 2.17. *The Circus* (Charlie Chaplin, 1928)/ Filming of *The Circus*

Bazin's particular kind of eroticism might more adequate to understand a film by Werner Herzog, for example, than *strata of natural history*. What we would like to take from this, however, is Bazin's view on montage and its relation, in his analysis of film history, to a screen shared by humans and animals. In the case of Muñoz's film, what we have are animals and humans sharing a screen without this having any implication for a violent or dangerous encounter between the two. This is not only, of course, because these are two images which have been superimposed (and not a single image, as Bazin calls for) but also because the humans and the animals, in this particular case, *co-existed at one point in the same space* (the zoo), and not only as actors on a screen. Their co-existence was not a "life and death struggle" between each other but rather, with the humans (off-screen) who put them there. In other words, the threat to the humans and the animals' lives did not come from their co-existence, but from the human beings who were on the other side of the camera, *watching*.

In *Creaturely Poetics*, Anat Pick returns to Bazin's writing on cinema and animals to develop the idea of "cinema as a zoo"<sup>116</sup>. She proposes the term "cine-zoo" and argues for "a 'fully' realist reading of cinema that necessarily surpasses the specificities of species identity

<sup>115</sup> Cartwright, "Experiments of Destruction", 149.

<sup>116</sup> Pick, Anat. *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011: 105-106. Kindle Edition.

to which Bazin was still attached”<sup>117</sup>. If realist film theory grants “a special place” for animals, says Pick, it is only as the “markers of film’s representation limits: death, contingency, and temporality”<sup>118</sup>. For Pick, the debate is not in subjectivity, or its absence, –that is, the question of who is looking, whether animals have or lack subjectivity, or even the proposed elimination of the human gaze towards the animal– but “in the connection between cinema and the corporeal”<sup>119</sup> and in the rejection of “the accepted parameters (subjectivity, language, identification) of the human” for a method of finding “what is discernible in both humans and animals: their existence as embodied, finite beings”<sup>120</sup>. Bazin serves the author to make the case that cinema is a “zoomorphic stage that transforms all living beings –including humans– into creatures”<sup>121</sup>.

If the relationship that Muñoz proposes between image and montage escaped Bazin’s ideas of cinema, it is perhaps in part because of his anthropocentric view of death, where what was thrilling in an image of man versus animal was the fact that either one of them could die. But it is also because he was looking to define cinema’s specificity at a time when perhaps it was necessary to do so for several reasons<sup>122</sup>. In the same essay, he writes, “We do not die twice. In this respect, a photograph does not have the power of film; it can only represent someone dying or a corpse, not the elusive passage from one state to the other”<sup>123</sup>. In the original photographs of the Kawéskar, someone’s death *is* being photographed, even though it is not happening at the precise instant that the photograph is taken. They can be understood as photos of people who are *dying*: people who have been violently kidnapped and taken miles away, exposed to illnesses which they have no defenses for, and exhibited against their will. Their death is *approaching* (most of them died in the days and weeks after the photos were taken) and their death is *in* the photograph (to a “listening” eye) and yet, the culprit, the killer, is never seen because he/she is behind –or next to, as the case may be– the camera. So Bazin is right that these photographs, at least in their original form, cannot represent a passage from life to death. However, as the images are re-photographed by Muñoz’s 16mm camera, we believe that *a second process of death occurs over the images*. They pass under the camera’s gaze and machinations one more time, and *this time* a passage *can* be recorded. Perhaps Bazin was wrong: maybe we *can* die twice. The appropriation of images, seen in this way, can be understood as a second death. The material consequences of this process on the images, then, would be the marks of the passage between “life” and “death”, or more appropriately, between

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid: 106.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid: 110.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid: 109.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Perhaps these two points –human specificity and cinema specificity– are not that different. After all, as John Berger observes in *Why Look at Animals?*, the first subject matter for painting was animal and prior to that, “it is not unreasonable to suppose that the first metaphor was animal... because the essential relation between man and animal was metaphoric. Within that relation what the two terms –man and animal– shared in common revealed what differentiated them. And vice versa” (Berger, *Why Look at Animals?*, 7). In other words, it is likely that animal and human differentiation is at the origins of language. He continues: “What distinguished man from animals was the human capacity for symbolic thought, the capacity which was inseparable from the development of language in which words were not merely signals, but signifiers of something other than themselves. Yet the first symbols were animals. What distinguished men from animals was born of their relationship with them” (Berger, *Why Look at Animals?*, 9).

<sup>123</sup> Bazin, “Death Every Afternoon”, 30.

“death” and “second death”.

If Bazin’s understanding of cinema excluded the incorporation or appropriation of photography, is it fair to borrow his words in order to think about Muñoz’s film? Bazin’s ideas on montage came from the films that he saw. Muñoz’s film shows us that other forms of montage are possible and these forms alter the spectator’s thinking regarding death. She creates a montage within the camera and within the image to show the co-existence of the Kawéskar and the animals, or the co-existence of the Kawéskar and the tourists taking photos of the animals at the present-day Berlin Zoo. In a way, Muñoz’s film could be considered Bazinian, or at least it cannot be accused of breaking Bazin’s fundamental law. But it also adds another aspect that may have escaped Bazin’s scope: the fact that the photographic and the cinematographic image (and analogue film in particular) *share* qualities, they too can *co-exist*<sup>124</sup>. This is especially true, or at least it is easier to see this relationship, when the chosen method is appropriation. The photographic image is appropriated by Muñoz, not as a scanned image but as an image which passes through her film apparatus, in order to become a cinematographic image.

### **Filming Co-Existence and Double Death: Multi-Species Approach to Methods of Appropriation Across Media**

Since we agree that Bazin’s reflections on cinema are perhaps too species-specific and cinema-specific to coexist with Muñoz’s film (and for the cinema that we are interested in analyzing here) it is probably most helpful to understand the superimpositions achieved by Muñoz through the (not cinema-specific) lens of multispecies feminist theorist Donna Haraway. She proposes the term *Chthulucene*, a compound of two Greek roots, *khthôn* and *kainos*, in which *kainos* is understood as: “[...] the sense of thick, ongoing presence, with hyphae infusing all sorts of temporalities and materialities”<sup>125</sup>, as an alternative to the much used (overused, perhaps) “Anthropocene” and the lesser used, but for Haraway more adequate “Capitolocene”. Unlike those previous terms, *Chthulucene* describes our current epoch as one in which the human and the nonhuman are linked. This concept is undoubtedly influenced at least in part by indigenous literature which is so important to her work and her thinking. The co-existence of all beings, both living and dead, is central to Haraway’s thinking and we believe it is appropriate concept for thinking about Muñoz’s film and for what her film achieves in the image. *strata of natural history* “makes trouble”, in the sense called for by the author in her book titled *Staying with the Trouble*: “Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places”<sup>126</sup>. By returning to Berlin to film the places where the Kawéskar were taken to –against their will– and where they eventually died, Muñoz is certainly “stirring up” the spectator’s response to the

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<sup>124</sup> As Peter Wollen argues in *Signs and Meaning* (1969-1972), “[T]here is no pure cinema, grounded on a single essence, hermetically sealed from contamination” (153). Just as cinema developed from the magic lantern, the daguerrotype, the phenakistoscope and similar devices, it also developed out of strip-cartoons, Wild West shows, automata, pulp novels, melodramas, and magic, says Wollen. Cinema also developed out of photography, therefore it is natural that it will share many qualities with the photographic medium.

<sup>125</sup> Haraway, Donna J., *Staying with the Trouble* (Duke University Press: Kindle Edition, 2016), 2.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*: 1.

devastating event which the film “speaks near-by” without it ever being seized or claimed<sup>127</sup>. She responds to the trouble by finding a way to film co-existence.

One of the key ideas explored in Haraway’s recent book is the concept of “double death”, which is borrowed from Australian-based ethnographer Deborah Bird Rose, who in turn borrows the concept from the aboriginal people of Australia for whom hunting, and therefore death, are an integral part of life. Rose defines “double death” as: “When death is no longer a natural or integral part of life”, “when it is a disabler of life”<sup>128</sup>. Double death sets up an “amplification of death, so that the balance between life and death is overrun”<sup>129</sup>. Examples of double death include those caused by extractivism, agriculture as mining, contamination, etc., all forms of –in the words of Haraway– “double death for profit”<sup>130</sup>. If we agree that the Kawéskar, having been kidnapped from their homes and taken across the world to be exhibited in cages and eventually die is an instance of “double death for profit”, then we can say that the question that the film proposes might be *what aesthetic form is the most suitable for filming the double-death of the Kawéskar*. The way that Muñoz *responds* is by turning to the superimposition and double exposure, created in-camera, and which allows her to capture an “ongoing presence” of the Kawéskar in the present, across temporalities and materialities, and the possibility of “dying twice”. In other words, the “double exposure” becomes the way of seeing –and feeling– the Kawéskar’s “double death”, in the sense described by Rose and Haraway. But we are also extending this *double death* to include the “dying twice” that is made possible in the second photographic/cinematographic act and which Bazin did not take into account. Both “doubles” –the double death and the double exposure—are achieved in *strata of natural history* in the image itself, coherently consolidating the relationship between visibility and death that Bazin once dreamed of, perhaps, but which he did not get to appreciate quite in this way.

The moment that a photograph is filmed by Muñoz’s 16mm camera, it becomes a cinematographic image and its original photographic aspects are transformed. Muñoz’s film works under the understanding that cinematography shares qualities with photography, qualities that are perhaps best described by Kay when he writes:

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<sup>127</sup> Filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-Ha uses the term “talking” or “speaking nearby” to speak of “a speaking that does not objectify, does not point to an object as if it is distant from the speaking subject or absent from the speaking place. A speaking that reflects on itself and can come very close to a subject without, however, seizing or claiming it. A speaking in brief, whose closures are only moments of transition opening up to other possible moments of transition — these are forms of indirectness well understood by anyone in tune with poetic language. Every element constructed in a film refers to the world around it, while having at the same time a life of its own. And this life is precisely what is lacking when one uses word, image, or sound just as an instrument of thought. To say therefore that one prefers not to speak about but rather to speak nearby, is a great challenge. Because actually, this is not just a technique or a statement to be made verbally. It is an attitude in life, a way of positioning oneself in relation to the world. Thus, the challenge is to materialize it in all aspects of the film — verbally, musically, visually. That challenge is renewed with every work I realize, whether filmic or written”. Chen, Nancy N., “‘Speaking Nearby’: A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha”, *Visual Anthropology Review* 8:1 (1992): 87.

<sup>128</sup> Rose, Deborah Bird, “Double Death”, *The Multispecies Salon*, Book Companion Website. <https://www.multispecies-salon.org/double-death/>

<sup>129</sup> Rose, Deborah, “What if the Angel of History Were a Dog?” *Cultural Studies Review* 12(1) (2006): 75.

<sup>130</sup> These are Haraway’s words, as expressed in her masterclass “Storytelling for Multispecies Justice and Care” given on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021, in acceptance of the Nuevo León Alfonso Reyes Award in Mexico, in which she mentions Deborah Bird Rose’s concept of “double death”, as a guiding concept of the second chapter in *Staying with the Trouble*. Haraway, Donna J., “Storytelling for Multispecies Justice and Care”, El Premio Nuevo León Alfonso Reyes (online conference) (March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021).



Inmediatamente después de su invención la cámara penetra (hacia 1850) en el espacio americano, donde incorpora a sus negativos sujetos y objetos, en comparación con su ultramodernidad técnica y perceptiva, anacrónicos, desarraigados, fantásticos, sorprendidos, en suma, prefotográficos. Por consiguiente, el medio de registro que es el lente, marca y traduce, como heterogéneo a él, aquello que hace ingresar a su documental de la escena americana: poblados incipientes en cuasipaisajes indominados e inconclusos abruptamente actuales, trasponables y ubicuos, presas y trofeos de la cacería fotográfica, bajo la especie de lo exótico. Por su calidad documental, o sea, por la congruencia material, bajo la forma de huella óptica, del significante (el dispositivo mecánico-químico) y del significado (lo "real" en cada caso improntado por la traducción lumínica en el significante) en una sola imagen, que arranca lo "real" de un espacio-tiempo único y contingente, trasladándolo a un espacio memoria, plural y múltiplemente citable y anexable, se tocan concretamente en la foto misma y se precipitan sobreimpresos dos tiempos discontinuos en sentido social. Varios tiempos y una sola imagen, por tanto, *imagen estratificada*. Una discronía<sup>131</sup>.

As both 16mm cinema and photography require analogue processes in their filming and chemical processes in their development, Muñoz is attuned to the ways in which these processes reflect –rather than detract from– one another. There are *strata* within the photographic image itself, multiple times congregated in a single image.

In the case of the Kawéskar photographs re-filmed by Muñoz in *strata of natural history*, this third strata belongs to the photographic apparatus and it is the most reflexive as it calls attention to the photographic image itself and to the framing as a constricting –and oppressive– space for the photographed subject. This is achieved through a parallel, or a co-existence, created between the Kawéskar and the animals<sup>132</sup>, and through the use of fences and bars which work not only to emphasize the zoo's cages, and the fact that these people were exhibited as animals behind cages in a human zoo, but also call attention to the image's "cage" that is also known as the frame. Here it is useful to return to Pick's term "zoomorphic stage"<sup>133</sup> to understand both the frame and the screen. Just like a cage, the photographs of the Kawéskar are "forced portraits", or images photographed under specific rules of framing and composition in relation to ideas of biometrics. As photographs taken in studios and under specific technical parameters, these photographs speak not only of the people in them, but also about the photographic apparatus and society that produced them.

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<sup>131</sup> Kay, *Del Espacio De Aca*, 27. Italics added.

<sup>132</sup> It is important, however, to distinguish this relation from the co-existence intended by Carl Hagenbeck. While the zoological gardens were made to emphasize "la breve distancia –o la falta de ella- entre los 'primitivos' no europeos y el mundo zoológico" (Báez and Mason, *Zoológicos humanos*, 23), for Muñoz the proximity between the people and the animals is somewhere altogether different: it is located in how they have been *treated and photographed*.

<sup>133</sup> Pick, *Creaturely Poetics*, 2011.



Figure 2.18. *strata of natural history* (Jeannette Muñoz, 2012)

In Pascal Bonitzer's text on "Deframing" cited earlier, Bonitzer makes a useful association between the verb of framing (*cadrage*) and *cadrer*, a term used in bullfighting which means to immobilize the bull just before the finishing blow<sup>134</sup>. We can see how, in the vocabulary of cinema itself, there is already a relationship between animals and the screen which is inherently violent. The frame is a space of *immobilization* of the subject within it; the frame *contains* the subject. For this reason, *deframing* is a particular modernist cinematographic tool that destabilizes the frame's intended function, creating new possibilities for space configuration on the screen. The "forced" quality of the images comes in direct opposition to the freedom of the subjects photographed, prior to their capture, exhibition and death.

In this sense, it is vital to observe the bird which Muñoz decides to include in her film. The species is not insignificant; it is a *ñandú*, a native bird of Patagonia, also called a *rhea*. These are –significantly– *flightless* birds, distantly related to the ostrich and emu<sup>135</sup>. The indigenous names for this bird include *ñandú guazu* (Guaraní, meaning big spider, most probably in relation to their habit of opening and lowering alternate wings when they run), *suri* (Aymara and Quechua), and *choique* (Mapudungun). For Muñoz, these birds represent "otro aspecto del colonialismo actual"<sup>136</sup>. The "forced" quality of the images and of the subjects photographed whose bodies are placed in a specific relation to the camera and taken in long exposures, parallels the experience of the caged birds. Muñoz comments on the free nature of the birds, and remarks on the irony that in the Berlin Zoo they were put in the smallest and most confined cages.

El ñandú en cautiverio me recordó inevitablemente a los indígenas expuestos en el mismo zoológico. Esto no tiene que quedar necesariamente tematizado en la película, pero en este caso me parece muy importante, porque el ñandú es un animal de la Patagonia que corre kilómetros. Es un animal *libre* por naturaleza. [...] Y en Berlín estaba confinado en una de las jaulas más pequeñas del zoológico, contaba

<sup>134</sup> Bonitzer cited in Sevin, Ayda, "Margins of the Image: Framing and Deframing in the Graphic Novel and the Film *V for Vendetta*", Master Thesis for Bilkent University (2007), 163.

<sup>135</sup> There are two extant species, the greater or American rhea and the lesser or Darwin's rhea. The IUCN considers the puna rhea a separate species. According to Wikipedia, "a feral population of the greater rhea in Germany appears to be growing, though control efforts are underway, and seem to be succeeding in controlling the birds' population growth". [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhea\\_\(bird\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhea_(bird))

<sup>136</sup> Muñoz, in: Agudo, Algarín Navarro, and García, "Entrevista con Jeannette Muñoz", 50-51.

con muy poco espacio para moverse. Ese gesto me pareció en sí mismo una forma de colonialismo. Hay una clara correspondencia entre el zoológico humano y el zoológico para animales y cómo se ha sedimentado la historia en ellos.<sup>137</sup>



Figure 2.19. *strata of natural history* (Jeannette Muñoz, 2012)  
A ñandú guazu

The *ñandú guazu*, or big spider, becomes a SF or *string theory* useful for the entanglements of both human and animal captivity, as well as for understanding the *symbiotic* relationship between cinema and photography which appropriation makes possible. We are referring to SF here in the sense that Haraway proposes “as a theoretical trope, a way to think-with a host of companions in sympoietic threading, felting, tangling, tracking, and sorting”<sup>138</sup>. Spiders and other “tentacular ones” “make attachments and detachments; they make cuts and knots; they make a difference; they weave paths and consequences but not determinisms; they are both open and knotted in some ways and not in others”<sup>139</sup>. In Muñoz’s film, the “big spider” that is the *ñandú* allows for more weaving to take place, for layers to act upon layers, in this case, of colonialism and double death. What might a more *ñandú*-cinema look like? It would be wild, running in zig-zags away from the spectator, as the flightless bird does when in danger. If the *ñandú* alternate with their wings as they run free, a *ñandú*-cinema might be one that weaves in different directions. While in traditional geology, strata typically work as horizontal layers, in cinema strata can take the form of entanglements in the image working in many different and simultaneous directions. Appropriation becomes an entanglement itself as it communicates across media and forms, across histories, species and time. Thinking towards a *ñandú*-cinema might offer us a more playful and freer concept of appropriation in film. We can try to create categories to understand and classify it, give it a scientific name to better contain it, but like the *ñandú*, appropriation cinema will always find a way out of our conceptual cages.

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<sup>137</sup> Agudo, Algarín Navarro, and García, “Entrevista con Jeannette Muñoz”, 67.

<sup>138</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 31.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

## The Body (and Image) as Site of Resistance

Cartwright claims that cinema becomes an apparatus for the disciplining of bodies, to which Pick adds that “it is also a space in which these disciplinary practices are publicly negotiated and so potentially resisted”<sup>140</sup>. The face-image in *strata of natural history* becomes a site for “double death” as it captures the incendiary photographic event, which is inextricably tied to the moment that death became imminent for the photographed Kawéskar, and then repeats it in the cinematographic event. Double exposure becomes the aesthetic form chosen by the artist to make visible the “double death”, as the same frame contains two images which have been incinerated by the light in a double-procedure (“incinerados por la luz en el negativo”, writes Kay<sup>141</sup>). In this visual representation, the disciplinary practices of the camera apparatus are re-negotiated and the body-as-image becomes a site of resistance.

At the end of the film, there is a sequence of images which go beyond the face to capture the bodies of the indigenous women photographed. The camera moves, following the filmmaker’s gaze, over the woman’s body, beginning in her hands folded over her belly, up towards her chest and then finally resting on her face (Figure 2.20).



Figure 2.20. *strata of natural history* (Jeannette Muñoz, 2012)

<sup>140</sup> Pick, “Executing Species”, 315.

<sup>141</sup> Kay, *Del Espacio De Aca*, 24.

The gesture is repeated immediately. These images are no longer superimposed on views of the city; now they rest on views of a forest. Century-old trees are seen through the women's torso and faces, connecting them in our minds. The film seems to suggest that if the memory of these women is to be found somewhere, it might be in the bodies of the generation-old trees which still remain.



Figure 2.21. *strata of natural history* (Jeannette Muñoz, 2012)

The “body” of the woods becomes the woman’s body (Figure 2.21). There is a kind of “touching” which becomes possible here in the texture of the trees. We can almost feel their “skin” as we can hers. If the camera acts as an extension of Muñoz’s eyes, then the image here acts as an extension of our hands, almost in our grasp yet not entirely attainable. The photograph is no longer a two-dimensional image of representation; it is now a material thing which can “come alive” through the film apparatus. As it comes alive, we are able to explore our senses beyond sight, and in lieu of an additional soundtrack touching is all that we have to get closer to the images. I would like to borrow Miriam de Rosa’s idea of “touching without

taking”<sup>142</sup> to describe the haptic experience that Muñoz offers the spectator in this face-image: we can touch but we do not dare to take, as this image does not belong to the realm of possession but rather, to the universe of memory: it drifts in and out, disappearing and appearing again, the power of presence by way of suggestion. It is felt, more than seen; recalled, more than known.



Figure 2.21. *strata of natural history* (Jeannette Muñoz, 2012)  
From cages to trees

Walter Benjamin defined memory as “not an instrument for exploring the past, but rather a medium”<sup>143</sup>. Memory is a medium for returning –again and again, he insists– to the

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<sup>142</sup> De Rosa, Miriam, “A Poetics of Care: Slowness, Ethics and Enchantment in Gianikian & Ricci Lucchi’s Oeuvre”, *Found Footage Magazine*, Issue 3 (March 2017): 35.

<sup>143</sup> “Extraction and Memory”, Written ca. 1932; unpublished in Benjamin’s lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften*, IV, 400–401, translated by Rodney Livingstone, on the basis of a prior version by Edmund Jephcott. *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, part 2 (1931–1934), “Ibizan Sequence”, 1932, ed. by Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William

same matter, the “matter” being “the strata which yield their long-sought secrets only to the most meticulous investigation”. He continues:

That is to say, they yield those images that, severed from all earlier associations, reside as treasures in the sober rooms of our later insights—like torsos in a collector’s gallery. It is undoubtedly useful to plan excavations methodically. Yet no less indispensable is the cautious probing of the spade in the dark loam. And the man who merely makes an inventory of his findings, while failing to establish the exact location of where in today’s ground the ancient treasures have been stored up, cheats himself of his richest prize. In this sense, for authentic memories, it is far less important that the investigator report on them than that he marks, quite precisely, the site where he gained possession of them. Epic and rhapsodic in the strictest sense, genuine memory must therefore yield an image of the person who remembers, in the same way a good archaeological report not only informs us about the strata from which its findings originate, but also gives an account of the strata which first had to be broken through.

Muñoz’s film responds to Benjamin’s call for “a good archaeological report”; as *strata of natural history* is concerned not only with identifying the strata itself—the layers of imagery and texture that can be found in a specific place—and which we have unfolded in this Chapter, but also with giving “an account of” the place itself, the *site* where the strata can be found. She does so by finding a way, through a personal filmmaking practice based in research not only about history and geography but also relating to film experimentation rooted in a formation in the chemical processes of photography and the materiality of the image, to treat memory as a medium for experience and, as Catherine Russell in her reading of Benjamin suggests, “it is precisely this reawakening of experience that the image is able to evoke”<sup>144</sup>.

Significantly, the experience here is not only the filmmaker’s—whose body is made visible in the camera movement which passes over the images (as the filmmaker looks at them) as an “embodied” movement—but also our own, as spectators, as we experience these photographs three times—at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the film. Over time—that is over the duration of the film—our relation to these face-images changes, not limited only to how we see them (blurry, at the edge, in focus, darkened, flashing before our eyes, “hidden” in the contrasting superimpositions and finally camouflaged in the environment, in the coming together of person and place), but also to how these images work on us over the duration of the film. They call forward our own participation, they make us see them and feel them, and by the end, our experience of them is a new layer on the material, an additional *stratum* of the film.

These images, as they are re-worked by Muñoz, challenge the notion of *transparent skin*, described by Deborah Bird Rose, as “the presumption of interior visibility”. This “imagined transgression” was and continues to be a part of colonial attitudes towards Aboriginal bodies<sup>145</sup>. She writes: “From a white perspective, reading the surface is a natural act that acquires its exactitude only because bodies are themselves conceived as natural. The white eye merely reads what the natural skin displays, and the skin only displays what the

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Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 576.

<sup>144</sup> Russell, Catherine, *Archiveology: Walter Benjamin and Archival Film Practices* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 14.

<sup>145</sup> Rose, Deborah Bird. “Aboriginal Life and Death in Australian Settler Nationhood”, *Aboriginal History*, vol. 25 (2001): 148–162.

interior ‘blood’ consists of. In contrast, Aboriginal people report experiencing this racial gaze as extreme aggression”. She turns to Fanon’s concept of the “genocidal gaze” to describe the aggressive and violent racialized gaze which penetrates the body of the black person in a colonial context. She concludes, “Under regimes of colonizing violence, a person’s body and form become a site of injury, and part of that injury derives from the presumption of interior visibility”<sup>146</sup>. Although we have argued that the skin becomes “touchable” it is far from *permeable* and never *transparent*. Photography can only allow us to get so close; there is a sense present in Epstein’s *Bonjour Cinema!* written at the beginning of the twentieth century – the century, Rony says, of the image, of cinema– that cinema and the *close-up* in particular will allow us to enter into face and to taste it. But this illusion of proximity reveals itself to be another distance. Like proximity and distance, presence too is nothing without its counterpart(s); appearance cannot exist without disappearance, and so, these processes are linked, within the image, in the moment that they appear and disappear from the screen. The face, placed in juxtaposition with the body in *strata of natural history*, becomes the site for imaginable proximity, met by the irreparable distance of the body. In this contradiction Kay finds resistance, however fleeting and transitory, which denounces a “devastating intervention”. In his words:

Puede que esos mundos ignorados, que esas caras prefotogénicas, que esas colectividades impintadas, que esos cuerpos refractarios, por la máxima distancia a la reproducción mecánica que ellos significan, contengan aún en su doble fotográfico, una resistencia (ya que la cámara no se encuentra en lo encuadrado por ella, nada ni nadie en lo reproducido la corrobora, sólo la pura distancia focal lo invade todo, el lente documenta su propia ausencia); una resistencia que logra, aunque sea fugaz y transitoriamente, denunciar su intervención devastadora.<sup>147</sup>

### **To Travel with Images, To Keep Vigil**

Muñoz’s decision to focus on the face and to separate the face from the body recalls the important work of fellow Chilean artist Eugenio Dittborn, whose work dates from the 1970s through Pinochet’s dictatorship, and are therefore works made while living under a repressive regime. As Charles Marewether’s text from 1997 on the work of Latin American artists Dittborn, Milagros De La Torre, Rosângela Rennó, attests: they used “photography precisely to destabilize its authority as a technology of remembrance, a technology that participates in constructing seamless narratives of identity”<sup>148</sup>. These artists worked “with the notion of the unsanctioned or unlawful body of the nation as a way to address the violence that characterizes the inscription of history. They use photographs that represent the moments before which the body becomes absent. In doing so, they question how and what it is that photography remembers and forgets and for whom and what purpose”<sup>149</sup>. Dittborn’s work, in particular, pointed to the archive as a container that preserves but, at the same time, “buries the subject”. In his extensive series *Airmail Paintings* began in 1983 (Figure 2.22), collages of screen-printed photographs, print media and other documents, including photographs of indigenous

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid: 157.

<sup>147</sup> Kay, *Del Espacio De Aca*, 29.

<sup>148</sup> Marewether, Charles, Eugenio Dittborn, Milagros De La Torre, and Rosângela Rennó, *Archives of the Fallen*, No. 62 (Fall 1997): 36-47.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid: 45.



peoples of the Tierra del Fuego taken in 1920 by anthropologist Martín Guisinde<sup>150</sup>, ID photographs of petty thieves and prostitutes taken from police files, images of archaeological remains and drawings of faces made by his daughter, are folded and placed into envelopes sent to different galleries and locations around the world.



Figure 2.22. *Airmail Painting, the 23<sup>rd</sup> History of the Face (500 years)*, Eugenio Dittborn, 1999

As Ana María Risco writes, based on conversations she had directly with the artist himself, he considers that the political in his work “is rooted in folds, which allowed the paintings to fit inside envelopes, enter the regular postal system and circulate during a time of harsh economic conditions and of narrow margins of expression for artists who stayed in Chile”<sup>151</sup>. For Marewether, this is a “work of exhumation” where the “unfolding” of figures “makes them visible” and “combats the oblivion to which they have been consigned”. However, as Risco observes, “The signs found on Dittborn’s airmail paintings resonate in visual space without letting us clearly perceive, as the iconographer or archivist might wish to underline, the particular past to which they allude. Many pasts resonate in each image, layered and juxtaposed together”. It can be argued that this practice of folding and unfolding began in Dittborn’s collages is continued in Muñoz’s work with layers in the cinematographic image.

Faces are particularly important for Dittborn, not as portraits but as images which have a history (The subtitle of the series is “the # History of the Face (500 years)”). Risco argues that these images are cleared of “any possible links to painterly portraiture (and its perpetuation of a history of illustrious men). [They] also problematise cultural memory, such as that of the path suggested by the early use of photography as a tool for identification, and its contribution to the development of an anthropology based on racial categories, as seen in the classifying and museological zeal of nineteenth-century European culture”. Marewether adds:

<sup>150</sup> One of these photographs is used in another film by Jeannette Muñoz titled *Envío 24* (2010).

<sup>151</sup> Risco, Ana María, “Disarmed and Equipped: Strategies, Politics and Poetics of the Image in Eugenio Dittborn’s Airmail Paintings”, *Afterall* (Spring 2012): 67.

As it exposes us to those whom the government had defined as transgressive, criminal, or primitive, this work fractures the seamless and monumental history of the nation. It becomes an allegory of life under the dictatorship of Pinochet, a regime that committed violence against its people in the name of the nation and national identity.

If Dittborn explored the limits of “machine-made image” using screen-printed photographs in juxtaposition with his daughter’s hand-made drawings in order to problematize the early use of photography as a tool for identification, control, and death, Muñoz takes this exploration towards cinema and more precisely towards the relationship between the photographic and cinematographic forms. She experiments with the film camera’s possibilities of visibility and invisibility, revelation and destruction. Her work also combats the oblivion of the Kewéskar indigenous people, but similarly to Dittborn, this is not expressed in straightforward messages of denunciation. Her films are political as Dittborn’s collages are political; they are political in their form. It is possible, then, to contextualize Muñoz’s film within a certain avant-garde artistic and aesthetic tradition of Chile rooted in the Chilean dictatorship and in resistance to a repressive and deadly regime. It is particularly noteworthy that the artist Eugenio Dittborn focuses on the faces of people who the illegal government has deemed transgressive, criminal, or primitive. Muñoz turns to the archive, including some of the same images used in Dittborn’s collages, and through filmmaking opens new questions for the photographic image and this archive in particular. Her film takes image experimentation across geographies (in a different way from Dittborn, although in both cases we can speak of images that are “well-travelled”), across species, and finally, across artistic forms, starting in the mechanical apparatus of the photographic camera and moving towards the realm of cinema.

These images also travel between the realms of the dead and the living. It is therefore not enough to think of Muñoz’s work of re-photographing photographs in terms of *reanimation*, where *re* is “back, again” and *animate* is “to endow with life”, or in sense that cinema was believed to “bring things and people back to life/to movement”, nor as a kind of “cinematic taxidermy” defined by Rony as a cinema whose purpose is “to make that which is dead look as if it were still living”<sup>152</sup> and for whom Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922) is an exemplary film. Muñoz’s work, rather, comes from the entirely different idea that death has an “ongoing presence”, it is not merely an event at the end of a life<sup>153</sup> nor is it something that is to be assumed of indigenous peoples (Rony describes the ethnographic taxidermic impulse as coming from the assumption that indigenous peoples were dying or already dead<sup>154</sup>, this is what she calls the myth of the “vanishing native”). Instead of *reanimate*, then, we might use the verbs *recall*, *remember*, or the Spanish *develar* which comes from the Latin *develare* and means “to remove the veil” (velum is the veil or curtain). This suggests that the dead are not gone, but very much all around us, co-existing with the living, including human beings, plants

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<sup>152</sup> Rony, *The Third Eye*, 101. On page 88 she speaks of “cinematic taxidermy”.

<sup>153</sup> Haraway cites van Dooren’s understanding of extinction: “Flight Ways shows how extinction is not a point, not a single event, but more like an extended edge or a widened ledge. Extinction is a protracted slow death that unravels great tissues. Flight Ways shows how extinction is not a point, not a single event, but more like an extended edge or a widened ledge. Extinction is a protracted slow death that unravels great tissues of ways of going on in the world for many species, including historically situated people”. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 38.

<sup>154</sup> Rony, 102.

and animal life, and objects. Something that cinema can do is make this co-existence *seen* or, rather, felt by the spectator. Co-existence as an alternative to or a multiplicity of Bazin's fantasy of *convergence*, or "the parallel unfolding of filming and event"<sup>155</sup>. Co-existence is also a powerful antidote to the "vanishing native" narrative.

In Haraway's reflection on Valerie Hartouni's reading of Hannah Arendt's analysis of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann, she argues that he was a human being who was "unable to make present to himself what was absent, what was not himself..."<sup>156</sup>. This surrender to immateriality and inconsequentiality, writes Haraway, *is* his thoughtlessness. If this is the case, then it is our most pressing task to make present that which is absent. *strata of natural history* achieves this through the mechanism of double exposure and superimpositions. These forms work to make visible the "double death" experienced by the Kawéskar in the photographs, at once in the photographic event and in their kidnapping, treatment, and eventual physical death, which as we have seen here, is inseparable from the moment they were photographed, and is remembered or recalled in the cinematographic image.

Brazilian experimental filmmaker Ana Vaz proposes the term *velar* (to keep vigil) in place of the often-used *revelar* (to reveal) associated with documentary filmmaking<sup>157</sup>. She champions for a Cinema which is free from the cataloging, identification and classification system of early ethnographic cinema and calls for a "desterritorialización de la mirada", turning to darkness and opacity, rather than the illumination of Modernity. For this reason, she prefers to think about how filmmakers can "velar" or *keep vigil*, accompany the subjects and archives without this implying the responsibility to shine a light on them and make them visible to the spectator. While Muñoz's film might make past existences *seen* in the double exposure, these images are made opaque through the addition of layers. Their visibility is far from clean or total; as such, these images can be felt but never attained. Her film challenges the idea of the face-image as something that can be grasped, kept, or owned. Her film also "keeps vigil" or mourns for the double death of the Kawéskar as it remembers them, calls the ghosts forward to appear and then disappear again into the image. *strata of natural history* can be understood as a *mourning-film* for the indigenous men, women, and children, kidnapped from their homes in La Patagonia and taken to Germany to die. The spectator mourns their lives and their deaths through the very process of watching or *bearing witness to the film*, without the filmmaker having to provide textbook information as to the specific details of their double death.

After Dittborn, Muñoz's film challenges ideas of what it means to bear witness in the post-cinematographic age. In the double exposure and the co-existence of temporalities and celluloid materialities, the spectator becomes entangled in the web that is history, and that is the image. As a materialist approach which has co-existence at its core, we believe that this

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<sup>155</sup> Marguelies, Ivone, "Bodies Too Much", in *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema*, ed. Ivone Marguelies (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 10.

<sup>156</sup> "That is, here was a human being unable to make present to himself what was absent, what was not himself, what the world in its sheer not-one-selfness is and what claims-to-be inhere in not-oneself. Here was someone who could not be a wayfarer, could not entangle, could not track the lines of living and dying, could not cultivate response-ability, could not make present to itself what it is doing, could not live in consequences or with consequence, could not compost. Function mattered, duty mattered, but the world did not matter for Eichmann." Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 36.

<sup>157</sup> Vaz, Ana and Raquel Schefer. "La mirada de las imágenes: crítica de la modernidad, inter-visualidad e inter-epistemología en el cine de Ana Vaz", *Ecologías de la imagen en movimiento: Seminario de estudios de cine*, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana - Lerma (Mexico) (May 4th, 2021).

film offers a “way out” of more Anthropocentric approximations to the face-image, in order to reveal the intricate ways in which multispecies and multiple territories continue to co-exist, even beyond their “double death”. “Double death”, as we have proposed to use it in this Chapter, also becomes a very useful way for thinking about what happens when photographs pass again under the cinematographic camera in acts of appropriation made with in-camera montage. It is especially powerful when the subjects represented in the images are the Kawéskar, who have experienced “double death” in the sense proposed by Rose, and when the film becomes a way of “staying with the trouble” of their untimely double death for profit. The face-image becomes a “door” for contemporaneity or co-evalness to occur, against expected proximity, transparency, and species and medium-specificity, and through interdisciplinary strategies of image-layering and co-existence.

### Chapter 3: Opening Up the Archive, Opening Up the Face: Freeing the Arrested Face-Image in Susana de Sousa Dias' Portuguese Dictatorship Trilogy

When I first saw [the police pictures/mugshots] I was really impressed, not because of the quality but because of the faces I saw. I couldn't get them out of my mind because they left such a strong impression. In fact, these images were the starting point for the whole project.  
–Susana de Sousa Dias<sup>1</sup>

There is life and its double. A photograph belongs to the world of the double. There's where the trap lies. As you get closer to faces (in photos) you feel you're sharing the life and death of living faces. Not true. If you're sharing anything, it's the life and death of images.  
–*Si j'avais quatre dromadaires* (Chris Marker, 1966)

Susana de Sousa Dias has been working with the images of the faces of Portuguese political prisoners from the archive of the Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado (PIDE) for the past two decades. Her three films made with archival material collected during Portugal's 48-year-long dictatorship (1926-1974) can be seen as a trilogy, starting with *Natureza Morta (Still Life, 2005)*<sup>2</sup> made with a combination of anthropometric black and white photos shot in 3x4 (mugshots) of political prisoners taken by the PIDE and original black and white archival photographs and footage which have been slowed down considerably, edited in collaboration with the experimental electronic soundtrack composed by Antonio de Sousa Dias<sup>3</sup>; *48 (2010)* which is made entirely of the anthropometric photographs of sixteen political prisoners, where the soundtrack is composed of the voices and testimonies of the former political prisoners commenting on the photographs and on their experiences as prisoners and victims of torture; and *Luz Obscura (Obscure Light, 2016)*, the last in the trilogy, and which, as a continuation of the previous two, also incorporates mugshots, archival footage, and voices that speak over and with the images, but also includes moving images filmed in the present. There is a movement between the three films, from the *macro* to the *micro*, as the first film is more generally about Portugal under the dictatorship of António Salazar, and the last film is about one specific family affected by the dictatorship. Many articles and book chapters have been written about the three films, especially about *48* and mostly in the past couple of years<sup>4</sup>, yet to this date none have

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<sup>1</sup> Jacobson, Ulla, "Seeing Without Knowing: Entrevista com Susana de Sousa Dias", *Dox* 61 (November 2005): 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Natureza Morta (Still Life, 2005)* was made during an Archidoc workshop organized by the IDF (Institute of Documentary Film), a center of formation and creation of networks for European documentary filmmakers who work with archives.

<sup>3</sup> For more on the collaborative work between the composer and filmmaker, See: De Sousa Dias, Susana and Antonio de Sousa Dias, "Documental expandido. El caso de *Natureza morta/Stilleben*", trans. Melissa Mutchinicki, *Arkadin*, 9(15) (2020). Original text in: *Pós-fotografia, pós-cinema: novas configurações das imagens*, ed. Beatriz Furtado and Philippe Dubois (São Paulo, Brasil: Edições Sesc SP, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> See: García Ambrunheiras, Iván, "Explorando la memoria traumática: Susana de Sousa Dias y el archivo salazarista", in *Jugar con la memoria: el cine portugués en el siglo XXI* (Santander: Shangrila Ediciones, 2014), 162-183; Viegas, Susana, "Aesthetical Divide: A Study on Susana de Sousa Dias' *48*", *Revista de Literatura, História e Memória* 10(15) (2014): 09-17; Ribeiro de Menezes, Alison, "Affect and the archival turn: recent documentaries by Inês de Medeiros and Susana de Sousa Dias", in *Women's Cinema in Contemporary Portugal*, ed. Mariana Liz and Hilary Owen (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020): 150-168; Viera, Estela, "Image,

focused purely on her treatment of the face-image. This Chapter will look closely at Susana de Sousa Dias' Portuguese Dictatorship trilogy (2005-2016) specifically through the films' re-appropriation of the anthropometric photo or mugshot face-image, and how this appropriation evolves throughout her work. This Chapter is of great importance for the dissertation, not only because our research on the face-image in archival cinema only took flight after seeing these films, but also because this Chapter will permit us to understand what makes the face-image a particularly valuable image in cinema today.

The principle question that guides the three films, and which has already been asked in the previous chapters, and will return in chapters that follow, was articulated very well by Susana and Antonio de Sousa Dias: "How to show the other side of an authoritarian regime using images produced by that very regime"?<sup>5</sup> In the case of the three films which we will study in this Chapter, although they use different materials produced by the Portuguese dictatorship, there is one type of archival material that is included in all three films: the mugshots of the political prisoners taken by the police. These images of faces, both frontal and profile, are reworked in the three films in different ways. The trilogy's insistence on these images provides us with rich material to examine how the filmmaker "opens" the archive by "opening" the face-image. In the process, a re-conceptualization of the face-image emerges which distances it from the portrait, through a re-thinking of the face as different from the talking head<sup>6</sup>. The function of these images throughout the films does not depend solely on the information that they can or cannot provide (for example, the identification of the people in the photographs, their ages and how they are related), but also in the formal exploration of these materials through an experimentation with cinematic form: including sound, movement, photography, and duration. As spectators who return-gaze to the images in question, we become part of the process of *opening up the face-image*.

For critic and novelist John Berger, "Photographs are relics of the past. They are traces of what has happened. If the living take that past upon themselves, if the past becomes an integral part of the process of people making their own history, then all photographs would reacquire a living context, they would continue to exist in time, instead of being arrested moments."<sup>7</sup> It is our argument that through the appropriation of the face-images of political prisoners arrested during the Salazar Dictatorship, de Sousa Dias makes these once "arrested"

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historical memory, politics: Margarida Cardoso's *Kuxa Kanema* and Susana de Sousa Dias's *48*", in *Women's Cinema in Contemporary Portugal*, ed. Mariana Liz and Hilary Owen (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020); Medina, Javiera, "48 (2010) de Susana de Sousa Dias: 'Ouvrir la photographie'", *La Furia Humana* 39 (2021).

<sup>5</sup> De Sousa Dias, Susana and Antonio de Sousa Dias, "Documental expandido", 3-4. "Esta operación busca trabajar las imágenes dentro de lo que ellas contienen en sí en potencia, dentro de su materia original. Examinarlas también en el sentido de volver al punto de origen, al momento en que esas imágenes fueron captadas y percibir el sistema que las produjo" (4).

<sup>6</sup> About the difference between a talking head and a face: "This was my problem in *Obscure Light*. It's very interesting because I presented a paper in New York about my methods of filming. I use a very simple method: the set-up interview, the most banal system of filming words. Sometimes this is a problem because this is what makes talking heads become talking heads. And this is a kind of contradiction. I don't want to have talking heads but my method of capturing the words [the sound] is filming talking heads. There is a paradox. So I presented a paper in NY some years ago and it was very interesting because a professor that was there told me that for the first time he understood that a *talking head* was different from a *face*. One thing is a head, and a person talking, and another thing is when we watch the face. And for that maybe we have to detach something. And pay attention just to the face and not to everything. I thought a lot about that." de Sousa Dias, Susana. Personal Interview. May 10th, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Berger, John, "Uses of Photography", *About Looking* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 57.

images “continue to exist in time”. Through cinema, she provides these images with a *living context*, including a time and a space, which allows for these images to be free of their “arrested” photographic quality and finally part of the process of “people making their own history”. In this Chapter, we will explore how this happens and we will pay particular attention to how movement is created through re-framing, re-photography, and sound, and how time and duration is added to the images to create a co-presence of temporalities between past and present. The chapter will be organized according to the different formal explorations of the face-image in the Trilogy in order to understand what changes between the films and how these differences are evidence of a reconceptualization of the face on film.

### “Mugshots are not just portraits”

Just as we have done in the previous chapters, we would need to learn the qualities attributed to the image at hand –in this case, the mugshot– in order to see how these elements are “unlearned”<sup>8</sup>, challenged or transformed in Susana de Sousa Dias’ cinematographic reappropriations. To begin, the photographing of criminals began shortly after the invention of photography in 1840. As early as 1841, the French police already began producing daguerreotypes of prisoners<sup>9</sup>, yet it was not until the events of the Paris Commune (1871) that the practice was developed on a more systematic basis<sup>10</sup>. Author Jonathan Finn describes how the photographic camera developed in conjunction with law enforcement practices in the nineteenth century: “Photography’s cost-effectiveness, ease of use, rapid means of production, and unique claim to objectivity assured the photograph a central position among other forms of visual representation across social, institutional, and scientific practices. [...] Law enforcement agencies quickly seized these benefits of the camera to transform the body, with all its complex idiosyncrasies, into two-dimensional documents, which were considerably easier to manage”<sup>11</sup>. The most well-known of these two-dimensional documents is the modern *mugshot*<sup>12</sup> as it is commonly known, characterized by photographs of the full face and the profile views, and standardized in 1883 by the French police officer Alphonse Bertillon. Replacing the previously used “rouges’ galleries” (leather-bound albums containing photographs of “criminals”, their histories and biographical information), the mugshot permitted a system of classification which would enable police to more effectively store and

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<sup>8</sup> Continuing with Ariella Azoulay’s proposal to “unlearn” imperialism and applying this “unlearning” to the image.

<sup>9</sup> Finn, Jonathan, *Capturing the Criminal Image: From Mugshot to Surveillance Society* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2009): 6.

<sup>10</sup> Frizot, Michel, “Body of Evidence: The Ethnophotography of Difference”, in *A New History of Photography*, ed. Michel Frizot (Koln: Konemann, 1998): 15.

<sup>11</sup> Finn, xviii-xviii.

<sup>12</sup> According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, a mugshot is a “photograph taken by police of a person after an arrest for identification purposes”. The word combines *mug*, defined as “a person’s face” and *shot*, in the photographic sense. [https://www.etymonline.com/word/mug-shot#etymonline\\_v\\_32434](https://www.etymonline.com/word/mug-shot#etymonline_v_32434) According to Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language published in 1989, aside from a drinking cup, a “mug” is *slang* for a) the face, b) the mouth, c) an exaggerated facial expression. It is also “grimace, as in acting”, “*Slang.* to photograph (a person), esp. in compliance with an official or legal requirement”; “*Slang.* to grimace voluntarily: assume an exaggerated facial expression, as in acting”, originally from the Scandinavian term *mugg* for drinking vessel.

exchange criminal records<sup>13</sup>, in such a way that presupposed the idea of the “habitual offender” and of criminal reoffending<sup>14</sup>. This system was quickly adopted across Europe, Canada, the United States and Russia.

As we can see in the full mugshot below (Figure 3.1), these images –which precede the cinematic *close-up*– separate the face (and the head) from the rest of the body. As photographs, they are essentially still and silent images, absent of movement and sound. They are produced by a carceral apparatus, made to serve as evidence in control systems. Evidence of what exactly? These photographs are used primarily to establish identity and presence<sup>15</sup>. They do so by encapsulating “essential elements” of the person’s appearance and providing “the anatomical traces of individuals, containing the fundamental features necessary for identification”<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, these images function under at least two key expectations and understandings of the image: first, that the face provides information necessary to identify a human being, and second, a belief in the indexical quality of the photographic image and the trust that the photograph will succeed in capturing the essential and identifying characteristics of the person<sup>17</sup>.

What is particularly striking about these images is how ruled they are. Bertillon developed a “signaletic” system of identification which involved recording specific identification data onto a standardized form. First, eleven detailed anthropometric measurements were recorded: height, head length, head breadth, arm span, sitting height, left middle finger length, left little finger length, left foot length, left forearm length, right ear length, and cheek width. These measurements were supplemented with a physical description of the body, including distinguishing marks like scars, tattoos and deformities, with particular attention to the features of the face (nose, mouth, hair, eyes), especially of the ear (“the most important factor from the point of view of identification [...] unvarying in its shape since birth, resistant to the influences of milieu and upbringing”<sup>18</sup>). The final aspect of this system was the recording of one full-face and one profile photograph, “obtained with a fixed lens, at a specified distance, and according to fixed principles whereby the face was reduced to 1/7 life-size, with always the same exposure and lighting”<sup>19</sup>. This information was recorded on an identification card, or *portrait parlé*. See Figure 3.1 for an example of a full identification card (one belonging to Bertillon himself).

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<sup>13</sup> Finn, *Capturing the Criminal Image*, 23.

<sup>14</sup> Frizot, “Body of Evidence”, 264.

<sup>15</sup> As Berger observes, “When photographs are used in a control system, their evidence is more or less limited to establishing identity and presence”. From: Berger, John, *The Success and Failure of Picasso* (New York: Vintage International, 2011): 71.

<sup>16</sup> De Sousa Dias, Susana. “(In)visible Evidence: The Representability of Torture”, in *A Companion to Contemporary Documentary Film*, ed. A. Juhasz and A. Lebow, first ed. (Minnesota: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 492.

<sup>17</sup> “Bertillon’s system was not entirely successful, and finger-printing would eventually replace it as the dominant mode of criminal identification. Nonetheless, Bertillon’s work had an important practical impact on law enforcement and criminal identification practices. By standardizing the identification process, Bertillon extended the capabilities of police to effectively store and use criminal identification information” (Finn, *Capturing the Criminal Image*, 28). The mugshot’s particular attention to the face continues to have an impact on how data is collected to this day, for example, through facial recognition technology.

<sup>18</sup> Bertillon, Alphonse, *La Photographie judiciaire* (Paris: Gauthier Villars, 1890), 95-96. In: Frizot, “Body of Evidence”, 264.

<sup>19</sup> Frizot, 264.



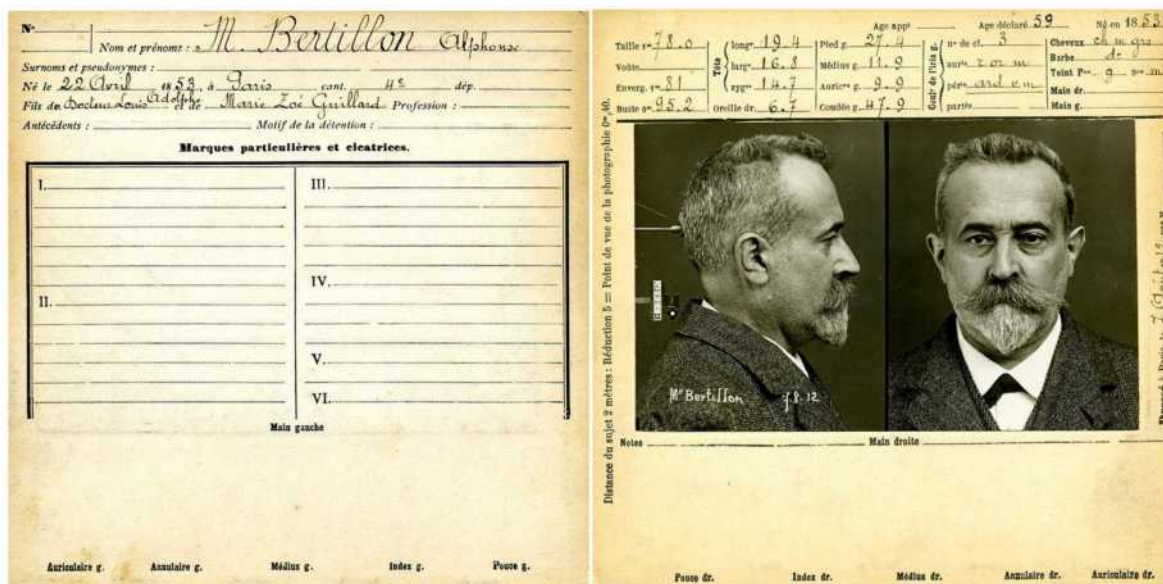


Figure 3.1. Alphonse Bertillon's identification card.

At the time of the development of the Bertillon system, the most dominant view in science concerning criminality had been proposed by Italian criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso. As the founder of this field which describes the study of the body, mind, and habits of the “born” criminal, Lombroso’s theory dominated criminological discussions in Europe, North and South America, and parts of Asia from the 1880s into the early twentieth century<sup>20</sup>. He studied the physiognomies of men and women alike, with particular attention to the face, in order to identify patterns and physical traits of criminality. He believed that photographs of criminals could provide scientific evidence of their “degeneracy”. In his book *Criminal Women*, the first of his books translated to English shortly after its publication, Lombroso includes many observations like these: “Looking at photographs of these women, people may say that these faces are not all too horrible, and I agree, insofar as they are infinitely less ugly than the male criminals portrayed in my *Atlas of Criminals*. Among the females there is sometimes even a ray of beauty; but when this beauty exists, it is more virile than feminine”<sup>21</sup>, and “Here we find overly closed eyes; a receding forehead; a small head; ears too tightly attached to the head; numerous, deep and premature wrinkles; crooked lips; a flat, crooked nose curving outward; a receding chin; and a virile physiognomy”<sup>22</sup>, and finally, “These ... photographs give a very good idea of the female criminal type”<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> From the Introduction written by Nicole Han Rafter and Mary Gibson to: Lombroso, Cesare and Guglielmo Ferrero, *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*, trans. Nicole Hahn Rafter and Mary Gibson (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004): 3.

<sup>21</sup> Lombroso’s words, in: *ibid*, 139.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*: 140.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*.

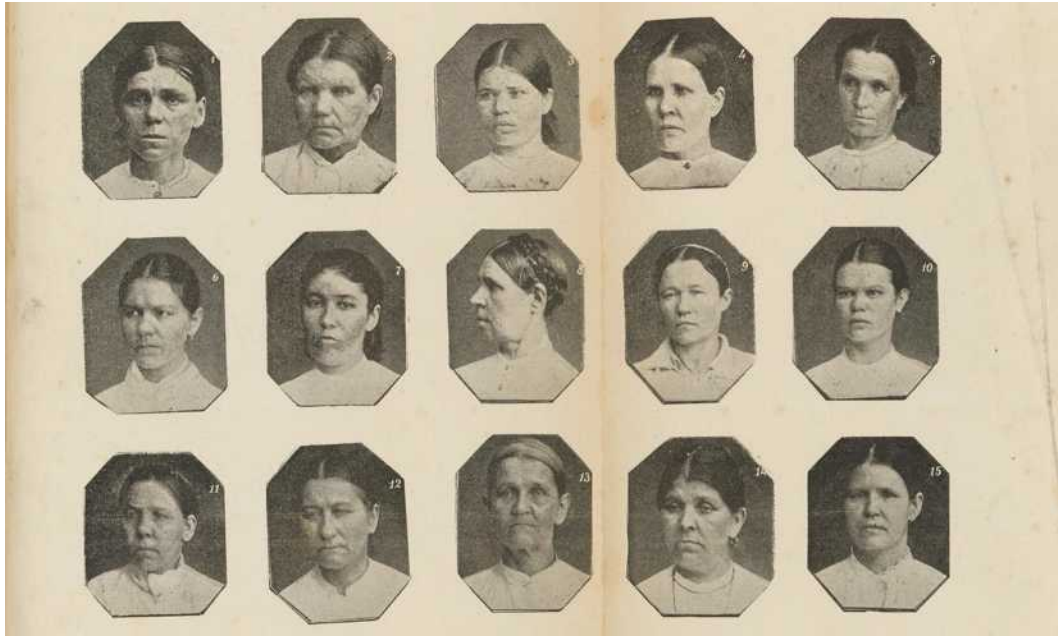


Figure 3.2. Physiognomy of “Russian criminals”. Source: Lombroso, *La donna delinquente*, 1893.

Like Lombroso, Bertillon believed “that criminality could be read directly from the body and, by extension, captured in its visual representation”<sup>24</sup>. As with many medical, scientific and legal photographs in the nineteenth century which are meant to produce inventories and be used in classification systems, the photographs taken by Lombroso and Bertillon function—in the words of Finn—as representation and as *inscription*. Representation in so far that the body—and in the mugshot, the face—is reduced to a two-dimensional document, a material representation to be reproduced, distributed widely, and eventually stored in a police file/archive, and *inscription* because the photograph gives rise “to new forms of knowledge regarding crime and criminality”<sup>25</sup>. These images are studied, analyzed, and organized in order to understand “the signs of criminality” in the body, and as a consequence, they participate in the development of a *new criminal subject*<sup>26</sup>. Just as the new criminal subject is created, the “normalcy of the white male body”, writes Finn, is reinforced, “simultaneously stigmatizing the bodies of multiple ‘others’ as anomalous and, therefore, deviant”<sup>27</sup>.

For de Sousa Dias, the “dogmatization” of the photographs produced by Bertillon’s system “sought not just to ensure uniformity in terms of methods to obtain photographs of prisoners, but also to make them precise, eliminating any factor of variability”<sup>28</sup>. The mugshot is a “precise” image which is created through a system of uniformity based on a scientific process that is assumed to be free of variability. As such, they are images which claim neutrality and representational accuracy. Despite their claim to neutrality, however, these images are strongly codified and therefore far from neutral. As she explains,

<sup>24</sup> Finn, *Capturing the Criminal Image*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*: 29.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*: 30.

<sup>28</sup> De Sousa Dias, “(In)visible Evidence: The Representability of Torture”, 492.

...Despite their seeming neutrality, these images are strongly codified from the technical point of view but also from the ideological one in the sense that they end up inscribing the people portrayed within a general notion of “miscreant”. They are also characterized by an “aesthetic of transparency”. The reduction of the image to the strict purpose of representational accuracy implies that its worth as analogon prevails over its epistemological value. It is precisely this aspect of transparency which causes only the portrayed person to be seen instead of the image in its amplitude<sup>29</sup>.

Filmmaker Brett Story (*The Prison in Twelve Landscapes*, 2016) agrees that these images play a role in organizing the ideological frameworks of knowledge:

An image, an edit, a sound—all tools of representation—operate as indexes to ideological themes. The language of the mugshot doesn’t just convey an image of a person but also reinforces a particular framework—the category of the criminal, for example, or the equation of criminality with danger—through which that person becomes “known.” Images have responsibility for far more than just expanding knowledge *about* anything; they organize the very ideological frameworks that determine what can even be known<sup>30</sup>.

Produced to reveal the identity and presence of the person photographed for their easy identification (and to be distributed widely and/or archived for future or continuous prosecutions and investigations), mugshots do much more than just convey an image of a person. They reinforce a particular framework for criminality and for “knowing” the person in the image. Viewers see these images and “see” a criminal; this particular “knowledge” takes over other forms of knowing that the image might also contain or communicate. It becomes difficult or impossible to “see” and “know” anything else in the image.

Remembering our discussion in the previous chapter, we can see now that the same codes of anthropometric description and photographic documentation which produced the photographs of the Kawéskar days before their untimely death at the hands of their kidnappers (and photographers) operate in criminal portraiture as well. As María Luisa Ortega explains:

La descripción antropométrica apoyada por el registro fotográfico rígidamente codificado se aplicaba por igual para la identificación del fenotipo criminal y la clasificación de los tipos humanos no europeos: nada escapaba al poder clasificatorio y reificador de la imagen fotográfica que revestía de objetividad y cientificidad a unas prácticas ligadas al control social y a la expansión colonial. ... Unas y otras imágenes pertenecen a un mismo contexto científico, cultural y social en el que la «diferencia» equiparada a la «anormalidad» o la «inferioridad» se convertía en categoría científica en sentido fuerte y registrable visualmente, y donde la «normalidad» (la heterosexualidad o el hombre blanco) no era objeto de semejante mirada científica<sup>31</sup>.

The impulse for social control and colonial expansion are in both cases disguised, with the help of a carefully designed and ruled system, by claims to objectivity and appeals to science.

Another ruled image is the painted portrait, which is studied and learned at art academies around the world. It can depict the subject full-length (the whole body), head and shoulders (bust), or just the head. In many cases, the face is completed first, followed by the

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<sup>29</sup> De Sousa Dias, “(In)visible Evidence: The Representability of Torture”, 492.

<sup>30</sup> Story, Brett, “How Does It End? Story and the Property Form”, *World Records Journal*, Vol.5 (2021).

<sup>31</sup> Ortega, María Luisa Ortega, “Una propuesta para el análisis de las imágenes científicas en la formación del profesorado: Una aproximación socio-epistemológica”, *Investigación y Desarrollo* 10(1) (2002): 92.

rest of the body. The subject's head may be painted "full face" (front view), profile (side view), or "three-quarter view" ("two-thirds view") which is somewhere in between. There are also portraits where the subject is painted with their back turned to the spectator. In order to create a portrait from life, the subject must pose for the artist for considerable time, depending on the artist. Although degrees of likeness have varied throughout its history, beginning as far back as Ancient Egypt and Greece, film theorist André Bazin has retold the history of painting as one divided between spiritual or interior expression and exterior imitation. For Bazin, "...[I]n the fifteenth century Western painting began to turn from its age-old concern with spiritual realities expressed in the form proper to it, towards an effort to combine this spiritual expression with as complete an imitation as possible of the outside world"<sup>32</sup>. Key to this process of imitation was the invention of *perspective*, a scientific system which allowed the artist "to create the illusion of three-dimensional space within which things appeared to exist as our eyes in reality seen them"<sup>33</sup>. After this, "painting was torn between two ambitions: one, primarily aesthetic, namely the expression of spiritual reality wherein the symbol transcended its model; the other, purely psychological, namely the duplication of the world outside"<sup>34</sup>. For Bazin, painting became for XV century Europe the modern equivalent of the Egyptian mummifications and the outdated practice of embalming the dead: "Louis XIV did not have himself embalmed. He was content to survive in his portrait by Le Brun"<sup>35</sup>. Of course, this division was never as cut and dry as Bazin suggested. Looking at the anatomical drawings of Leonardo da Vinci, for example, Ortega observes that "estas imágenes se hallan lejos del retrato que atrapa una única y genial observación"<sup>36</sup>. The capacity for representation of these images resides "no en que constituya una reproducción fidedigna de la visión, en que ofrezca al espectador o al lector una mirada vicaria sobre la realidad –aspecto en que se basará buena parte de la legitimidad de la fotografía como dispositivo 'objetivo' de representación de lo real– sino precisamente porque va más allá de las apariencias convirtiéndose en una explicación del mundo, al menos del fenómeno representado"<sup>37</sup>. It was necessary, perhaps, for Bazin to emphasize painting's imitational force in order to then make the case that photography would take painting's place.

For Bazin, the invention of photography was the single most important event in art history. As the art form which could now more accurately reproduce life "as it is" (supposedly without the mediation of an author, as the photograph is taken to be the product of a purely mechanical process<sup>38</sup>), photography *liberated Western painting* from its "realist obsession" and

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<sup>32</sup> Bazin, André, *What is Cinema? Volume 1*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 10-11.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*:11.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*: 10.

<sup>36</sup> "These images are far from the portrait that captures a unique and brilliant observation". Ortega, María Luisa, "Imágenes, conocimiento y educación. Reflexiones desde la historia de la representación visual en las ciencias", *Tarbijya: Revista de investigación e innovación educativa* 3 (2002): 18.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*. "...Not in their constitution of a faithful reproduction of the vision that offers the viewer or the reader a vicarious look at reality (an aspect on which much of the legitimacy of photography as an 'objective' device for representing reality will be based); but rather precisely because it goes beyond appearances, becoming an explanation of the world, at least of the phenomenon represented...".

<sup>38</sup> Finn, *Capturing the Criminal Image*, xi.

returned to it its aesthetic autonomy.<sup>39</sup> Painting could finally free itself of imitation and become an *object*,<sup>40</sup> again, returned to its “original place” in the plastic arts. In this analysis, the photographic –and by extension we can also assume the cinematographic– image– would occupy the place that painting had been attributed before: relegated to the place of imitation. As critic Peter Wollen observes, Bazin’s conclusions on photography are very close to Charles Sanders Peirce’s concept of the *index*, defined as “a sign by virtue of an existential bond between itself and its object.”<sup>41</sup> But while Peirce wished “to found a logic”, says Wollen, “Bazin wished to found an aesthetic.”<sup>42</sup> According to Wollen, it was not merely about imitation, but rather a double movement of impressions: “[F]irst, the interior spiritual suffering was stamped upon the exterior physiognomy; then the exterior physiognomy was stamped and printed upon the sensitive film.”<sup>43</sup> In any case, Bazin’s aesthetic for cinema was founded upon the indexical character of the photographic image<sup>44</sup>, in which the primacy of the object was asserted over the image<sup>45</sup>.

It is within the particular tradition of –or expectation for– the photograph as objective document, as index and as evidence, that mugshots have been reduced to their representational accuracy. This reduction of the image to its representational purpose is what prevents these images from, in de Sousa Dias’ words, “really being seen”, for their material form as images and as objects. In order to “unlearn” this image, the image must be seen –and *listened to*– first and foremost *as an image*, where what is seen is understood as an *inscription* and not merely as a description of the world. Here we are using a different concept of inscription than the one used in the nineteenth century. Proposed by the Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov in his Manifesto “Council of Three” from 1922:

La cámara no revelaba la verdad, pero Vertov creía firmemente en su poder de “inscribir” verdaderamente, principio en el que basaba su llamamiento a “tomar la vida por sorpresa”, el poder de crear una inscripción como la generada por el instrumento científico, un registro a ser interpretado que, gracias a los medios de rodaje al alcance de la cámara podía llegar donde el ojo humano no podía. Recordemos sus palabras en el manifiesto “Consejo de los Tres”: “de una vez por todas tengo que encontrar *un aparato que no describa sino que inscriba*”, para terminar presentando su cine-ojo “como lo que el ojo no ve, como el microscopio y el telescopio del tiempo<sup>46</sup>.”

Inscription, for Vertov, would allow the cinematographic camera to capture what the eye could not see.

To understand these images primarily as *inscriptions* (and not just as representations of a criminal or descriptions of a person) is to be able to *see*, *hear* and *feel* aspects in the image that were previously invisibilized by how the image was used originally (to identify, control,

<sup>39</sup> Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, 30.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid: “Toda imagen debe ser sentida como objeto y todo objeto como imagen”.

<sup>41</sup> Wollen, Peter, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema: New and Enlarged* (1969-1972), third ed. (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1972): 122.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid: 126.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid: 134.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid: 136.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid: 126.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in: Ortega, Maria Luisa, “De la certeza a la incertidumbre: *collage*, documental y discurso político en América Latina”, *Piedra, Papel y Tijera: El Collage en el Cine Documental*, ed. Sonia García López y Laura Gómez Vaquero (Madrid: Ocho y Medio, 2009), 110.

surveil, and capture individuals and groups of people who had been labeled “criminals”). As the uses for these images are always ready to be modified (by changing definitions of criminality, for example), these images are extremely malleable in what they can and cannot say and mean. To see the images as inscriptions opens possibilities for “listening to images” that allows the researcher to suddenly pay attention to aspects like framing, light, movement, and duration (even, or more so in a still image), aspects that are not as vulnerable to changing definitions of criminality but which are, undoubtedly, inherent to how the image itself was inscribed. As a result, we can break with the image's *iconic* value and *interrupt*<sup>47</sup> what the image has been made to represent/ “say” through its production, accumulation, distribution, and naturalization.

It is with this understanding of the mugshot primarily *as image* that Susana de Sousa Dias considers the mugshot to be “not just a portrait”. In an interview with me, when asked about the difference between a mugshot and a portrait, she replied:

For me it was a surprise because I always thought of mugshots as portraits. And now, for me, a mugshot is not just a portrait. It's an image with a time inside it and with a knowledge inside it. It's an image more than a portrait. I felt it but when I saw the images for the first time I didn't have the words to explain everything, I just felt something regarding those images. But now I know that they are images with a time within them and a knowledge within them<sup>48</sup>.

What is the intrinsic plastic value of the mugshot? And what relationship might there be between its materiality and its own conceptualization of time and knowledge? How might one film and edit these images of faces so that *the image itself*, and not only the person therein represented, can actually be seen?

In the case of the Portuguese dictatorship which lasted 48 years (Europe's longest authoritarian regime), the mugshots taken of the political prisoners are the only images of political prisoners available in the archive. The challenge faced by de Sousa Dias was to take these photographic still images –taken by the police for their own purposes of control and repression– and look at them again with the camera and with cinema, and see in them *other* possibilities for what Berger calls the “making of history”. She writes: “...These faces reveal a dimension of the actions of the political police that no written document could express. Revealing them thus implies a redemption, by exposing something which the authoritarian regime wished to hide.”<sup>49</sup> This process of *exposure* works through cinema and through the *opening up* of the face-image in the archive.

An artist who has recycled mugshots famously into his work is Andy Warhol, in his mural-sized photograph series titled *13 Most Wanted Men* made to adorn the outside of the Panoramic Cinema Theater, as a centerpiece of the New York State Pavilion at the 1964 New

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<sup>47</sup> In the sense proposed by Walter Benjamin and picked up by William C. Wees in *Recycled Images*: “Interruption is one of the fundamental methods of all form-giving. It reaches far beyond the domain of art. It is, to mention just one of its aspects, the origin of the quotation. Quoting a text implies interrupting its context.” William Wees applies this concept to his analysis of the found footage films of Abigail Child, Keith Sanborn, and Leslie Thornton, since they recycle elements “extracted from their original contexts, diverted (or ‘détourned,’ in the terminology of the Situationists) from their original, intended uses, and thereby made to yield previously unrecognized significance”, Wees, William C., *Recycled Images*, 33.

<sup>48</sup> De Sousa Dias, Susana. Personal Interview. May 10th, 2017.

<sup>49</sup> De Sousa Dias, Susana, “(In)visible Evidence: The Representability of Torture”, 493.

York World's Fair (Figure 3.4 and 3.6). This series consists of 13 silkscreen on canvas enlargements of mugshots from a NYPD booklet featuring the 13 most wanted criminals of 1962. Some images are both frontal and profile shots, and others all single shots. All are photographs of men. *13 Most Wanted Men* was installed on April 15, 1964, but it was painted over by Fair officials a few days later, the exact reason for this remains unknown<sup>50</sup> (Figure 3.5). Some of these images were reproduced by Warhol again in the summer of that same year and exhibited at the Sonnabend Gallery in Paris in 1967.



Figures 3.3. and 3.4. Left: Andy Warhol's mural *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* at the New York State Pavilion, New York World's Fair, 1964; Right: Aluminum paint covering the mural. Photo: Rainer Crone Archive.

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<sup>50</sup> “Just a few days before the World's Fair's official opening in April 1964, Warhol's large-scale mural was dramatically painted over, although the exact reasons why have proved difficult to pin down. Initially it was thought that Warhol himself had instigated this process, saying that he wasn't happy with the final result. Press reports at the time stated that, ‘Mr. Warhol claims that the work was not properly installed and felt that it did not do justice to what he had in mind. Mr. Johnson [Philip Johnson, the architect] said... that he was in agreement with the artist and ordered the mural removed from the building.’ It later emerged that New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller had commented on the large number of subjects who could be said to be of Italian-American heritage, and was worried that this would upset an important and influential political lobby”, from: Christie's, May 16, 2018. <https://www.christies.com/features/Warhols-Most-Wanted-9057-3.aspx>

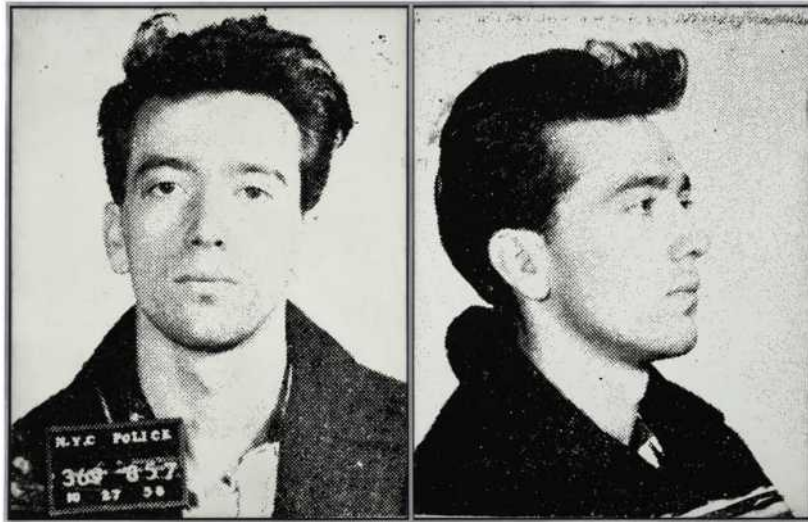


Figure 3.5. *Most Wanted Men No. 11, John Joseph H., Jr* (Andy Warhol, 1964)

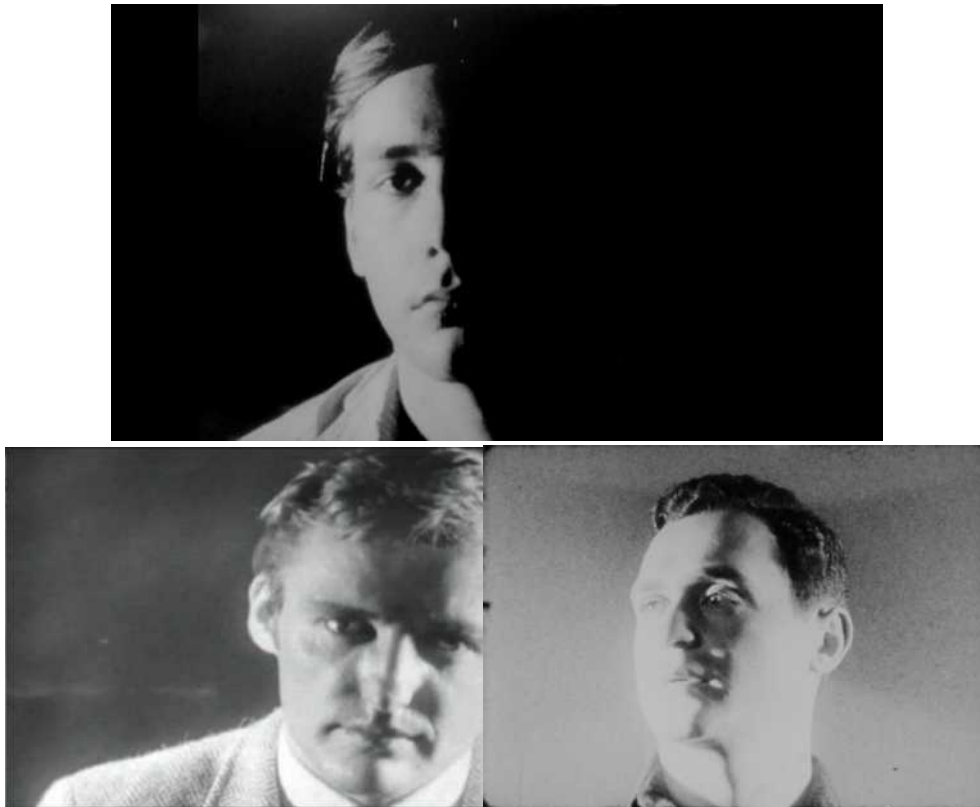


Figure 3.6 Different frames from *Thirteen Most Beautiful Boys* (1964)

Just a few months after completing *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* or quite possibly overlapping in production, Warhol made a sub-series of films to his series titled *Screen Tests*, called *Thirteen Most Beautiful Boys* (1964) (Figure 3.7). In fact, the very first *Screen Tests* were shot for this series, inspired by the same 1962 New York City Police Department pamphlet source of the photographic images used in the 1964 mural. As with the other *Screen Tests*, of which there are 472 in total, these are portraits of both well-known and anonymous beautiful people



looking straight into the camera as the face of the subject is confronted with the film apparatus. Shot in black and white with a static 16mm Bolex movie camera, subjects are directed to sit in front of the camera and not blink for the duration of the entire roll of film (about three minutes). These films were then projected in slow-motion. A more well-known series was *Thirteen Most Beautiful Women*, but it was later abandoned. In *Thirteen Most Beautiful Boys* the mugshot and the actor's *headshot* find a common ground, highlighting the overlapping qualities of criminality and celebrity.

In both works, Warhol reworks on the criminal mugshot for its particular plastic qualities (enlarging the grain, etc., in the screenprints based on the photograph series, and the duration and gaze in the cinematographic series), as well as the text "Most Beautiful" and "Most Wanted", calling attention to the (homo)sexuality and desire in the wording behind "Most Wanted" Ads. However, while his work focuses on the glamour and beauty of the men photographed<sup>51</sup> (we will explore *glamour* further in the following Chapter), in a language very much based in publicity, advertisement and in the commodification of the subject/object, de Sousa Dias' focus is elsewhere. She too recovers the plasticity and materiality of the image, but instead of working on the surface of the mugshot, she explores cinematographic ways of getting past the surface and *opening up* the image, through experimentations with editing, duration and sound. In addition, while Warhol's images exclude all contextual information about the men in the mugshots (except for their names), de Sousa Dias reworks this information into her films. Her images are liberated from their original uses, but not from their historical contexts.

In her films, the "opening up" of these images occurs through a process of *inscription*, or *re-inscription*, into the cinematic form and, more specifically, into digital cinema<sup>52</sup>. The mugshots, re-photographed and edited by de Sousa Dias, are no longer taken as accurate portraits or stand-ins for the people photographed, nor as mere images of identification and presence, as they were for the Portuguese control system. These images are treated as *images* and as *objects*, with intrinsic plastic value, which contain information about their own materiality and conditions in which they were taken (and not only about the person in the photo). By "exposing" *this* information, by opening up the image to include the possibility of seeing it "how it is"<sup>53</sup>, de Sousa Dias' method does for the mugshot what photography once had done for the Western painting—"simultaneously a liberation and a fulfillment"<sup>54</sup>—or what, according to Fernand Léger, Abel Gance's *La Roue* (*The Wheel*, 1923) accomplished for cinema<sup>55</sup>: her films liberate the mugshot from its expected representational accuracy, returning it to its plastic value: as image and, ultimately, as object. How this occurs and the implications of this process for the re-conceptualization of the face-image are the main concerns of this chapter.

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<sup>51</sup> For example, in regard to No. 11: "...with his good looks and chiseled features, Henehan wouldn't have looked out of place in one of the era's teen heart-throb magazines. (...) This outward appearance, however, hides a darker, violent character...", *Christie's*, May 16, 2018.

<sup>52</sup> We will continue to explore digital re-inscription in Chapter 6, in the case of *Le livre d'image* (Jean-Luc Godard, 2018).

<sup>53</sup> Sontag, Susan, *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966).

<sup>54</sup> Bazin, *What is Cinema?* 18.

<sup>55</sup> Léger, Fernand, "A Critical Essay on the Plastic Quality of Abel Gance's Film *The Wheel*", in *Functions of Painting* (New York: Viking Press, 1973).

## Re-framing the Face-Image

*Not only is the individual being photographed a forced subject, obliged to corporal constraints, but the photographer too has to comply with conditions while composing the portrait which entail a set of rigid precepts (pose, lighting, distance, background, etc.). As a matter of fact, these are always “forced portraits.”*<sup>56</sup>

As essentially “ruled” images, reframing becomes especially important as far as the filming of mugshots or anthropometric photos is concerned. How to film a mugshot? What part of the original image will be included, what will be left off-screen? How to transpose these photographic images to the cinematic screen? And furthermore, how to do so without reproducing the stigmatization of criminality intended by these images which were originally used to arrest, control, and attempt to destroy the people photographed? What, if anything, does the framing have to do with this stigmatization?

The first film in the trilogy, *Natureza Morta* (2005), begins with six different mugshots, one after another, with seconds of blackness between each image. To be more precise, these images are close-ups taken from the mugshot photographs, as we do not see the entire mugshots in the frame, only the frontal image. As in *strata*, in these films the original photographs are *turned into close-ups*. As we “look” at the images and the people in them, we are reminded that, as scholar Noa Steimatsky writes, “the face sustains the gaze; it compels our attention and animates our responsiveness, our recognition”<sup>57</sup>. If there is a movement in the progression of these still images, it is a narrative one. When we see the images one after the other (below) we can see that the first woman appears to be coming out of the image (Figure 3.7), since part of her body is cut out of the photographic frame. As the images continue, the person is centered and we are compelled by the gaze, “arrested” in our place by the returned gaze of the photographed subject who seems to be looking out “at us” (Figures 3.8, 3.9, 3.10). In the final two photographs, the gaze shifts, as the two men “disobey” the rules of the mugshot (and the instructions of the person behind the camera) and disrupt the camera’s ability to capture their eyes, either by looking downward (Figure 3.11) or by blinking (Figure 3.12). Even though these face-images are of different individuals, their internal movement (which might be described as from appearance to refusal) makes them part of a collective expression.

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<sup>56</sup> Quote from Pheline, 1985, in: de Sousa Dias, Susana, “(In)visible Evidence: The Representability of Torture”, 492.

<sup>57</sup> Steimatsky, Noa, *The Face on Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 6.



Figure 3.7.



Figure 3.8.



Figure 3.9.



Figure 3.10.



Figure 3.11.



Figure 3.12.

Stills from *Natureza Morta* (Susana de Sousa Dias, 2005)

These images are temporarily freed of their original context; they are individualized, separated, cut-out from the original images. They have been turned into *close-ups*. However, the images tell us that they are not close-ups: as “arrested images” they are much more. As the film continues, the stories behind these images begin to unfold. But this process of unfolding takes time. The mugshots are edited together with moving archival images, for a contrapuntal effect between stillness and movement.

Around mid-way through the film, we see the first complete –or fairly complete– mugshot, including both the frontal and profile views and the number of the photograph written on the side (Figure 3.13). These images make the mugshot –and police control apparatus– visible within the cinematographic image.



Figure 3.13. *Natureza Morta* (Susana de Sousa Dias, 2005)

A surprising and slow zoom-out begins shortly after, revealing the photographs in context. Now the spectator understands that these are not individual “portraits” but rather several, multiple photographs taken of many different people which share a time, place, and history. The original format of these images has negated that acknowledgement. As Camppt remarks, “What you don’t see in the individual identification photograph is the history of a community. That comes through when the photographs are brought together as a serial archive, even in the absence of their faces”<sup>58</sup>. For a moment, let us recall the zoom-in described in our analysis of *Settela: Face of the Past* in Chapter 1. In this film, director Cherry Duyns zooms into the screen to get a closer look of Settela’s face. In *Natureza Morta*, however, the opposite movement occurs. The zoom-out achieves not only a sense of contextualization in terms of numbers, but also a visualization of the community to which this anonymous woman belongs (Figure 3.14). In this sense, the scene is comparable to the second time we see Settela in *Aufschub*, when her face-image is followed by the text “245 Roma and Sinti deported on this train”. Farocki’s text contextualizes Settela within a community; de Sousa Dias does the same, but without needing to resort to words.



Figure 3.14. *Natureza Morta* (Susana de Sousa Dias, 2005)

<sup>58</sup> Wallis, Brian, “The Sound of Defiance: Interview with Tina Camppt”, *aperture* (October 25, 2017).

The size of the PIDE archive is overwhelming. The vast quantity of photographs already says so much; it tells of a system of police repression which targeted both men and women, so many women, over a very long period of time. The photographic format of the archive of police mugshots reappropriated by de Sousa Dias (formally very different from the Westerbork archive, for example, as photographs do not have duration in the same way that moving images do) makes it difficult to grasp the size of the archive and the duration of the dictatorship. The patient, constant and intentioned zoom-out in *Natureza Morta* allows the spectator to see that each individual photographed is part of a much larger community.

In 2010, five years after *Natureza Morta–Visages d’une Dictature*, de Sousa Dias made an installation at the Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporaneo do Chiado in Portugal titled *Natureza Morta/Stilleben* (from December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2010 to January 16, 2011).<sup>59</sup> The title of the installation evokes both the French/Spanish/Portuguese denomination of “Naturaleza Muerta” and the German/Dutch/English denomination of “Stillleben”, which means immobile life or existence, name given to the distinct genre and professional specialization in Western painting which began in the 16th century in the Netherlands (from the Dutch *stilleven*). As in the film, this work explores the relationship and contrast between cinematographic movement and photographic stillness, now from the perspective of a gallery installation space. Using three screens (instead of the singular screen that is traditional to cinema), de Sousa Dias “opens up” the mugshot images<sup>60</sup>, letting them unfold horizontally in the triptych conformed by the three projected images (Figure 3.15)<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> According to Helena Barranha in her curatorial note on the website of the Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporaneo do Chiado, “Natureza Morta thereby proposes a change of scale and perspective which diverts the spectator from the staging of a collective memory in order to focus on the intimate territory of individuality, distracting attention from the theatrical gestures of power in order to take an attentive and prolonged look at the anonymous gestures of daily survival. Suspended in the slowness of the images and the musical interpolations, between terror and empathy, the spectator witnesses a ghostly parade of the living-dead and the dead-living across an expectant nation, conditioned by repression and paralyzed by fear from which not even the revolution, at the end of the film, appears to rescue them completely. <http://www.museuartecontemporanea.gov.pt/en/programacao/952>

<sup>60</sup> “In 2010 I made an installation titled [Natureza Morta/Stilleben](#) [from December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2010 to January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011 at the Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporanea do Chiado, Portugal]. Here I worked with three screens so that I could *open up* the images.” From: de Sousa Dias, Susana. Personal Interview. May 10th, 2017.

<sup>61</sup> In the installation, it is possible to see the full mug-shot image, including right profile, frontal, and left profile, all at the *same time*. We can also see the spaces between the images and the number of the series of photographs (#14). Our eye can pass from one image to the next and back, at the speed and in the order that we choose, more or less unrestricted. In “Documental expandido”, Susana de Sousa Dias and Antonio de Sousa Dias describe that they intended to give the visitor of the installation an experience similar to that of a film spectator: “Del mismo modo, cada uno de los módulos de la instalación fue trabajado pensando su microestructura en una perspectiva de autonomía condicionada. El dispositivo de exposición en su concepción genérica, no obstante, contempló un modo de visión asentada en una única perspectiva, a través del posicionamiento de bancos a distancia en lugares ideales de visionado de un film por un espectador de cine y jugando con las proporciones globales de las pantallas en su totalidad. La dimensión de cada una de las pantallas fue pensada en su interacción directa con el espectador, en el contexto de un espacio libre de los condicionamientos de la sala de cine, y libre de circular por él y de interactuar de maneras diferentes con la obra. Es por esta razón que, por ejemplo, un plano medio —el plano que se define por la dimensión de un cuerpo humano— surge, en la instalación, en una dimensión lo más próxima posible a la dimensión real de un cuerpo humano, siendo su proyección hecha a escala de casi 1:1”, De Sousa Dias, Susana and Antonio de Sousa Dias, “Documental expandido”, 6.



Figure 3.15. *Natureza Morta/Stilleben* (Installation, 2011)

We understand the Trilogy as another kind of triptych, in cinematic form, of the different possibilities for showing these images on screen and with the aid of cinematographic language. As we observe images from each of these films, one next to the other, we can see how the images are filmed and shown differently each time. If we observe the following two stills from *Natureza Morta* and *48* (Figure 3.16), for example, images taken of the same mugshot but shot with two different cameras and lenses, we can see that in the second image the edges of the mugshot are much more visible, as are the edges of the other anthropometric view beside it.



Figure 3.16. Left: *Natureza morta* (Susana de Sousa Dias, 2005); Right: *48* (Susana de Sousa Dias, 2010)

In *Natureza morta* the mugshot is often shown as a *close-up*; in *48* the film we see the image first as a mugshot and then as a close-up. Similarly, in *Luz Obscura* –which has much fewer mugshots than the previous two films–, the mugshots are always shown first more complete, and only then the camera cuts in for a close-up (in a jump-cut, we will come back to this). This allows the viewer to never stray too far from the original context of the images presented and from the history to which they belong.

While in the gallery space the triptych quality of the installation allows for an open reading of the images, where the spectator can more or less decide where to look and in what order, the one-screen and one-image-at-a-time quality of cinema makes for a very different experience of looking at these images. While this Chapter does not concern itself with the particularities of this difference<sup>62</sup>, we mention the installation in order to highlight the work's

<sup>62</sup> For a text that does, see: De Sousa Dias, Susana and Antonio de Sousa Dias, “Documental expandido”, 2020.

transdisciplinary nature between photography, visual arts, and cinema, as well as to draw attention to the filmmaker's insistence with the materials and her experimentation with them in relation to space, duration, and the creation of a particular relationship between the films and the spectator. Rephotography, editing, duration, and sound, are all aspects that the cinematic apparatus will introduce to these photographic images to alter our experience of looking at and listening to them.

### **Re-photographing, Editing, and Micro-movements**

One of the initial ways in which de Sousa Dias "opens up" the mugshot is through re-photography and this is where the process of the re-inscription of the anthropometric images begins. These "two-dimensional" photographic images taken from the PIDE archive are re-inscribed into the cinematographic form, via the moving camera, just as Jeannette Muñoz did with the late 19<sup>th</sup> century photographs taken of the Kawéskar and reappropriated in *strata of natural history*. However, a key difference is that while in Muñoz's film the re-inscription occurs through the analog process of double exposure (which we have argued re-inscribes the double death of the Kawéskar), in de Sousa Dias' work the re-inscription occurs in digital cinema. In the trilogy, the photographs are re-photographed in three different ways. Each film is photographed by a different photographer, using different cameras and lenses, and experimenting with new approaches to the re-photographing of the same anthropometric photographed images. As the filmmaker explains in an interview with the author,

I shot the same mugshots with three different cameramen and each time it was completely different. ... For *Still Life* I shot with a cameraman that had to put his camera very far away from the pictures, many meters away, so that he could do a zoom-in and just focus the images. And this gives a particular character to the images. Then with the second one, with *48*, [the camera] was at a kind of middle distance, it was closer to the images. And then with the last one, in *Obscure Light*, he [the cameraman] said to me, they are such tiny pictures, we have to get close to them. He used a light table and he put the images there and we were very close to the pictures and with some of the special lenses that he bought in Russia we worked in a very different way. It was very interesting for me to shoot the same images in three different ways<sup>63</sup>.

Just as the narrative approach to the Trilogy moves from macro to micro—from the dictatorship in general in *Natureza Morta* to its impact on a particular family in *Luz Obscura*—the photography also moves from macro (distance) to micro (close-up) in terms of distance in relationship to the filmed object (the mugshots). In the following stills (Figure 3.17), we can see the difference from one film to the next and perceive the differences not only in distance and proximity to the images, but also in color and texture of the image.

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<sup>63</sup> De Sousa Dias, Susana. Personal Interview. May 10th, 2017.



*Natureza morta* (Susana de Sousa Dias, 2005)



*48* (Susana de Sousa Dias, 2010)



*Luz Obscura* (Susana de Sousa Dias, 2016)

Figure 3.17.<sup>64</sup>

Seen this way, one image next to another, we can begin to perceive small but important differences between the re-photographing of the mugshots across the three films. The color and the texture of the images vary, it is true; but what is more startling, is how in each image *we get closer to the photographs, closer to both the faces and the images themselves*. In the third film, we can detect greater detail in the image which permits us to see the face with more clarity, as well as a clearer image of the photo itself. The greater detail of the face allows the gaze to penetrate more deeply in the spectator; the eyes are enlarged by this proximity, and in return, the image is able to look more closely at the spectator.

The depth of field of the images is also transformed through re-photography. This is important for the filmmaker, considering that the original anthropometric photographs lack depth. As de Sousa Dias explains,

Each shot is a two-dimensional surface with a figure and a background. It is not a shot that has any depth itself: there is either a white background or a black background, both two-dimensional; and in the base there are photographic images, that is, still images, with no movement. Moreover, virtually the entire film has a very limited scale around close-ups<sup>65</sup>.

<sup>64</sup> These images are selected using the following criteria: they are closest close-ups that we found in each film.

<sup>65</sup> De Sousa Dias, Susana, "(In)visible Evidence: The Representability of Torture", 496.



We have already discussed the “limited scale”, now what we want to focus on here is the lack of movement of the original image. Through the addition of movement both in the photography and in the editing (between the images and between the images and the black screen), the films create a depth of field that the original photographs lack.

How is movement added to these images? One way is through the use of the camera itself, by way of “micro-movements” of the apparatus during the filming of the images (Figure 3.18). These movements are not necessarily “visible to the eye” but are felt by the spectator in the particularly intense viewing process.



Figure 3.18. *48* (Susana de Sousa Dias, 2010): *Slow micro-movements into the mugshot, opening it up.*

As the camera moves both inward and across the images ever so slightly, the images begin to “open up” before the spectator’s eyes. This “opening up” occurs within the image itself—as the camera goes into the prisoner’s faces—but also works across the image, permitting the spectator to see other anthropometric views of the face (Figure 3.19).



Figure 3.19. *Luz Obscura* (Susana de Sousa Dias, 2016): *micro-movements across the image to reveal other anthropometric views of the face.*

Something similar occurs in *Vidrios partidos. Testes para um filme em Portugal* (*Broken Glass. Tests for a Film in Portugal*, Victor Erice, 2012) filmed at the textile factory of Rio Vizela in the Vale do Ave region in Portugal. Once the second largest textile factory of Europe in the 20th Century, it finally closed in 2002. Erice returns to the ruins of the factory and films with

the children and relatives of the factory workers. He focuses his gaze on one photograph that remains in the former factory canteen. Erice films the photograph in different ways: first silently in wide shots with fade-cuts into closer shots, then as the backdrop to the (scripted) testimonies of the people who passed through the factory, and finally, at the end of the film, accompanied by the sound of a single accordion, shot with slow pans across the image, and then direct cuts into closer, tighter shots, ending with “close-ups” of individual faces. As in de Sousa Dias’ work, here we see an insistence on exploring different ways of filming a photographic image in order to be able to “open” the image and “enter” into it.



Figure 3.20. *Vidrios partidos. Testes para um filme em Portugal* (Victor Erice, 2012)

De Sousa Dias also adds movement to the images in the editing, through the employment of jump-cuts between different scales of the mugshot image (Figure 3.21), from the equivalent of a mid-shot to a close-up. The cut provides an illusion of movement inward, but it is more abrupt than if this movement occurred gradually, as it does throughout *Natureza Morta* and parts of *48*. The jump-cut in *Luz Obscura* draws attention to the film form and to the fact that these are first and foremost images. As the image jump-cuts into a tighter scale the spectator becomes aware that there is off-screen space and that at any moment we are seeing an image that is not entirely complete. As the image calls attention to what is outside the frame, our participation and attention as spectators is activated.

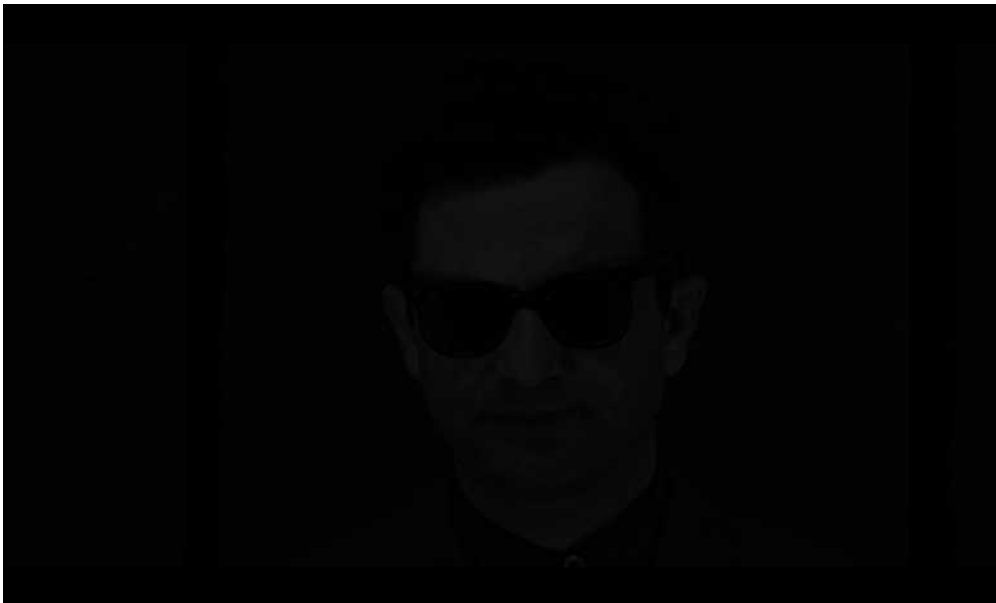


Figure 3.21. *Luz Obscura* (Susana de Sousa Dias, 2016): Movement through a jump-cut into the face.

Another way of adding movement in the editing is through the transitions between the images. In all three films, mugshot images seem to “appear” and “disappear” before the spectator through a very carefully orchestrated and highly effective method of *fade-ins* and *fade-outs* (Figure 3.22). Although the method is used in the three films, it has particular force in *48* and *Luz Obscura* when the fading in and out becomes a visual way of representing the disappearance –and temporal re-appearance– of the political prisoners in the lives of their loved ones and in many cases, in their death.



Faces appearing out of whiteness in *Natureza morta* (Susana de Sousa Dias, 2005)



Faces disappearing into blackness in *Luz Obscura* (Susana de Sousa Dias, 2016)

Figure 3.22.

### **Adding Time to the Face-Image**

Susana de Sousa Dias “opens the face” with duration. From the first film to the second, there is a change of duration in the face-image. In *Natureza Morta*, the mugshots are shown for intervals of about ten seconds, usually following images of the propaganda archive films. The contrast between the *slow motion* of these archival moving images and the stillness of the

photographic images produces a contrapuntal effect on the spectator<sup>66</sup>. In *48*, on the other hand, which is composed only of mugshot images (and no other archival footage), the mugshots are on-screen for about two full minutes each. There is no counter-image to these faces (aside from the spectator's own face, staring back). The duration of these images is expanded to its limit-point.

Time is also visualized by way of composites made of two or three photographs taken of the political prisoners on different occasions, many years apart (Figure 3.23). These photographs tell of the time spent in the prison –a *prisoner's time*<sup>67</sup>– and how this time is revealed on the face. This is part of de Sousa Dias' on-going cinematographic effort to make visible through cinema what is invisible to the human eye alone. One of these aspects is time; let us recall for a moment the Portuguese dictatorship's duration of 48 years (and *48* is the title of the second film in the series). How to show 48 years in an image? In the following section, we will dive deeper into how time is treated in the three films.



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<sup>66</sup> “O *slow motion* torna caricatas essas expressões de apoio. Sobre as imagens de êxtase coletivo desmesurado são montadas outras fotografias frontais dos presos políticos. Assim, os ícones da repressão que nos olham diretamente nos olhos servem novamente como contrapontos a ficção já desconstruída da uma população feliz, em sintonia com a liderança política.” Overhoff Ferreira, Carolin, *O Cinema Português: aproximações a sua história e indisciplinaridade* (São Paulo: Alameda, 2014), 209.

<sup>67</sup> Author Estela Vieira reflects on the prisoner's preoccupation with time in the voice testimonies: “The prisoners are insistently preoccupied with numbers and references to time; they mention dates, years, months, days, weeks, and seasons when talking about the length of time they were imprisoned, or subjected to sleep deprivation, or spent without seeing a family member. Arrested multiple times some of the prisoners rely on these numbers to give sense to their experiences”. Vieira, Estela, “Image, historical memory, politics: Margarida Cardoso's *Kuxa Kanema* and Susana de Sousa Dias's *48*”, *Women's Cinema in Contemporary Portugal*, ed. Mariana Liz and Hilary Owen (Bloomsbury Academic: New York, 2020), 147.



Figure 3.23. Above: *Natureza morta* (Susana de Sousa Dias, 2005);  
Below: *Luz Obscura* (Susana de Sousa Dias, 2016).

### Co-Presence of Temporalities

One of the challenges through the making of the Trilogy, and one of the reasons for the filmmaker's insistence on the images and on using them in different ways across three different feature-length films, has to do with time and with the obstacle of how the temporality of these images would be perceived or felt by the spectator watching the film.

I wanted to confront the viewer with an actual political prisoner, not with a former political prisoner. And so the political prisoner is the mugshot, it's not the people talking today. If I were to show the people talking today, I would have ex-political prisoners talking to the viewer and suddenly the mugshots would be pushed through the past, like a kind of illustration. Suddenly these will be young people again. And for me this would create a fracture between two times, present and past. And I was not interested in that. I was interested in working in this co-presence of different temporalities, different times. This was in *48*.

De Sousa Dias' concern with the temporal fracture that film creates and how to maintain a co-presence of different temporalities, is similar to Roland Barthes' unease with the images of D.C. Lewis Payne in 1865, taken right before his death (Figure 3.24), and which compelled him to write in his wonderful essay on photography, *Camera Lucida*, in reference to Payne: "He is dead and he is going to die". Barthes continues:

I now know that there exists another *punctum* (another "stigmatum") than the "detail." This new *punctum*, which is no longer of form but of intensity, is Time, the lacerating emphasis of the *noeme* ("that-has-been"), its pure representation.

The photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the *studium*. But the *punctum* is: *he is going to die*. I read at the same time: *this will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose, the photograph tells me death in the future. What *pricks* me is the discovery of this equivalence.

In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder, like Winnicott's psychotic patient, over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe. This *punctum*, more or less blurred beneath the abundance and the disparity of contemporary photographs, is vividly legible in historical photographs:

there is always a defeat of Time in them: that is dead and that is going to die. These two little girls looking at a primitive airplane above their village (they are dressed like my mother as a child, they are playing with hoops) -how alive they are! They have their whole lives before them; but also they are dead (today), they are then already dead (yesterday). At the limit, there is no need to represent a body in order for me to experience this vertigo of time defeated<sup>68</sup>.



Figure 3.24. Three photographs of Lewis Payne by Alexander Gardner. April 26, 1865.

The equivalence between Barthes' "this will be" and "this has been" is similar to de Sousa Dias' preoccupation in *48* with wanting to show an *actual* political prisoner and not a *former* political prisoner. Although the photograph was taken many years ago, for the filmmaker it is important that the spectator not feel that these images are of the past. She wants the mugshots "to push through the past" into the present. How to make images push through the past? For Barthes, the images of Payne are incredible not because Payne was killed shortly after, but because they represent the "vertigo of time defeated" for they reveal to him something that has not occurred yet (when the photo is taken) but that suddenly seems inevitable, causing him to exclaim that "every photograph is a catastrophe".

What seems to be at the core of this "catastrophe" is that the image is a portrait and that the image is still. The images that he gives as examples – a photograph of his mother, a photograph of two little girls looking at an airplane– have this in common. They are still, unmoving photographs of people he loves or considers beautiful. What hides behind the portrait, for Barthes, is the inevitability of death. But death is another way of speaking about time, about the point in which one thing ends and another begins. Let us recall our discussion on "double death" in the previous Chapter, and our argument that *strata of natural history* makes co-existence between the living and the dead possible, equally among human beings, plant, and animal life, if only as a powerful antidote to the "vanishing native" narrative which has discursively situated indigenous communities in the past and denied them of their co-evalness (as well as to what Fatimah Tobing Rony refers to as their ability "to resist and survive European encroachment and dispossession"<sup>69</sup>). The reappropriation of images, especially images that are still and silent, into cinema is a way to "speak" about these images without

<sup>68</sup> Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida: Reflection on Photography* (Vintage Classics, 1993), 39.

<sup>69</sup> Rony, Fatimah Tobing, *The Third Eye* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 91.

resorting only to words which, as we know from Barthes, are not always adequate<sup>70</sup>. Where Western grammar falls short, perhaps the cinematographic reappropriation of the face-image (including montage and sound) can succeed<sup>71</sup>.

For Barthes, the punctum that he discovers looking at the Payne photographs is that of Time. We can see clearly now that this is the same punctum with which Susana de Sousa Dias' films experiment. How to show time? This might be the question these films ask. But I believe that they go further: they ask what time these mugshots contain and what is the time of the PIDE archive? And how can these images, these same images from the archive, be re-thought and re-photographed and re-edited in order to break or challenge or resist *this* concept of time? As Berger attests, "All photographs are possible contributions to history, and any photograph, under certain circumstances, can be used to break the monopoly which history today has over time"<sup>72</sup>. The only images of political prisoners in the PIDE archive are their mugshots and these are the only images that the archive contains which show *what was done to the prisoners photographed*. These mugshots become the photographs that Susana de Sousa Dias will use to break the monopoly which history has over time: she does this through careful attention to the punctum which is located in the delicate line of shifting temporalities between the past and the present<sup>73</sup>.

In *Natureza Morta*, the co-presence achieved in the film is between the political prisoners (as individuals, as a group) and society (as a collective, as a whole). The images which correspond to the political prisoners are the mugshots and the images which correspond to society are the propaganda archives. De Sousa Dias finds ways to single out faces from the crowd, creating close-ups where there originally weren't any. She edits these faces which are placed in slow-motion against the still anthropometric images to create a contrast, which is temporal but is also historical, of different realities of the Portuguese dictatorship. In *48*, the co-presence is reduced: it is not about the individual in relation to the society, it is now about only these individuals and how they were treated in the prison space. The co-presence which is created is between the image and the sound, between the political prisoner *then* and his/her voice *now*. As de Sousa Dias describes:

The fact that the faces of the prisoners today are not shown, as has been mentioned before, follows a political imperative. However, this choice was only truly concretized at the time when I realized that *there was no need to show their faces in the present, since, just by resorting to sound, the viewer can have a more physical and sensorial perception of the witness*. This "being" with the persons in present times (in their corporal completeness and not just as people transmitting a discourse) brings us closer to their "being" in the diverse situations described, including experiences in the torture room<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> "Like Proust, Barthes's effort to find the linguistic form capable of recapturing a present in the past, a form that it turns out spoken language does not offer". Bannfield, Ann, "L'Imparfait de l'objectif/The Imperfect of the Object Glass", *Camera Obscura*, 24 (September 1990): 75.

<sup>71</sup> We will come back to this discussion on the archive's grammar in Chapter 7, in the context of Onyeka Igwe's work. Igwe argues that -exist outside language- and so the archive is an impossible archive which requires fiction and a "reading for performance".

<sup>72</sup> Berger, *Uses of Photography*, 81.

<sup>73</sup> One of the most important ways in which this occurs is through her use of sound, which in itself deserves many studies and analysis.

<sup>74</sup> De Sousa Dias, "(In)visible Evidence: The Representability of Torture", 501. Italics added.



Finally, in *Luz Obscura*, there is a further reduction: after the prison space of *48*, de Sousa Dias moves closer in, now to the family sphere. The co-presence here is between the political prisoners *then* and the voices, memories *and faces* of the children of the prisoners *today*. Here the approach taken is not through composites, which have the distinct function of visibilizing how the faces have changed over time: instead, the function is the opposite, to show how similar the faces of the children are to the faces of their parents and grandparents in the mugshots.

In *Obscure Light* the problem was another one. It was: how can I show archive footage, how can I show mugshots and how can I show the people without creating this fracture between past and present? Because I am not interested when people talk that these are *relatos* – they are *pasado*. But I mean *lo más importante es que sean los relatos, es la memoria que funciona. No buscar cualquier cosa del pasado; estoy más interesada en ver cómo el pasado arriba al presente*. For me it was very important for me to try not to create these kinds of fractures. It will be easier to keep out the people that are talking today. But for me it was not fair and it was not the point of the film because they are sons and daughters and grandsons and granddaughters of all these people that are already dead. Also they are kind of heirs of all these people, in their physiognomies. So for me it was very important to make these links between the faces of the people that are already dead and were imprisoned, with them today. So there is a kind of transmission through the physiognomy, through the faces. And for me this was very important to bring to the film. That's why for me it was evident that they had to appear. So in this sense it's different from *48*<sup>75</sup>.

Avoiding “fractures” between past and present, in *Luz Obscura* Susana de Sousa Dias finds transmission in the physiognomy and her last film emphasizes this relation. We will come back to how this is achieved through formal experimentation in the following section in order to understand how her films attempt to breach the gap of non-inscription which others have witnessed in post-dictatorship Portugal.

### **Inscription or Non-Inscription**

For Portuguese philosopher and essayist José Gil, the 48 years of Portuguese dictatorship have not been inscribed in the everyday lives of the Portuguese in the sense that the Portuguese do not feel responsible for what took place during the dictatorship<sup>76</sup>. Despite the Carnation Revolution that took place in 1974 and brought to an end the 48-year dictatorship, there were no prosecutions of the PIDE's political police officers. For this reason, Gil writes, “Em Portugal nada acontece, quer dizer, nada se inscreve –na história ou na existência individual, na vida social ou no plano artístico”<sup>77</sup>. Authors Susana Viegas (2014) and Carolin Overhoff (2014) have both written about Susana de Sousa Dias' work in relation to Gil's concept of *non-inscription* and, in different ways, argue that her films demonstrate the opposite, that the dictatorship *has* been inscribed in the faces of the political prisoners. They see Susana de Sousa Dias's films as *proof* of that. For Viegas, *48* is a film that “reanimates” the dead past; in doing so, it challenges Bazin's thesis that the photograph is something that has been and that is no more. She writes, “In reanimating the dead past we are reinterpreting the present with aesthetic, political, and historical consequences: in *48*'s case, [...] we bring around the past

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<sup>75</sup> De Sousa Dias, Susana. Personal Interview. May 10th, 2017.

<sup>76</sup> Gil, José, *Portugal Hoje. O Medo de Existir* (Lisboa, Relógio d'Água, 2004), 11.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid: 15. “In Portugal nothing happens, which is to say, nothing is inscribed -neither history nor individual existence, not in social life nor in the artistic realm”.

reinterpreting our present –it is a *possible act of inscription*.<sup>78</sup> Susana de Sousa Dias’ work becomes a way for contemporary Portuguese authors to think again about how inscription of the decades of dictatorship might take place in cinema today.

For Overhoff, *Natureza Morta* and *48 (Luz Obscura* had still not been made when she wrote her article) are films made within the tradition of Portuguese filmmakers including Fernando Lopes, Paulo Rocha, and Alberto Seixas Santos, working between 1968 and the early 70s, and whose work sought to articulate ethics and aesthetics in films about the human condition. While she situates her work within this tradition, she also argues that these films open new ground for Portuguese cinema since they are films made with archival materials and rooted in a *found footage* practice<sup>79</sup>. Overhoff finds inscription particularly in the mugshot images in which “as faces em *close-up* olham-nos frontalmente, estabelecendo um contato direto através do olhar”<sup>80</sup>. These gazes, she writes, “indicam uma história alternativa, que representaria a inscrição, mas foi reprimida e permanece pouco conhecida ou vista”<sup>81</sup>. These films help to circulate these gazes to a more general audience, through which this history (and archive) also begins to circulate more widely.

In reference to Levinas’s well-known theory of the “face-to-face encounter”<sup>82</sup>, in which he argues that in the other’s face –and in their voice– the looker (and listener) can establish an ethical sense of responsibility towards the other and by extension towards themselves, Overhoff argues that inscription also works in *48* on the viewer who returns-gaze to these images through a process of identification.

Quando a jovem mulher nos olha de forma frontal, a contextualização e o sofrimento em sua voz exigem que nós nos posicionemos perante o seu olhar e perante a sua fala sobre a repressão durante o autoritarismo português. É importante lembrar que alteridade absoluta não significa acessibilidade, senão responsabilidade absoluta. Por isso, somos também convidados a nos identificar com esse sofrimento, o que nos oferece a oportunidade se sentirmos empatia e reconheceremos as atrocidades recalcadas do passado<sup>83</sup>.

While we agree with Overhoff’s appropriation of Levinas and the face-to-face encounter in her analysis of *48*, we believe that something else is also at work in this encounter which cannot fully be grasped by the concept of empathy, nor solely described as identification with the prisoners. A certain complicity is attained with the spectator, established not only through the gaze, but through a particular articulation between the carceral system and the film apparatus.

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<sup>78</sup> Viegas, Susana, “Aesthetical Divide: A Study on Susana de Sousa Dias’ *48*”, *Revista de Literatura, História e Memória* 10(15) (2014): 16.

<sup>79</sup> Overhoff Ferreira, Carolin, *O Cinema Português: aproximações a sua história e indisciplinaridade* (São Paulo: Alameda, 2014), 203.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid: 207. “The faces in *close-up* look at us directly, establishing direct contact through the gaze”.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid: 209. “...indicate an alternative history which would represent inscription, but was repressed or unknown”.

<sup>82</sup> Lévinas, Emmanuel, “The Face of the Other”, “Sensibility and the Face”, and “Ethics and the Face”, in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969.

<sup>83</sup> “When a young woman looks at us frontally, the contextualization and the suffering in her voice demands that we take a position vis-a-vis her gaze and her talk about repression during the Portuguese dictatorship. It is important to remember that absolute alterity does not mean inaccessibility, rather absolute responsibility. For this reason, we are also invited to identify with this suffering, and given the opportunity to feel empathy and recognize ourselves in past atrocities”, Overhoff, 217.

The fade-ins and fade-outs throughout *48* and *Luz Obscura* take on a new meaning when we understand just how important light and darkness can be for a prisoner. In the final testimony of *Luz Obscura*, a former prisoner speaks about being tortured with light and darkness. Through this torturous use of light, prisoners were sleep-deprived for days on end, resulting in hallucinations and psychological effects. In other words, the same elements which are used in cinema to act on the spectator, in this case light and darkness, are also used to torture prisoners. The relationship between form and content likens torture to the cinematographic practice, and moreover, the experience of being a prisoner to the experience of being a spectator. The spectator can therefore *identify with the person photographed* in a more subtle way than the one provoked by face-to-face identification: *the film is acting upon the spectator in a way that reflects what was done to the prisoners*. While making *48*, Susana de Sousa Dias asked, “How could the experience of the violence of the methods used by the political police be transmitted? How could one manage the disconnect between the moment the event happened and the experience endured to present times? How could one represent the pain?”<sup>84</sup>. The cinematic plays with light and darkness through fade-ins and fade-outs is one way of the most powerful ways that *48* and *Luz Obscura* finds to transmit the experience of torture and represent the pain endured. That this pain becomes shared between the prisoner and the spectator is a way in which the films “inscribe” the years of dictatorship on the spectators and *on cinema itself*.

As the dictatorship becomes inscribed in the faces of the prisoners (as years and decades of being taken away from their children, tortured and constantly surveilled take their toll physically on the faces), their images become less recognizable to themselves, in a process known as *non-recognition*. This is further achieved through a process of “deform by mockery” in which prisoners photographed choose to change their faces or expressions as a way of resistance towards the photographer and photograph itself. While the mugshots were taken in order to identify, control and arrest people identified as criminals for their participation and/or relation to activities of the Portuguese Communist Party, these same images, as they are used in *48*, attest to how limited this identification can be. Seen in this way, the film becomes an exercise in *non-recognition*.

*48* is not just a movie about recalling or recognizing, but mainly about not recalling or not recognizing. This non-recognition is sometimes heroic. One man explains how he subverted the photographic mechanism of recognition by always posing the same awkward face. He said that “they” could photograph, but he still had the freedom to choose his face. Being an anti-fascist resistant, he chose to “deform by mockery” that process identification in jail. Another girl describes the “silly smile” that she had on her face after being released from jail. It was a proud smile celebrating the fact that she was by then one more member of her family imprisoned by the hands of PIDE agents. She also remarks something about the way people related to each other back then. “The language was very much captivated. [...] We have to discover the truth of this Portugal by minimal gestures. We were old, I think. Very old. There weren’t any children, nor youngsters. We all had the same age, we all had masks”. Two things here: firstly, a truth that is enlightened only through minimal gestures is an idea that governs the whole movie in its own formal device; secondly, if the photograph is a mask of time, as André Bazin wrote, those old photos are “masks of masks”. “That face there wasn’t my face outside”, says one of the women. Another man states: “That isn’t my mother. It’s not her face”. *48* is a story of deformations, of

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<sup>84</sup> De Sousa Dias, “(In)visible Evidence: The Representability of Torture”, 483.

faces that don't belong to anyone. Ultimately, it is a picture about a lack of recognition. The underground but also the authoritarian forces of the regime worked out these ways of non-recognition. After being tortured, the prisoners became unrecognizable even to the eyes of loved ones. Even, I must add, to their own eyes. One of the male prisoners tells that, after being deprived of sleep for several days, he didn't recognize his face in the mirror<sup>85</sup>.

The faces are not only *not recognized* by the subjects photographed and their family members, but also a process of non-recognition occurs for the spectator when –or rather, *as*– they see these images, provoked by the manipulation of the archival materials through movement and duration which make these *iconic* images suddenly *unfamiliar*. This occurs through a process of *defamiliarization*.

According to Formalist literary theorist, critic and writer Viktor Shklovsky who introduced the term “defamiliarization”<sup>86</sup> in his essay from 1917 titled *Art and Technique*, “The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make object “unfamiliar”, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged”<sup>87</sup>. When art makes objects “unfamiliar” it *slows down* the process by which the perception of that object is defined. He writes, “An image is not a permanent referent for those mutable complexities of life which are revealed through it; *its purpose is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object –it creates a ‘vision’ of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it...*”<sup>88</sup>. As we’ve said before, in the case of the mugshot, the viewer’s perception of the image typically acts very quickly: when confronted with these images, the viewer will immediately “see” (and therefore “know”) a criminal is in the photograph. *Defamiliarization* becomes a strategy for impeding or rather slowing down this process of perception (by which knowledge is reinforced and, in this case, “punishment” and authoritarian violence are justified), *calling attention to itself in the process*, and as a result, forcing us to notice the image’s own construction. While an object (like a mugshot) has a specific function which is unquestioned and which works on our perception in ways that go unnoticed, Shklovsky argues that works of art draw attention to the ways in which perception is created, making us more aware of the world.

This essay offered a break with the established approach to aesthetics at the time, which Shklovsky summarized in Alexander Potebnya’s widely accepted claim that “Art is thinking with images”. For Shklovsky, this approach led to the belief that art is purely the making of symbols, which has privileged imagery “as a practical means of thinking”, over imagery’s poetic potential, “as a means of reinforcing an impression”<sup>89</sup>. For Shklovsky, it is not the object that is important but how it is experienced; art is what makes this experience primarily one of impressions and perceptions, capable of making the objects that we grow accustomed to (primarily through language: words), unfamiliar, new and therefore capable of keeping us alert.

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<sup>85</sup> “Frames Portuguese Film Festival 2014: what is memory?”, *A Pala de Walsh* (November 23, 2014): <http://www.apaladewalsh.com/2014/11/frames-portuguese-film-festival-2014-what-is-memory/>

<sup>86</sup> The Russian word is *ostraneniye* (“making strange”). In Spanish, the term “extrañamiento” is more commonly used.

<sup>87</sup> Shklovsky, Viktor, “Art as Technique”, in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. Lee T Lemon and Marion J Reis, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 12.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid: 18. Italics in original document.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid: 8.

We return to this essay now because it offers another way to think about the role that images play in the construction of knowledge. In the filming of mugshots –images, which as we have said, construct particularly strong ideological frameworks that determine what can be known by this image– *defamiliarization* becomes a potent strategy for unlearning through a slowing down of the process of perception. In the following section, we will analyze a sequence in *Luz Obscura* in order to make the case that in these films *defamiliarization* is achieved through manipulations of movement, stillness, and duration, allowing for other ways of experiencing carceral images and making us, as spectators, more attentive to how our perception of these images changes over time.

### **Slow Motion, Movement and Time, the Face-Image as Cyborg**

As we have said before, *Luz Obscura* is different from *Natureza Morta* and *48* in that it revolves around one particular family, using the photographs from the PIDE archive including mugshots of the parents and photographs of the children in captivity as a kind of “family album”. But the film is also distinct in that it includes images of the children of the political prisoners *today*. These images, although brief, are important because they help to breach the rupture between past and present and are part of the process of inscription mentioned earlier. We would like to pay particular attention to one key moment in the film, in which the faces of the children of the political prisoners are filmed in a similar way to the mugshots of their parents. That is, the extreme slow motion that is applied to the still photographs as they are re-photographed and edited digitally is also applied to the moving images of the children (now adults). By drawing attention to how this slow motion works and the *defamiliarization* that it achieves, and that it extends not only to the mugshot but to the face-image in the moving archive as well, we can begin to understand how the manipulation of the face-image (in both of its forms) creates a specific relationship with the spectator.

About halfway through the film, two of the children, Isabel and Rui, the youngest child of Octávio Pato and Albina Fernández, husband and wife who were detained by the PIDE, are shown in three close-ups (Figure 3.25). The first, of Isabel, is a profile shot, similar to the profile angle included in mugshots, and the second and third are more frontal and more directly framed around Rui’s face.





Figure 3.25. *Luz Obscura* (Susana de Sousa Dias, 2016).

In particular, we would like to look at what happens in the third shot, of Rui's face.



Figure 3.26. *Luz Obscura* (Susana de Sousa Dias, 2016).

These images have been slowed down considerably, so much so that they appear to be still images (Figure 3.26). If we look at the third shot in particular, it works as a kind of reverse *tromp l'oeil*<sup>90</sup>, a trick of the eye, designed to deceive a spectator into confusing a painting with something real. At one moment, Rui is looking off to the side. In a matter of seconds, expanded through the application of duration, Rui's gaze meets the spectator's. The extreme slow motion applied to this particular movement of Rui's eyes makes the entire event feel imagined; felt, more than seen. It is only by pausing and returning to see the shot again, that we can attest to *what has been done* to the image. De Sousa Dias has applied an extreme slow motion, slowing the image down to 1% of its original duration. In a way, this is what *48* was about: the entire film plays with a modification of the experience of the time that it takes to look at the mugshots. Photographs that would take no more than seven minutes to look through are extended to a duration of 93 minutes<sup>91</sup>. Now, in *Luz Obscura*, the detail of a moving image that would "normally" last less than a second is expanded to several seconds on the screen.

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<sup>90</sup> Between portrait, still life, and *tromp l'oeil*, we can see that these three films are in direct dialogue with forms long associated with painting. Therefore, the film is an exemplary film of how much contemporary film practice is rooted in the visual arts, including painting and photography.

<sup>91</sup> This is explained in: De Sousa Dias, Susana, "Presenta *48*", *Photoespaña* Matadero Madrid (31 de mayo de 2011). <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bUpwxwCjpXI>

About the face in film, Noa Steimatsky writes: “Absorptive and projective, [the face’s] unique conjunction of centered unity and complexity is matched by a commanding visibility in the face’s superior position on the body, while its register of motion is the most nuanced – even the slightest change can be intensely expressive”<sup>92</sup>. In the face-image, even the slightest change in expression acquires importance. For Shklovsky, this change does not necessarily produce meaning or knowledge, but an *impression*. By slowing down the image, our perception of it is deferred so that we become more aware of our process of looking at it. Our attention to the object (the face) grows.

The eleven-minute, black and white, silent Fluxus film shot on 16mm, *Disappearing Music for Face* (Mieko “Chieko” Shiomi, 1966), has been described by Shiomi in the following way: “Transition from smile to no-smile, shot at 2000ft/sec. Camera shows only a CU of the mouth area”. The entire film consists of this transition which has been slowed-down to such a point that it is extended to eleven minutes of film (Figure 3.27). The change from smile to no-smile, now extended in duration, becomes an *event*. In both films, the object study becomes the face itself. In *Disappearing Music for Face*, the object is the smile; in *Luz Obscura* it is the entire face. The micro-movement in Rui’s face occurs in the eyes and it is so microscopic and quick, just as the moment that a smile is no longer. In both films, the question seems to be how to show something so small as a pair of eyes that turn slightly to look directly at the camera, or a mouth that turns away from a smile. These movements which occur very quickly in real life can be *transformed into events for the camera*.

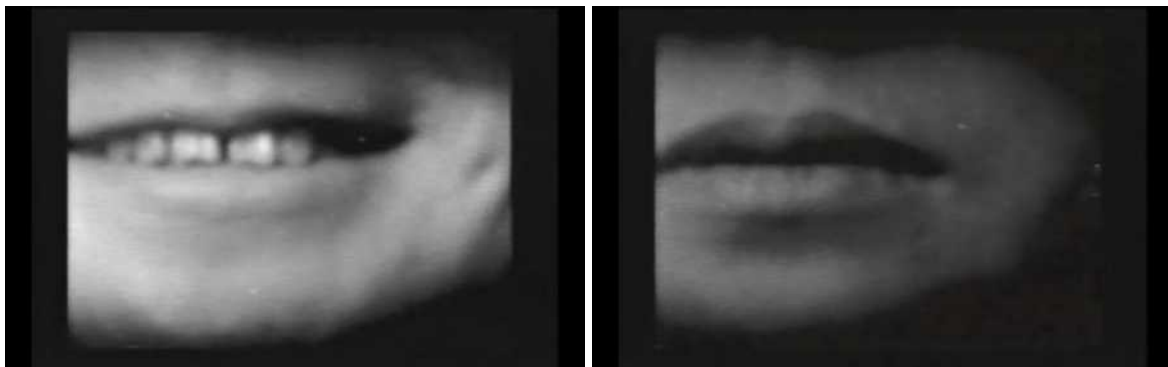


Figure 3.27. *Disappearing Music for Face* by Mieko (Chieko) Shiomi from 1966.

It does not seem to matter that while in *Disappearing Music for Face* the stillness is “real” and in the celluloid, the stillness achieved in *Luz Obscura* –through electronic and digital means– is just “an illusion”. Despite the difference in format from analog to digital cinema, *Luz Obscura*, just like *Disappearing Music for Face* before, explores the limits of time on the image and the possibilities of duration for small, seemingly insignificant movements. This formal exploration is coherent with the film’s political intention: if police mugshots are essentially *forced portraits*, both *still* and *silent*, taken of people who had no choice in whether they wanted to be photographed or not, images that are forced and mathematically measured so that the head will not move in order to ensure the image’s scientific status as evidence, and if photographs are images that do not in themselves show time in the sense that they do not

<sup>92</sup> Steimatsky, *The Face on Film*, 6.

have a duration: what happens when cinema *adds* movement, time, and sound to these particular photographs? How does the spectator's perception of the people in the photographs change? How is our experience of seeing them transformed? The movement and time *added* to the still and timeless images work to "unlearn" the image by unlearning its very material structure. Instead of looking quickly at these images, rapidly getting information from them and moving on, as one might do in the Police Archive, and as one would do with a symbol, the film asks us to look with attention and with care. This presents a strong contrast to the "forced" nature of the original images and the context of violence within which they were produced.

What is done to Rui's image in these seconds (which is importantly *not* an image from the PIDE archive, nor a mugshot, but a moving image filmed by de Sousa Dias) *is representative of what is done to the archive and the mugshots in particular*—even though the movement is contrary: Rui's image (a moving image) is slowed down to the point of extreme stillness in which it is possibly to "see" the micro-history within his gaze, while the mugshot (a still image) is expanded in duration to the point in which the image's extreme stillness reveals a micro-movement which resists the image's "forced" quality. Both directions—movement to stillness, stillness to movement—are created in the editing through a careful play with duration and slow motion. The result, as far as its effect on the spectator is concerned, might be described with the help of Freud's notion of "the uncanny", defined as the moment when "the distinction between imagination and reality is suddenly effaced"<sup>93</sup>. Laura Mulvey applies this notion to the effect produced by stillness in the photograph and its association with death: "Uncanny feelings are aroused by confusion between the animate and the inanimate, most particularly again associated with death, and the return of the dead. The photograph's suspension of time, its conflation of life and death, the animate and the inanimate, raises not superstition so much as a sense of disquiet that is aggravated rather than calmed by the photograph's mechanical, chemical, and indifferent nature"<sup>94</sup>.

Something of this "indifferent" nature is present in the moving image as well. The extreme slow motion of Rui's image in *Luz Obscura* turns what may have been at one point taken only as a portrait into something entirely different. As we become more aware, in the sense that Shklovsky champions, and as the image—and the face—become defamiliarized, the photographs and the people photographed become something and someone else. No longer *just human*, nor *just image*, what we are looking at might be best described as a *cyborg*, defined by Donna Haraway as: "a hybrid of machine and organism"<sup>95</sup>. In the film machine's manipulation of the face-image, something non-human begins to co-exist with the human face. The cyborg peers out through Rui's eyes to momentarily lock gaze with the spectator, but it is certainly not only Rui who we are looking at.

Something similar occurs in Lucrecia Martel's *AI* (2019)<sup>96</sup>. In this short, commissioned as the trailer for the 2019 Viennale, Martel, who is most well-known for her fiction feature-length films including *La Cienaga* (2001), turns to her first exploration in reappropriation and

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<sup>93</sup> Freud, Sigmund, "The Uncanny", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. xiv., ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74).

<sup>94</sup> Mulvey, Laura, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (Reaktion Books: London, 2006), 60.

<sup>95</sup> Haraway, Donna J., "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century", in *Manifestly Haraway* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2016), 5.

<sup>96</sup> Video available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ua6sMjfoBvg>



found footage. She takes an extract from an interview filmed in 16mm at the University of California in 1961 with a patient with catatonic schizophrenia, titled *Psychiatric interview series, patient no. 18: evaluation for diagnosis*<sup>97</sup> and heavily manipulates the image to, in the words of critic Ross McDonnell, “construct a post-human or non-human subject”<sup>98</sup>. The first decision in this process is to re-frame the original image so that the background is removed and it is centered on the patient’s face: the image becomes a close-up. Then, instead of slowing down the image as de Sousa Dias does, Martel pixels out the rest of the image so that we can only see one of the subject’s eyes (“it is the typical pixelation that is usually used to hide the identity of a witness, or of a minor”, says Martel, “and the elements of the single eye, with the two voices, that’s a mythological touch”<sup>99</sup>). As the interviewer poses a question and the patient responds, our attention is drawn directly to the eye and to how it moves. The patient’s voice responds, but the eye seems to have “a life of its own”, its movement disconnected from what is being said. “I am not completely like other people”, he says, to the interviewer’s question. As the interviewer is not seen, only heard, both voices seem to come almost from the same source, as a kind of “internal monologue”. The result is an image with two voices and one eye; a “condensed image of both imagination and material reality”<sup>100</sup>.

In an interview with Martel in 2020, she speaks about machines as “the next stage in our species” and the elimination of the individual. She asks, “Will these creatures be able to overcome our pettiness? The less similar they are to us, the more chances they will have”<sup>101</sup>. The interviewer speaks of a “post-human” creation. The cyborg or a “companion species” concept might be a more fitting description, however, as it indicates that instead of one replacing the other, there is a hybridity which occurs between the two forms, between organism and machine. Haraway speaks of a “pleasure” in the confusion of boundaries, the discovery of which she attributes to queer politics<sup>102</sup>. But even before Haraway, the fascination between the hybrid human-machine form can be traced back to Vertov’s “Kino-manifesto” as a utopic possibility for cinema. In our research we are finding that experimental contemporary films bordering between documentary and found footage and which take the face-image as its object of contemplation, become a rich ground for confusing all sorts of pre-established boundaries, be they related to film form (documentary vs. fiction, imitation vs. aesthetics) or the dualities attributed to the face itself (interiority vs exteriority, identification vs. non-recognition, showing vs. hiding, etc.). One of these binaries is between human and machine.

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<sup>97</sup> Video available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lehtMYIOuIk>

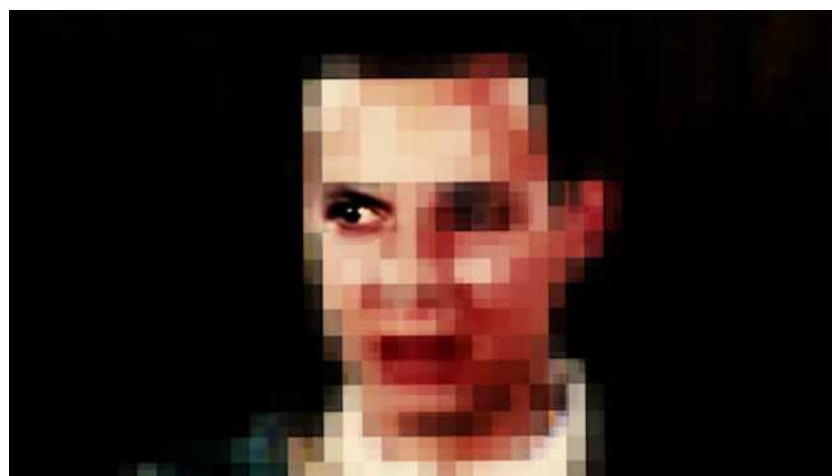
<sup>98</sup> McDonnell, Ross, “Machine Eye: Lucrecia Martel Discusses *AF*”, Mubi Notebook Feature (October 23, 2020).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Haraway, Donna J., “A Cyborg Manifesto”, 7.

<sup>101</sup> McDonnell, *ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Haraway speaks about the influence of queer movements on her theoretical practice: “I think that the politics of pleasure were thought, developed, practiced, proposed as *public* practice most vividly in queer movements”, Wolfe, Cary, “Interview with Donna J. Haraway: Companions in Conversation”, in: *Manifestly Haraway*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 254.



Figures 3.28. and 3.29. Above: *Psychiatric interview series, patient no. 18: evaluation for diagnosis* (University of California, 1961). Below: *AI* (Lucrecia Martel, 2019).

Another comparison can be made with the 1960 Kurt Kren film *48 Köpfe Aus Dem Szondi Test* (*48 Heads From the Szondi-Test*). Kren, a Structural filmmaker from Austria, is known for his avant-garde films which are edited frame by frame and by hand. In his film prior to *48 Köpfe*, Kren edited in the camera with a single frame mechanism. In *48 Köpfe*, his second film, Kren began to implement a serial editing technique for the first time using mathematical principles. The film reworks 48 photographs of faces from the Szondi Test<sup>103</sup>, a 1935 nonverbal projective personality test developed by the Hungarian psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Léopold Szondi. The test was designed to identify psychiatric patients' diagnosis through their identification with a set of eight psychiatric patient 'types'. The test consists of six sets of eight photographs (48 in total). Kren films these 48 images for one to eight frames, following a structure frame plan. The length of the take was determined from the sum of the two preceding takes: 1, 2, 3,

<sup>103</sup> These faces are in fact "found faces" or found images, drawn from several sources. Thirty-eight are from German textbooks (30 from a 1901 text and 8 from texts published in 1892, 1904, 1928 and 1922), while six are from the Swedish Institute for Criminal Psychiatry and only four come from Szondi's own practice in Hungary. Fletcher, Abbe, "2/60 *48 Köpfe aus dem Szondi Test*", in *Kurt Kren: Structural Films*, ed. Nicky Hamlyn, Simon Payne and A.L. Rees (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2016), 37.

5, 8, 13, 21, 34 frames<sup>104</sup>. In this mathematically-based system of editing, the still images of faces begin to acquire movement. As Abbe Fletcher describes,

The short shot lengths create the illusion of animation of the still faces: eyes close and open, brows shift, mouths smile or grimace, moustaches appear and disappear, faces tilt, turn and fill the frame. The variation of frame lengths between one and eight frames, in ascending and descending patterns of varying frequency, gives the illusion of gesture, creating a circular pattern of movement rather than a fragmented, uniform or constant metre<sup>105</sup>.

The cropped faces, concentrated into groups of mouths, noses, eyes, and ears, work against the opportunity for comparison and identification (as the test was intended to do), and towards a “synthesizing effect”<sup>106</sup>. As a result, “individuals become a mass of features”<sup>107</sup>. For Stefan Grisseemann, “Kurt perverts the methods of racial science experts who attribute human characteristics to particular skull forms, by reinterpreting their cult of superficiality according to an inner logic of filmic montage. He speeds up and slows down, remaining rhythmically erratic as the grey images of faces threaten to melt into one another...”<sup>108</sup>. In other words, Kren uses film montage to subvert the supposedly scientifically-accurate characterization of “types” into one indistinguishable and inseparable whole.

Occasionally, faces drift to a side of the frame, axis of heads are rotated so as to appear horizontally, edges of the test card become visible –moments that appear as “mistakes” or that show the filmmaker’s fallibility<sup>109</sup>. Here the artisanal quality of the film (which draws attention to the film’s construction and the fact that it has been made frame by frame and by hand) overpowers the technical and mechanical force of the structural serial montage, as it evidences the fact that the film has been made by a person and not only by a precise and infallible machine. The “humanity” of the cyborg relationship can be found in the “imperfections”.

According to Fletcher, this film is concerned with “the linking, interchanging, comparing, structuring, morphing, abstracting effect of connecting elements in different faces, and their cumulative effect”. Kren is more interested in the linking and re-ordering of images (which we also discussed in Farocki’s *Aufschub*) rather than individual images themselves. While Fletcher associates this with Vertov, it might be more appropriate to think of Kuleshov here (whose ideas on montage have often been attributed to Vertov, Pudovkin and Eisenstein), who studied the forces of individual images and how these forces are transformed in a sequence. Kren’s “visual-kinetic investigation” adds to Kuleshov’s experiments in that his intricate and mathematical structural system of short frame rates creates illusions of movement and gesture *within* the still images and not only between them. As a result, an undeniably “uncanny” effect emerges, but one that does not divert the spectator’s attention away from its own (man-made) construction.

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<sup>104</sup> Tscherkassky, Peter, “Lord of the Frames: Kurt Kren”, *Millennium Film Journal*, 35/36 (Fall 2000).

<sup>105</sup> Fletcher, “2/60 48 Kopfe aus dem Szondi Test”, 36.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Grisseemann, Stefan, “Fundamental Punk: On Kurt Kren’s Universal Cinema”, in *Film Unframed: A History of Austrian Avant-Garde Cinema*, ed. Peter Tscherkassky (Vienna: Austrian Film Museum / sixpackfilm, 2012), 98.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid: 37.

While Kren's montage moves quickly, hardly allowing the time to rest our gaze on any particular face, de Sousa Dias works with duration, slowness, and time to expand and open the images. Kren's 4.5 minute film covers 48 different faces; while de Sousa Dias, on the other hand, spends more time on fewer faces, choosing to emphasize instead the impact of 48 years of the dictatorship on individual face-images. Another difference between these films is that while de Sousa Dias was interested in working with the PIDE archive –and found that the mugshots were the only images of the prisoners in the archive– Kren deliberately set out to work with images of heads and “stumbled on” the Szondi test<sup>110</sup>. Notwithstanding the differences on how these filmmakers begin working with face-images, both will continue to explore these types of images throughout their work and, in the case of Kren, this also includes images of his own face<sup>111</sup>.

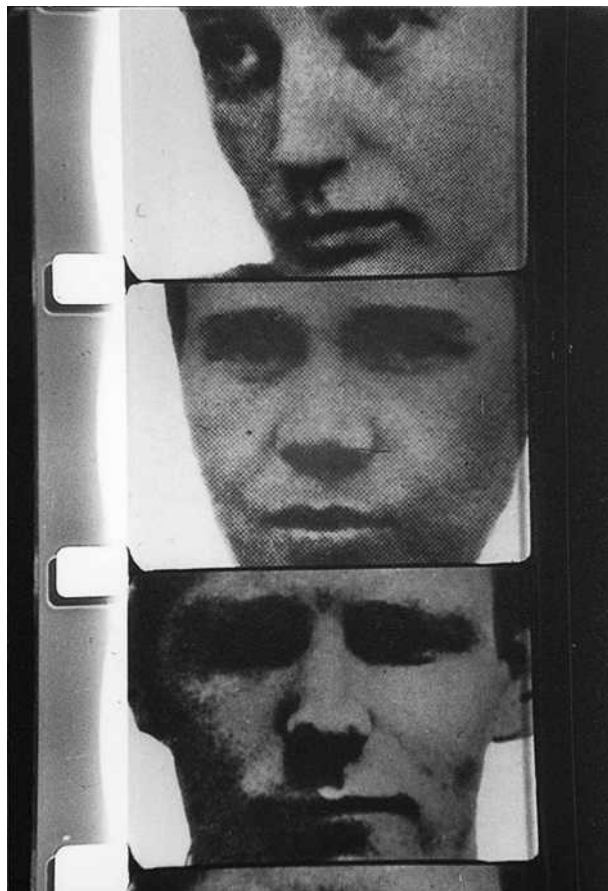


Figure 3.30. *48 Kopfe Aus Dem Szondi Test* (Kurt Kren, 1960)

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<sup>110</sup> “I wanted to make a film with human heads and stumbled on the Szondi test”, Kurt Kren in Tscherkassky, Peter, “Interview with Kurt Kren”, in *Kurt Kren: Structural Films*, ed. Nicky Hamlyn, Simon Payne and A.L. Rees (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2016), 252.

<sup>111</sup> Grisseemann, “Fundamental Punk”, 98.

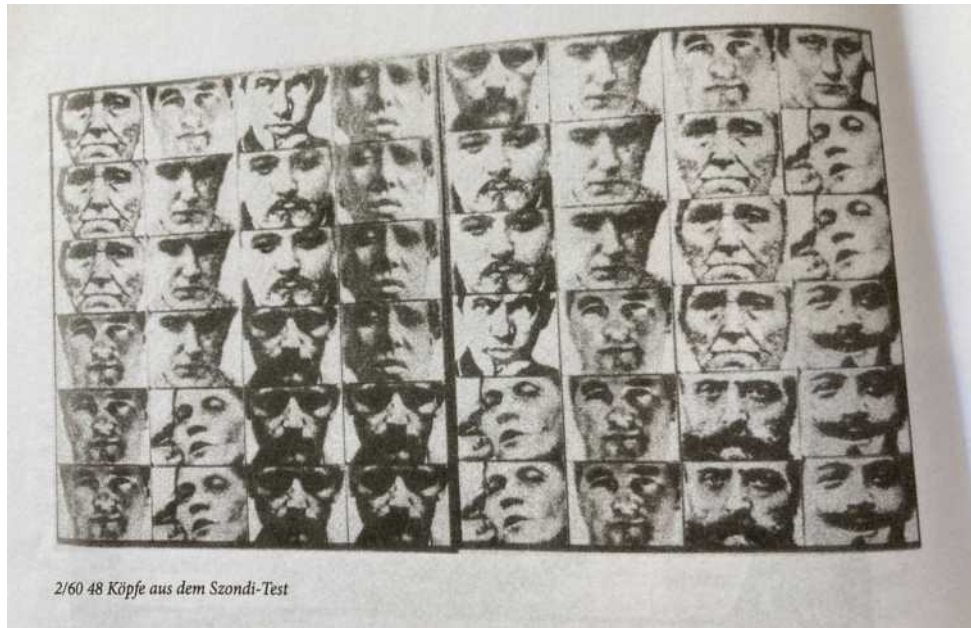


Figure 3.31. *48 Köpfe Aus Dem Szondi Test* (Kurt Kren, 1960)

In Susana de Sousa Dias' Trilogy made over a period of ten years, the movement from still photographs to moving images, which is a movement that occurs, as previously mentioned, in both directions, allows for a hybridity to occur between the subject photographed in the mugshot and the manipulation of the image in the editing. As a result, we are shown images that are never quite still and never entirely moving, but somewhere in-between. The exploration of the boundary between stillness and movement is complemented by the coexistence of temporalities achieved in the different types of composite images, as well as the transitions between the images with extremely slow fade-ins and fade-outs in which the image and the black screen become part of each other. In this way, the mugshot is explored as an image (not only as a portrait), detached from its original purpose of representational accuracy of the subject photographed, and able to acquire other characteristics that make it both organism and machine, both photography and cinema, both representation and materiality, description and inscription. While Bazin (or readers of Bazin, rather) divided art rather uncomfortably into two categories, imitation and aesthetics, and while critics and film theorists continue to divide and categorize artistic expressions in order to better understand how they differ and what is specific to each, a multi-species approach applied to film theory and to the face-image allows or solicits a more flexible way of thinking about cinema, which permits the use of "both/and" (Haraway), but also might be useful for thinking about what Barthes called "shifters" of space and time (e.g. here/there, this/that, now/then). Still *and* moving. Organism *and* machine. Face *and* image. *Face-image*.

In this way, the Portuguese Dictatorship Trilogy makes it possible to feel deeply affected by the identities of the political prisoners who were kidnapped, separated from their families, and tortured over several decades, through an entirely materialist and experimental reworking of mostly still and silent photographs originally intended to label these prisoners as criminals. With the insistence of time and rooted in a transdisciplinary artistic practice, de Sousa Dias' reappropriation "opens" the mugshots so that they can be seen and heard for more

than “just” portraits, and re-inscribed beyond their original objective of creating a criminal subject. What is strange is that these cyborg images allow the spectator to see the *humanity* of the images even clearer. Perhaps this is because of the sound which allows the images to continue to breathe.

While the images are being reworked digitally through many processes that we have covered in this Chapter, the sound (which has also been heavily edited) appears to the ear as untouched. In “hearing” the pauses between the words, the clicks of the tongue, the breaths taken among stories of struggle and hardship, something like “human error” appears (even if it is fabricated or emphasized through digital means, as Kren’s “imperfections” are created manually) to remind us that we are –for the moment, still– human. The presence that we once looked for in the image and then lost, has finally been found in the sound<sup>112</sup>. At last, in the sound (including the voice, the breathing, the bodily sounds of speech) we discover the missing counter-image to the mugshot and face-image.

In the case of Amós Mahanjane and Matias Mboa, two of the sixteen testimonies in *48* and the only African colonial prisoners, their voices have no counter-image in the mug-shot, as their photographs have not survived. For this reason, de Sousa Dias writes that they been subjected to a “double erasure”<sup>113</sup>. If for Viegas the reanimation of the dead past becomes an opportunity of inscription of Portugal’s violent history, and if for Overhoff this inscription occurs through the identification with faces, it becomes necessary to ask what happens to the process of inscription when there is no image of the colonial political prisoner’s face? At the beginning of this Chapter we turned to Berger who said, “[...] if the living take the past upon themselves, if the past becomes an integral part of the process of people making their own history, then all photographs would reacquire a living context, they would continue to exist in time, instead of being arrested moments”, but we did not consider the question of the absence of photographs and what this would mean for making “our” own history. What does it mean for our history-making process that certain faces be left out of the archive? And what can we do with this absence?

While the two African men speak in *48*, a computer-generated black background gives way to “a new blackness”, obtained photographically, which acquires dust and evidence of the wear and tear of the film, and then transitions to an image of an actual photographed night. In the absence of photographs, de Sousa Dias chooses to “rupture” the system she has created for the film<sup>114</sup>, somehow freeing the spectator of the film’s spell. After delineating a system in which mugshots appear to “open” through the masterful working of the photographic, editing and sound apparatus, the images that are chosen for the voices of the African former prisoners

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<sup>112</sup> “When I started to make *48*, the idea of the film –well the first idea of the film- was to show just mugshots and then people talking. But when I started to make the film my doubts were if it was ethical to leave the people out. For me it was a big question. Am I allowed to do that? Is it fair to leave the person talking outside the image? Even if that was the idea of the film, to leave them out. I started to make the film and I made several interviews and suddenly I started to realize that through the sounds of the body and just listening to their voices I had their presence. It was not necessary to have a face talking. When I understood that I could bring them there just through the body and the voices, that I could get an approach and be closer to them in a more physical and sensorial way, without seeing the faces, for me that was the point that I thought, OK I can do the film as I wanted to, before”. De Sousa Dias, “(In)visible Evidence: The Representability of Torture”, 500.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid*: 501. This term reminds us of the concept of “double death” which was very important for Chapter 2.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*: 501.

are images that decidedly *cannot* be entered. In this way, the limitations of the image and cinema are revealed, and an ethics towards what can be seen and what cannot is respected<sup>115</sup>.

### Hapticity in the Carceral-Film Apparatus

At the beginning of this Chapter, we made the promise to “learn” the qualities historically and aesthetically attributed to the mugshot in order to see how these elements are “unlearned”, challenged or transformed in Susana de Sousa Dias’ cinematographic reappropriations of the image in *Natureza Morta*, *48*, and *Luz Obscura*. In this process, we learned that mugshots share specific aesthetic qualities determined by the carceral and authoritarian conditions in which they were produced, in addition to a program of social control and colonial expansion upon which these images are founded. These aesthetic elements include stillness, uniformity, silence, and a specific sense of time which is neither strictly past nor present tense, but somewhere in-between.

As we have seen in this Chapter, the reappropriations of these images in the three films revert and sometimes *heighten* these carceral qualities, “adding” movement, variation, sound, and duration to the images, and make them “come alive” out of their originally arrested state. Through our analysis of her work, we have returned to the writings of theorists of film and photography, thanks to whom we can understand these images directly in conversation with questions of indexicality and inscription. But we have also found that there is something else at work here, perhaps as subtext, whereby the organic and the mechanic become a single entity. Laura Mulvey’s approach to Freud’s concept of “the uncanny” is close but not exactly precise enough to describe how it works here, although these films also are examples of what she describes as “a sense of disorientation”<sup>116</sup> and “a sense of disquiet”<sup>117</sup>. What comes closer, perhaps, to what we have found is Haraway’s more open and unbounded concept of *cyborg*, which she defines as a hybrid image, and we find better describes what is at work here. While the uncanny is “a property of the human mind and its uncertainties”<sup>118</sup>, the cyborg is only *partly* human, part machine. At the risk of applying a concept taken out of context to another body of work, we find it useful to think of cyborg imagery in relation to the face-image (in this case, as an image which is so clearly on the border of photography and cinema) because, as Haraway writes, it “can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves”<sup>119</sup>. It is evident that the three films in question have turned a cold, institutional archive into a haptic experience, where we are suddenly able to feel, touch, and listen to the images. What Tina Campt has written in reference to a photograph taken by her husband of his hands over a photograph from a “convict album” of a man’s frontal and profile headshots and his hands in view, could also be applied to the three films, when seen as a whole: “...the convict album is transformed into what it sought to distance itself from all

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<sup>115</sup> Something similar occurs at the end of *strata of natural history*, in the image of the woods on the bodies of the Kawéskar women. In both cases, the filmmakers break with the systems they have themselves created to present a resistance or boundary that cannot be passed.

<sup>116</sup> Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, 62.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid: 61.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid: 55.

<sup>119</sup> Haraway, quoted in Wolfe, “Interview with Donna J. Haraway”, 67.

along: a family album”<sup>120</sup>. But it is also true that while Susana de Sousa Dias’ reappropriation provides a haptic experience, it does not invisibilize the mechanical process by which this experience takes place and which mirrors or reflects the carceral system under which these images were originally produced. In this sense, there is a *double movement* at work, between hapticity and a heightened awareness of the apparatus itself. We believe that the face-image, as an image of a person’s face which has been interrupted and ripped from its original context and recycled into a new one, is where this double movement is presently most felt in contemporary cinema and *the filmed mugshot* becomes the site for making visible the similarities and differences between the carceral and cinematic apparatus.

For Camp, the practice of refusal exists *within the image itself* and does not need reappropriation to be seen, felt or heard. This reminds us of Derrida who, commenting on Barthes’s association between photography and death, writes “...there is a point at which the photographic act is not an artistic act, a point at which it registers passively and this poignant, piercing passivity represents the opportunity of this reference to death; it seizes a reality that is there, that was there in an indissoluble now”<sup>121</sup>. We would like to keep this in mind as we continue to explore the face-image in the contemporary found footage film: that it is not only what is done to the images that interests us here, but also how *the images themselves* practice refusal, and that this can be “heard” in their materiality. The filmmaker-researcher who “listens” to images participates in a hybrid process –part human, part machine—which works with the images to “open” them up to the spectator. In Chapter 5, we will see that this “refusal” expresses itself as a future-tense that paradoxically exists only in *looking back*<sup>122</sup> (a redirection of time, as Elsaesser observed in *Aufschub* in Chapter 1, and as we also witnessed in *strata of natural history*). We can begin to see the face-image as a kind of time-machine, able to transport the film (and the spectator) in non-linear and, perhaps more accurately, *inter-linear* directions.

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<sup>120</sup> Camp, Tina M., *Listening to Images* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), 123.

<sup>121</sup> Derrida, Jacques, “The Photograph as Copy Archive and Signature”, in *Art and Photography*, ed. David Company (London: Phaidon Press, 2003): 220.

<sup>122</sup> “However skillful the photographer, however carefully he poses his model, the spectator feels an irresistible compulsion to look for the tiny spark of chance, of the here and now, with which reality has, as it were, seared the character in the picture; to find that imperceptible point at which, in the immediacy of that long-past moment, the future so persuasively inserts itself, that, looking back we may rediscover it”, Benjamin, Walter, “A Short History of Photography”, *Screen* (Spring 1972): 7.



## Chapter 4: Refusing Nostalgia and Defending Voicelessness in Feminist Avant-Garde and Experimental Film Reappropriations of Face-Images and Mugs from Home Movies

Desapropiadas, pues.  
-Cristina Rivera Garza<sup>1</sup>

If mugshots have become synonymous with criminal portraiture, there is another kind of mug that has quietly escaped from view. This is the mug present in home movies, when the family member who is filmed looks at the camera and sticks out their tongue, “making a face” at the camera and at the person filming as an act of defiance. For Fred Camper, in his essay titled “Notes on the Home Movie” from 1988, the mug is not only a *gesture* which “insists on asserting his humanness before the photomechanical machine”, the mug is *the most important of these gestures*, the gesture that “belongs, so to speak, to the home movie genre”<sup>2</sup>. In this chapter, we will take a look at how the mug from home movies has been reappropriated in experimental archival films in order to understand what this appropriation means for new uses and forms of the face-image in contemporary archival cinema. What role does the face-image play in these appropriations? What becomes possible through these mugs, or gestures?

To begin, the *home movie* has been defined by Patricia Zimmermann as: “...a subset of the amateur film movement located within individual and/or familiar practices of visual recording of intimate events and rituals and intended for private usage and exhibition”<sup>3</sup>. For Roger Odin, “A home movie is made by one member for other members of the same family, filming events, things, people, and places linked to the family”<sup>4</sup>. Often used interchangeably with the term *amateur film*, particularly in the US context<sup>5</sup>, due to what Zimmermann calls the “renewed fervor of *familialism*” of the 1950s which “wedded amateur film to the blissful domain of the home”<sup>6</sup>, *home movies* are a subset of a wider encompassing amateur film practice

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<sup>1</sup> Rivera Garza, Cristina, *Los muertos indóciles: Necroescrituras y desapropiación* (Penguin Random House: Ciudad de México, 2019), 21. Translation: “Disappropriated, then”. As Rivera Garza says “desapropiadas”, she refers to the disappropriation of *female subjects*. In English, this is difficult to communicate with a simple translation.

<sup>2</sup> Camper, Fred, “Some Notes on the Home Movie”, *Journal of Film and Video* XXXVIII (Summer/ Fall 1986): 13.

<sup>3</sup> Zimmermann, Patricia, “The Home Movie Movement: Excavations, Artifacts, Minings”, *Mining Home Movies*, eds. Zimmermann and Karen I. Ishizuka (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2008), 8.

<sup>4</sup> Odin, Roger, “Reflections on the Family Home Movie as Document: A Semio-Pragmatic Approach”, in *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories*, ed. Karen I. Ishizuka and Patricia R. Zimmermann (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2008), 256.

<sup>5</sup> In other contexts, it seems that this association is not taken for granted but rather experienced as a space of “resistance”. The Spanish scholar Efrén Cuevas, for example, distinguishes between amateur films and home movies in the following way: “...amateur filmmakers aim to make films –fiction or documentary– that are to be shown in public and thus emulate professional standards (including the editing); on the other hand, home moviemakers mainly shoot their daily activities or events happening in their surroundings, to be shown just in family gatherings”. Cuevas, Efrén, “Change of Scale: Home Movies as Microhistory in Documentary Films”, in *Amateur Filmmaking: The Home Movie, the Archive, the Web*, ed. Laura Rascaroli, Gwenda Young and Barry Monahan (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 143-144).

<sup>6</sup> Zimmermann, “The Home Movie Movement”, 8.

and are distinct in that they are often concerned with the domestic space and intended for a more intimate spectatorship<sup>7</sup>.

Scholars Adrian Danks<sup>8</sup> and Efrén Cuevas<sup>9</sup> have traced the origin of the home movie genre to the beginning of cinema, starting with the Lumière Brothers' *Repas de bébé* (1895), a film in which a father and mother feed their baby. As Cuevas observes, "El cine surge, parecen decir los hermanos Lumière, para grabar lo cotidiano, y en ese ámbito, lo doméstico tiene lógicamente un protagonismo particular"<sup>10</sup>. While this early Lumière film is shot on 35mm, the domestic film is met by many smaller filmic formats over time, starting in the 1920s when Pathé Baby 9.5mm and 16mm film are introduced commercially, to the 1930s with the arrival of 8mm film and then Super 8mm film in the 1960s. Domestic affairs, separated at once from more commercial (i.e. narrative) subjects, become the material for these smaller formats ("For smaller topics, smaller formats", says Cuevas) while the larger formats (35mm+) are reserved for narrative feature films.

Despite –or precisely because of– its small format, Cuevas claims that the home movie is one of the most "stable" of all film genres<sup>11</sup>, evidenced by its vast quantities of these films over a large amount of time (until the 1980s when the video camera was introduced commercially). Whether or not it is in fact a genre (or a practice or a subject) has yet to be demonstrated. However, it is a type of film that is international, as several (recent) academic articles from around the world and International Home Movie Day demonstrate. For Camper, writing in 1988, "It seems likely that the history of cinema has seen the creation of far greater number of home movies than any other type of film"<sup>12</sup>. And yet, despite the proliferation of home movies internationally, home movies have been systematically left out of general and official histories of cinema (in the United States and around the world) which, as Camper points out, again and again "award hegemony to the commercial narrative feature film"<sup>13</sup>. This is demonstrated not only by history books and textbooks which continually leave out the home movie genre, but also by many national and regional archives which have historically excluded

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<sup>7</sup> While amateur film encompasses "a variety of ethnographic, industrial, labor, scientific, educational, narrative, travel, missionary, explorer, cine club, arte, and documentary forms" (Zimmermann, 9), is often characterized by a desire to replicate Hollywood style and intended to be seen by a public outside of the intimate family circle, the home movie is often concerned with the domestic and intended for a more intimate spectatorship. Despite the original difference in these terms, the terms *amateur films* and *home movies* became synonymous in the 1950s, as documented by Zimmermann, due to "the expansion of leisure time and the naturalization of Hollywood style" which "deactivated the definition of amateur film". As a result, "The renewed fervor of *familialism*, an ideology and social practice that emphasized family relations above other kinds of social or political interactions, wedded amateur film to the blissful domain of the home". Zimmermann, Patricia R., "Morphing History into Histories: From Amateur Film to the Archive of the Future", *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories*, eds. Zimmermann and Karen I. Ishizuka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 132. For this reason, the terms are often used (rather confusingly) as interchangeable in several books and articles on the subject, despite the fact that home movies are actually historically a subset of a much wider encompassing amateur film practice.

<sup>8</sup> Danks, Adrian, "Photographs in Haunted Rooms: The Found Home Experimental Film and Merilee Bennett's *A Song of Air*", *Senses of Cinema*, Issue 23 (December 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Cuevas, Efrén, "Del cine doméstico al autobiográfico: caminos de ida y vuelta", in *Cineastas frente al espejo*, ed. Gregorio Martín Gutiérrez (T&B Editores: Madrid, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid: 102.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid: 132.

<sup>12</sup> Camper, "Some Notes on the Home Movie", 9.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

home movies from their priorities for restoration and preservation<sup>14</sup>. This is due, argues Zimmermann, in great part to how these films are often perceived: "...as simply an irrelevant pastime or nostalgic mementos of the past, or dismissed as insignificant byproducts of consumer technology"<sup>15</sup>. However, in 1988 (only two years after the introduction of video cameras) Camper could already foresee a future interest in the home movie genre, he writes: "Perhaps because of its demise in 1986 as a dominant form, as a result of home video, will awaken us all to an appreciation of what is surely a major aspect of American folk art"<sup>16</sup>. Not only was Camper right to signal a post-video "awakening" regarding home movie appreciation in the academic world<sup>17</sup>, but this can also be seen in found footage film practice as well, which has paralleled –if not preceded– the academic interest in home movies. The most well-known

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<sup>14</sup> In her writing about the 1993 Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. hearings to assess the state of film preservation, access, and archives, Zimmermann shares: "Some testimony estimated that perhaps less than 1 percent of amateur film and home movies had been archived" (Zimmermann, "The Home Movie Movement", 11). This is changing. As researched by Zimmermann, the archives at the forefront of amateur film collection in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s included: Northeast Historic Film in Maine, the Prelinger Archives, the Human Studies Film Archives at the Smithsonian Institution, and the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles (ibid: 11). One of the most significant "acquisitions" of amateur film to an institutional film archive occurred in 1996 when the U.S. National Film Preservation Board selected the Japanese American home movie *Topaz*, shot during WWII by prisoner Dave Tatsuno, for preservation in the National Film Registry (See: "The Home Movie and the National Film Registry: The Story of *Topaz*" by Karen L. Ishizuka and Patricia R. Zimmermann). This was the second amateur film to be included in the registry, after the Zapruder Film of President Kennedy's assassination. Zimmermann considers the naming of *Topaz* to the registry as significant because "it signaled that home movies had achieved recognition as historical documents worthy of protection, shelf space, and preservation" (ibid: 15). Around the world, amateur film collections have been undertaken by regional film archives in Wales, Scotland, Singapore, Mexico, and Colombia.

<sup>15</sup> Zimmermann, "The Home Movie Movement", 1.

<sup>16</sup> Camper, "Some Notes on the Home Movie", 9.

<sup>17</sup> According to Liz Czach, the mid-1990s "was a watershed moment for archivists and scholars in the discovery and appreciation of amateur films and home movies" (See: "Home Movies and Amateur Film as National Cinema", *Amateur Filmmaking*, ed. Laura Rascaroli, Gwenda Young and Barry Monahan, New York: Bloomsbury, 2014: 28). She cites Penelope Houston's 1994 study of film archives and Patricia Zimmermann's 1995 ground-breaking study *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* as pioneers in this regard, culminating in the 1997 edition of the annual FIAF conference in Cartagena, Colombia, titled *Out of the Attic: Archiving Amateur Film*. Another important date in the "awakening" in academia regarding the home movie is 2010, when two simultaneous academic conferences dedicated to amateur film took place –*Saving Private Reels: Presentation, Appropriation, and Recontextualization of the Amateur Moving Image*, which according to Maija Hawe was "the first international conference of this scope to focus specifically on amateur film" (In: Hawe, Maija. "The Ascension of the Amateur", *The Moving Image*, vol. 11, no.2, 2011:137), took place in Cork, Ireland from September 17–19 in 2010, with keynote presentations by Patricia Zimmermann and Roger Odin, and the second, *The Center for Home Movies 2010 Digitization and Access Summit*, introduced by Rick Prelinger, which took place in Culpeper, Virginia on September 22–24, 2010, and was directed towards the state of amateur film in the United States. In her review on these two conferences, Hawe writes: "...Twenty-five years after the publication of Camper's article, amateur film has finally received the institutional attention and legitimization long considered overdue. A number of archives exclusively or predominantly dedicated to amateur film now exist, with many other regional, state, and national archives also housing substantial collections of amateur film. In addition, a growing number of conferences and publications engaging with amateur film have emerged in recent years, illustrating a building of scholarly interest in the subject" (136). The (at least) twenty-five year academic and artistic interest in home movies was finally met by the institutional art world when in 2019, the Museum of Modern Art inaugurated its first gallery installation of home movies and amateur film, *Private Lives Public Spaces*, drawn exclusively from its collection. The MOMA website states, "This 100-screen presentation of virtually unseen, homemade works dating from 1907 to 1991 explores the connections between artist's cinema, amateur movies, and family filmmaking as alternatives to commercial film production. Staged as an immersive video experience, the exhibition reveals an overlooked history of film from the Museum's archives, providing fresh perspectives on a remarkably rich precursor to the social media of today".

and written about practitioner is perhaps Peter Forgács who recycles old home movies and amateur films since the 1980s to create narratives of twentieth-century European history<sup>18</sup>.

In the age of appropriation, *home movies* become materials that can be recycled into different kinds of (re)productions, including television, advertisements, fictions, documentaries, and experimental films<sup>19</sup>. In perhaps one of the earliest articles on the subject, “Childhood Memories and Household Events in the Feminist Avant-Garde” from 1986, after a wonderful description of Maya Deren’s *Meshes into the Afternoon* as a gift of “Deren’s vision of a home movie” to a future generation of filmmakers, writer Maureen Turim asks, “Where have these younger women filmmakers gone with metaphors generated by the home movie, the amateur film, the captured fragments of family life and special events?”<sup>20</sup> Her analysis takes her to films that re-visit and reinscribe the home movie in their mise-en-scene, including *Glass Shadows* (Holly Fisher, 1976), as well as three films made with found home movies, *Covert Action* (Abigail Child, 1984)<sup>21</sup>, *Daughter-Rite* (Michelle Citrion, 1980) –made with autobiographical home movie footage from her childhood intercut with fictional, staged conversations between two women filmed in *cinema-vérité* style– and finally, *Daughters of Chaos* (Marjorie Keller, 1980). She is particularly engaged by *Covert Action*, of which she asks, “Who are these women and how do we feel about them as elements of a double spectacle –the one constituted by the home movie and the one reconstituted by the deconstructive montage of the home movies in the context of a speculation on image, motion, and pacing? Abigail Child has left her film whirling beyond itself. She has not fixed the answers to her image dilemma within the frame of the film itself. The film poses its women as questions”<sup>22</sup>.

While Turim refers to these films as part of *the feminist avant-garde*, Adrian Danks proposes the term *found home movie experimental film* to include “works that encompass the response of children to the images imposed on them by their parents and which emerge from the gaps between experience or memory and its representation”<sup>23</sup>. Following Turim, he inscribes these films within a feminist paradigm. Generally speaking, he says, these films are “an act of rebellion, denial and rejection” in order to “purge, reclaim and rewrite the lost images of childhood”. They have two principal objectives: first, to highlight the “lies” within the images, “revealed through slowing down, freezing, reframing and recontextualising elements such as facial expressions, gestures and bodily contact”; and second, to “show a domestic world

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<sup>18</sup> For a variety of articles on the work of Hungarian filmmaker Peter Forgács see: Efrén Cuevas (2005), William C. Wees (2010), Richard Kilborn (2014), and Ruth Balint (2014).

<sup>19</sup> In this chapter, we are interested in looking at experimental appropriations of the home movie, but in doing so we cannot look past other, more conventional approaches to the same material. It will be useful then for our analysis to compare and contrast more experimental approaches with more conventional ones in order to understand what stays the same and what is radically altered.

<sup>20</sup> Turim, Maureen, “Childhood Memories and Household Events in the Feminist Avant-Garde”, *Journal of Film and Video*, Vol. 38, No. 3/4 (Home Movies and Amateur Filmmaking, 1986), 88.

<sup>21</sup> “The images are taken primarily from home movie footage which one eventually understands as the chronicles two men made of their amorous encounters with various women at their vacation house. Mainly the personages are seen cavorting in the backyard, but there are also a number of close-ups, many of them shots of kisses. Child fragments the shots to an extreme –some are only a few frames long– then systematically repeats, varies, interweaves them, matching or contrasting the motion or graphic dominants involved. The frenzied pace is augmented by an autonomous and equally rapid sound track montage of musical clips, conversational fragments, random phrases, periodic announcements”, Turim, “Childhood Memories”, 89-90.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Danks, “Photographs in Haunted Rooms”.

to which no one can never return”. While Danks limits the *found home movie experimental film* to experimental films made by the children of the parents and authors of the original home movie material, we will open the definition to include (as Turim does) films that recycle materials that are “actually” found, that is, materials that are not necessarily shot by the filmmaker’s family members. These “orphan films”<sup>24</sup>, as they are called, can be home movies that belong to public national archives or other institutions that “adopt” these films and allow for these films to be seen and reimagined by filmmakers who are strangers to the people filmed and to the authors of these films. While this was perhaps less common in 2002, when Danks was writing on the *found home movie experimental film* (which would explain the exclusion of these types of films from his essay), in recent years this practice has become more commonplace as institutions and archives have (slowly) begun to include these “intimate” or “private” materials in their “public” collections, as well as projecting home movies in public screenings<sup>25</sup>. This chapter will include a reflection on this emerging practice and what it can mean for the contemporary found footage film. Around mid-way through the Chapter, our analysis leads us to look at a body of films (from Los Ingrávidos, Annalisa D. Quagliata, and Ximena Cuevas) made in Mexico, perhaps one of the first countries to include home movies in national archives and certainly the country with the most important and longest-running national archive in Latin America. We will also look at Paz Encina’s *Familiar*, made in Paraguay, a country where public access to archives is a much more recent and difficult process. As we will see, in these films the “conversation” being had with the archival material is not only personal (between a daughter and her father, for instance) but also radically collective.

In our analysis, we are interested in the ways in which experimental archival films reappropriate the face-image or mugshot in order to reveal what is within or below or behind the image itself. After all, as many writers on the subject have attested, home movies are “non-narrative” (Cuevas), “essentially fragmentary” (Zimmermann), “do not communicate” (Odin<sup>26</sup>) and “do not function as documentation” (Odin). For Odin, the family film “is...a *counter-document*”, because it is “used” for something that is not its own function<sup>27</sup>. Home movies are *common things* (he says, in reference to George Perec’s *cause commune*, in French):

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<sup>24</sup> Since the end of the 20th Century, archivists and academics have used the term “orphan film” to refer to any film that has been abandoned by its creator. The Orphan Film Symposium has widened the definition to include all films that exist outside of mainstream or commercial distribution circuits, including “public domain materials, home movies, outtakes, unreleased films, industrial and educational movies, independent documentaries, ethnographic films, newsreels, censored material, underground works, experimental pieces, silent-era productions, stock footage, found footage, medical films, kinescopes, small –and unusual– gauge films, amateur productions, surveillance footage, test reels, government films, advertisements, sponsored films, student works, and sundry other ephemeral pieces of celluloid (or paper or glass or tape or . . . )” . . . For Orphan Film Symposium founder Dan Streible (2007), in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, “every film (on celluloid) has become an orphan technology”.

<sup>25</sup> In Spain, for example, the Spanish Filmoteca has commissioned re-editings of amateur films and home movies in relation to recent Spanish history, including *Vestigios en Super-8: una crónica amateur de los años del cambio* (2018), edited by Elena Oroz and Xose Prieto Souto in collaboration with the Centro Galego de Artes da Imaxe, Filmoteca de Andalucía, Filmoteca de Castilla y León, Filmoteca – Institut Valencià de Cultura and Filmoteca de Navarra; and *Diarios del exilio* (2019), an archival documentary film that includes fragments of home movies filmed between 1937 and 1977 by families living in exile during Franco’s forty-year dictatorship, also produced by the Filmoteca, in association with the Cineteca of Mexico, and directed by Irene Gutiérrez.

<sup>26</sup> Odin, “Reflections on the Family Home Movie as Document”, 259.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*: 261.

the difficulty is “to free these images from the straitjacket in which they are trapped, to make them produce meaning and speak about what they are and what we are”<sup>28</sup>. Of everything that can be filmed in a home movie, the face of a loved one is certainly the most “common”. The “freeing” that we are interested in here then is two-fold: the freeing of home movie images and the freeing of the face-image in home movies. What we will argue here is that “freeing the face” in home movies goes hand-in-hand with formal experimentation with the materiality of the archive, of which the dissociation of image and sound is one of the most important strategies.

### What is a Mug?

On any sun-drenched, humid August day in Washington, D.C., tourists cruise the mall, hauling popcorn, kids, and cameras. Fathers pose their children in front of the African elephant grandly inhabiting the rotunda of the National Museum of Natural History. The kids assault the phones that play pre-recorded descriptions of this stuffed behemoth. Fathers survey their children’s mischief with camcorders like FBI agents at a demonstration. The kids lash their tongues out at their fathers, contort their faces, and defiantly perform for the camera<sup>29</sup>.

In the opening paragraph of *Reel Families*, Zimmermann describes a typical home movie scene. Without having seen the film, we can easily imagine the scene for it is similar to countless others. Fathers “pose” their children; fathers “survey” their children; kids “lash out their tongues” and “contort their faces”. These facial contortions –acts of defiant performance for the camera– are known as *mugs*. They are present in the majority of home movies, at one point or another, which is why Camper says that the mug is the gesture that “belongs, so to speak, to the home movie genre”.

What makes the mug the gesture that *belongs* to the home movie? Home movies share a few characteristics which distinguish these films from other amateur and professional formats, one of the most important of these is its tendency to be silent<sup>30</sup>. In this essentially silent cinema, the gesture occupies a greater place, for as Giorgio Agamben writes in his “Notes on Gesture”, gesture is a *gag* that indicates something that cannot be put into words<sup>31</sup>. As a gesture that stands out for its directness towards the viewer and the camera, has no need for sound nor speech, and as a playful and at times even aggressive gesture towards the person filming, the mug becomes the gesture that defines the home movie genre. If, as Agamben suggests, the cinema becomes the place to “reclaim gestures” (and to “record [their] loss”)<sup>32</sup>, then the home movie is where the *mug* –as a gesture– can be reclaimed (and its loss can be recorded). *But what exactly is reclaimed by the mug?* What does the mug “say”? If the mug is “communication of communicability”, if it is making visible or physical or indexical what cannot be said in words, unable to be figured out in language, then what is the mug

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<sup>28</sup> Quote is from Georges Perec, cited in Odin, “Reflections on the Family Home Movie as Document”, 261.

<sup>29</sup> Zimmermann, Patricia, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1995), ix.

<sup>30</sup> As Cuevas notes, the soundtrack of home movies tends to come from the comments of family and friends as the film is projected (I would also add that the soundtrack comes from the projector itself, as it is running; this is a sound which, as a curious side note, can extend beyond the duration of the film itself).

<sup>31</sup> For Agamben, gesture is “not being able to figure something out in language”: Agamben, Giorgio, “Notes On Gesture”, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2000), 589.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*: 523.

communicating exactly and how would we be able to put into words this essentially speech-hindering gesture? Does putting the mug into words, as we might attempt to do here, immediately remove or threaten its essentially silent nature?

Fortunately, cinema is not only gesture: it is also words, text, sound, montage. That is, to speak of the mug in the found home movie experimental film is not only to speak of this gesture but to study it in context and in relation to the other aspects of cinematographic language which give it (a new) meaning. It is precisely in what the filmmaker who appropriates this image does to it –not only by slowing down, freezing, reframing and recontextualising – but also, and perhaps most importantly, in its relationship to *sound*, which gives the gesture meaning.

Without this context, without its reappropriation, the image or gesture (“there are no images, only gestures” Agamben) is, it could be argued, meaningless or banal. Its banalization comes from the face image itself. Its superficial and supposed “universality” is only tested when the image has passed through a new “reading” by its appropriator; that is, when the image has been recontextualized by the film form itself and by its new place in a new montage and a new history. As cinema is essentially “silent” and home movies literally so, crucial to this process of resignification becomes the sound. To analyze appropriations of the mug we must look not only at how the face-image is recycled but also how the filmmaker responds to the image’s silence.

In order to begin to understand what the mugshot in home movies might communicate, we must understand what is communicated by the home movie itself, and for this a comprehension of the genealogy and history of the home movie is necessary. *Reel Families* (1995) offers such a historical account of the home movie, which far from contributing to its idealization, gives the reader a detailed history of its origins in capitalism. Thanks to Zimmermann’s research, we are able to understand that the home movie has, from its very origin, been intimately linked to consumerism. It is a technology used towards the construction of an ideological discourse on home and family life. From as early as the 1920s, amateur filmmaking manuals and popular magazines have instructed home movie filmmakers to record daily life “as it is” and family members in close-up, semi-closeup, or long shot, “as they really are”<sup>33</sup> and, in their attempt to emulate Hollywood film styles<sup>34</sup>, to avoid filming family members looking directly at the camera, instead, they must be directed by the filmmaker to “act naturally”<sup>35</sup>. And yet, in the home movie, direct address is a part of the form. In fact, as Odin writes, “No other types of films evidence as much direct address as the home movie. The family filmmaker’s camera functions first as a *go-between* and only secondly as a recording instrument”<sup>36</sup>. To participate in the film is to take part in a “*collective game* in the family domain”<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> From an article titled “Pictorial Diary for a Lifetime: Home Movies for Christmas” from 1928, cited in Zimmermann, *Reel Families*, 67.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> A 1934 Popular Science article says, “It goes without saying that the best shots you are likely to get of either children or grown-ups are those taken when your subjects are completely unaware that a camera is trained on them”, Zimmermann, *Reel Families*, 69.

<sup>36</sup> Odin, “Reflections on the Family Home Movie as Document”, 257.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

The mugshot in home movies –face-images children and wives looking directly and defiantly at the camera– can be understood then as both a staged participation in the *collective game*, as well as a sign of *rupture* of the discourse of idealized family life. These images “break the spell” of the institutionalization of the family as a natural construct<sup>38</sup>, just as they actively participate in it as actors. In the mugshot we can see the subject filmed “responding” to the camera –and the cameraman-father figure behind it– challenging him in his attempt to film daily life “as is”<sup>39</sup>. The supposed *innocence* of the home movie technically and visually represented by the *naturalness* with which it is supposedly filmed, is broken in the face-image or mugshot of home movies. It might seem paradoxical then that Camper would call the mugshot “*the gesture of the home movie*”. How can the quintessential gesture of a film be precisely the image that disrupts its continuity? This is why the mugshot in the home movie is such a fascinating –and complicated– image for analysis, *and* why it has continued to fascinate (and even obsess) filmmakers working with found home movies around the world. The home movie must be understood as an extension of a power discourse which uses the film camera (ideologically enforced by the unquestioned scientific objectivity of the photographic medium) as a machine surveillance of the body in the domestic sphere. Just as the criminal mugshot both exemplifies *and* disrupts the criminal justice system (disrupts it, for example, when the person photographed blinks or closes their eyes or changes their appearance so as to not be identified), the mugshot in home movies is both a rupture of the movie *and* the gesture which most “belongs” to it. This duality of the mugshot is precisely what makes it so interesting.

### **Ideology, Nostalgia, and Narration**

For Zimmermann, the history of amateur filmmaking and of home movies begins in photography. She turns to Emerson’s manuals, for instance, in order to understand how the first photographers were instructed to use their cameras. “Relying on popularized notions of empiricism that foregrounded powers of observation as the absolute verification,” she explains, “Emerson maintained that photographers should study their subjects closely; they should emulate scientific observation so that they could apprehend beautiful forms, arrangements, and lines in the subject”<sup>40</sup>. Since its invention, the photographic camera offered the possibility of a so-called scientific or “objective” observation of the other for study, investigation, and “improvement”. Through amateur photography, scientific management could finally “penetrate” daily life<sup>41</sup> in the domestic sphere as in the workplace. As Zimmermann observes, “With smaller equipment and more accurate observation, factory managers and parents could

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<sup>38</sup> Vance Packard in the 1952 issue of *American Magazine*: “It is important that the people acting in your movie be so deeply absorbed with what they are doing that they seem to be taken unawares. They break the spell if they yell, wave or stick out their tongues” (footnote 105). In Zimmermann, 1995: 134.

<sup>39</sup> The opposite can occur as well. Odin recalls a story told by filmmaker Merilee Bennet in *Song of Air*: “The shot of him [my father] talking directly into the camera with a tree and blue sky behind him was shot by men when I was 12 years old and he is actually telling me to stop, that it was enough now. I remember holding my finger on that button knowing that he couldn’t get really mad at me because I would have it on film, so he had to keep smiling even though he was getting cross” (Odin, 257). It seems poignant that it is precisely because the image has no sound that this situation is possible.

<sup>40</sup> Zimmermann, *Reel Families*, 5. Refers to Emerson’s “Educated Sight”, *Naturalistic Photography*.

<sup>41</sup> Zimmermann, *Reel Families*, 42.



control the worker and the family”<sup>42</sup>. As the family institution entered into a period of crisis in the 1950s, photography became even more important for the family home and home movies became its most important medium. In *On Photography* Susan Sontag observes, “Photography becomes a right of family life just when, in the industrializing countries of Europe and America, the very institution of the family starts undergoing radical surgery. As the claustrophobic unit, the nuclear family aggregate, photography came along to memorialize, to restate symbolically, the imperiled continuity and vanishing tenderness of family life”<sup>43</sup>. Amateur filmmaking in the home –or the home movie—became fertile ground for the values of pictorialism: “emphasis of the natural, harmony, a unified idea, and the search for universal, general values”<sup>44</sup>.

The ideological function of the home movie can be observed in both the content and the form of each home movie film, including the recording of family event such as birthdays, weddings, births, trips and celebrations –i.e. events where the family is all together; the particular emphasis on children and babies and the recording of “firsts” (first birthdays, first Christmas, etc.); the way that the camera searches for all of the family members present, capturing one by one on film; the emphasis on the “happy” moments and on the family smiling and acting happy for the camera. And despite the fact that many of these films were then seen by the family in intimate, private screenings, there is also a clear instruction to capture these moments for future observation:

Think of the pleasure, in after years, when your son or your daughter is grown up and leaves home of having a complete film record from cradle days up. Think what a generous filming of scenes of your honeymoon would mean to you know. The greatest single pleasure that is possible to store up for the days of old age is a wealth of reminiscences of happy hours spent in youth with comrades or people you care for in a sincere and lasting way. The old people of today have only their dimming memories to depend on; those of tomorrow will have libraries of this film. This camera ought to add greatly to the joy of every family<sup>45</sup>.

The idea expressed in this home movie manual from 1917 is that one must make a complete film record of the family for the “days of old age”, that is, for memory’s sake. When we look at these films now it is inevitable to feel a certain *nostalgia* –even if the home movie is not our own. The feeling of nostalgia transmitted through the home movie is so powerful that it is possible to achieve empathy and identification not only in the family members of the subjects filmed but also in complete strangers. Interestingly, this is quite the opposite effect of the criminal mugshot which does not call for empathy or identification, but rather caution and distrust (“they must have done something wrong to be there”) <sup>46</sup>.

For Cuevas, home movies bridge the micro and the macro when they are recycled by contemporary filmmakers into constructed narrative frameworks<sup>47</sup>. He limits his analysis to two types of narratives: collective portraits of countries/groups within a specific historical

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Sontag, Susan, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 8-9.

<sup>44</sup> Zimmermann, *Reel Families*, 42-43.

<sup>45</sup> Mervin Delaway, “Make and Project Your Own Home Movies” (1917), In: Zimmermann, *Reel Families*, 45.

<sup>46</sup> How opposite these emotions really are is difficult to say exactly; maybe they are not that different. I think about what Angela Davis said about her mugshot: how it converted her into both a criminal and a hero.

<sup>47</sup> Cuevas, “Change of Scale: Home Movies as Microhistory in Documentary Films”, 2014.

context (he examines *Private Chronicles. Monologue* by Vitaly Mansky from 1999, *Memory of Overseas Territories* by Claude Bossion from 1997, and *Something Strong Within* by Robert Nakamura and Karen Ishizuka from 1994) and microhistorical family narratives which are personal and family portraits embedded in their historical contexts (here he examines *Y in Vyvorg* by Pia Andell from 2005, *For My Children* by Michael Aviad from 2002, and *I for India* by Sandhya Suri from 2005). He argues that home movies are not in themselves “narrative films”, but they *become* narrative films –and consequently of interest for external spectators and academic study– when they are used by or appropriated by narrative films into a narrative construction. The films that he selects for his analysis “succeed in placing the narratives of these families in broader frameworks, providing the spectator with a deeper understanding of past times”<sup>48</sup>. But is it possible to place home movies into a narrative framework without recurring to the nostalgia and viewer-identification mentioned earlier? What is lost when narrative is prioritized over a more critical experience of the archival materials? It seems to me that many narrative appropriations of the home movie, no matter how valuable they may be as films, many times work to heighten a feeling of *nostalgia*. Many of these productions, no matter how interesting or well done, often seem to be following the advice that was given as early as 1917 by popular technical journals and mass-market magazines when amateur filmmakers were instructed to create “a narrative spectacle of idealized family life”<sup>49</sup>.

One of the most recent examples of this is *16 memorias* (Camilo Botero, 2008), which reconstructs 33 home movies filmed by Colombian amateur filmmaker Mario Posada Ochoa between 1945 and 1971 on a Bolex Paillard. Botero adds intertitles, music, and follies to the original silent 16mm material in order to create an illusion of synchronized sound. His montage tells a story divided into 16 memories: it begins with the birth of the eldest child (who is also the film’s narrator) and continues with the births of the subsequent children and family trips, seen (mostly) through the eyes of the young boy. The texts were written for the film in order to give the material narrative structure. However, the story is one of idealized family life: every trip taken is “the best trip”, every time is “the best time”, etc. While it is true that this film reworks found home movies in potentially experimental ways, it leaves the original home movie material ideologically unquestioned and formally unexplored. The artificial sentimentality, nostalgia, and exaggeration of the original film material is exacerbated by more of the same sentiment present in the added intertitles, music and sound. The result is a false idea of the “happy family”.

In two instances mugshots are reappropriated and re-constructed by the filmmaker. One is of one of the daughters on her way to school: she makes a face at the camera because she does not want to go (Figure 4.1). The other is of the male narrator (Figure 4.2): it is used to illustrate the fact that the young man –and his siblings– have grown up. In both circumstances, the face-image is frozen, accompanied by the sound of a “click” of an (imagined) photographic camera. The effect is the illusion of these mugshots as photographic snapshots. This particular way of showing these images connects film and the home movie genre to the photographic medium. Accompanied by the sound of a piano, the effect is also one of induced nostalgia. The

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid: 150.

<sup>49</sup> Zimmermann, *Reel Families*, 46.

face-image here is milked for what it's worth: as an image of presence used to exploit the home movie's sentimentality, foregoing a deeper exploration of the image. These moments literally take the image at "face value" and use it to illustrate a storyline which prioritizes narrative, story, and sentimentality.



Figures 4.1. and 4.2. *16 memorias* (Camilo Botero, 2008)

What goes unexplored in the film is the underlying surveillance of the father figure who filmed his wife and five children for decades and who caused major trauma as a result<sup>50</sup>. The film exploits the images that were produced through this surveillance as an analogic treasure, rather than going deeper to explore the images, to question and to test them through cinematographic experimentation. The film puts narrative first, while the images remain secondary to the storyline. The role that these images play in the family, the relationships that they reveal, the obsession with filming and the painful role of being filmed—all these subjects go unexplored, undisclosed, unresearched. Instead the filmmaker contents himself with the material that has been found and uses this material for his own narrative and sentimental end, which has been forced upon the material under the preconceived notion that home movies are all nostalgia, emotion, and good times—the *cliché* of the home movie. Botero attributes himself the role of carrying the torch of the original author's (Posada Ochoa) legacy. He does not appropriate these materials per se, but rather re-edits and cuts down the 33 hours of footage into feature-length compilation of what the original director intended, adding sound, heavy-handed music and titles to emphasize emotions.

A different approach is *My Mexican Bretzel* (Nuria Giménez Lorang, 2019), made with home movie footage shot by Frank A. Lorang between the 1940s and 1960s. Lorang and his wife, Ilse G. Ringier, are turned into fictional characters (Léon and Vivian Barrett) through the dispositif of a "found" diary which narrates (silently, in on-screen text) the life of a bourgeois woman (Vivian) in the 1940s and 1960s. Like *16 Memorias*, this film also prioritizes narrative, but instead of constructing a "narrative spectacle of idealized family life", it creates a narrative spectacle of a marriage that is falling apart, told from the fictional point of view of the wife. The film is so heavily constructed that even as it comes to an end, so does the wife's life, and her death becomes the chosen way to end the film before the credits roll. In this film the "good times" that we might see in the home movie footage are transformed into moments of rupture,

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<sup>50</sup> The filmmaker spoke about this in his presentation of the film at the Universidad de las Artes in Ecuador in 2019. However, the film itself does not address this issue nor hint at its possibility.

uncertainty, unrealized desire and lasting regret. The fictional diary often brings attention to “Vivian’s” unease being filmed by her husband. The closer shots of her face, as she smiles for the camera, are turned into images of refusal towards her husband and his obsession with the camera (Figure 4.3). The prevailing emotion here is not necessarily one of *nostalgia*, but rather the question of “what might have happened...”, a kind of *nostalgia for the future that could have been*. This nostalgia is framed within a context of false diaries and placebos, accompanied by a minimalist soundtrack which is often silent, spontaneously punctuated by sounds of objects in the frame (a train, a race car, an ice skate) or experimental electronic music, heightening moments of emotional and narrative tension. The sound also works as a placebo, bringing attention to the film’s artifice.



Figure 4.3. *My Mexican Bretzel* (Nuria Giménez Lorang, 2019)

A more interesting and complex project around women, home movies, and the travelogue film, is *Terra Femme: A Performance Lecture About Women and the Travelogue Archives* (Courtney Stephens, 2020)<sup>51</sup>, an hour-long lecture performance and real time event on early female travelogues filmed by women (Figure 4.4). The performance incorporates many new archives' holdings, including Northeast Historic Film, Bristol Empire and Commonwealth Museum, African American Home Movie Archive—all amateur archives shot by women in the 1920s and 40s— set to music by Sarah Davachi. Here the voice over that accompanies the images is Stephens’ own. However, she does not pretend to “speak for” or ventriloquize the voices of the anonymous women in the films—although she does include biographical information found in her research— but rather speaks from her own position as a

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<sup>51</sup> This lecture performance took place on Zoom on September 13th, 2020 as part of the online edition of Open City Documentary Film Festival 2020. In her invitation to the event, Stephens shares that she had given iterations of this lecture in person for the last few years, but decided to take a different approach during the Covid-19 quarantine of 2020. For more information on this performance, see: <https://opencitylondon.com/events/terra-femme-women-and-the-travelogue-archives/>

woman of this century, looking back at these images and what they provoke in her. Doing so allows Stephens to establish a more critical approach to the archival images.



Figure 4.4. *Terra Femme: A Performance Lecture About Women and the Travelogue Archives* (Courtney Stephens, 2020)

In many documentaries and fiction films that use home movie footage, however, nostalgia seems to be inescapable, intentional, even pragmatic. For scholar Pablo Piedras, the nostalgia present in *16 memorias* hints at or reveals a nostalgia present in film history itself. He writes,

¿Será una percepción inundada de nostalgia? Posiblemente. Algo de ese orden se respira en las imágenes de *16 memorias*, nostalgia por un tiempo de la infancia en el que crecer se asociaba a descubrir, nostalgia, por qué no, por un tiempo que tal vez dentro de algunas décadas será considerado la infancia del cine o si se quiere –con menos mística y más ciencia–, del discurso audiovisual. Hipótesis personal: quizás la fascinación que ejercen las imágenes fílmicas de lo cotidiano se relacione con el indefectible carácter de pérdida que significa el paso de un minuto y la impresión de un fotograma, en la vida y en el cinematógrafo<sup>52</sup>.

Certainly, the nostalgia so often present in home movie appropriations is a nostalgia for cinema's past. But the idealization and romantic re-telling of this cinematic past is problematic because it ignores a historical and political perspective of cinema in favor of reinforcing a superficial fascination with the image, which is really a fascination with the technology that produces the image. In an interview with writer Caitlin Quinlan about *Terra Tremme*, Stephens speaks to the contradiction of experiencing both artistic admiration for the women who filmed the amateur travelogue films and, at the same, certain ambivalence regarding modes of objectification and exoticism resulting from their colonial gazes. Towards the end of the film, Stephens' voice-over comments on her archival-researcher-instinct to imagine the life of one anonymous subject, J. Shipley Dixon, and to enact a romanticization of her life (something that

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<sup>52</sup> Piedras, Pablo, "16 Memorias", *Revista de Cine Documental*, Número 1 (2010).

Botero and Giménez do in their films, albeit in different ways). She says that these fascinations might have “let her off the hook for some of the visual modes she does not escape, cliché and forms of exoticism”<sup>53</sup>. Fascination with the archive (with the image, but also with imagining who may be behind the camera and what *she* might be like) can encumber—or, at the very least complicate—a more critical approach to the archive.

Frederic Jameson calls “nostalgia film” any film that returns to past forms<sup>54</sup>. As scholar Vera Dika explains, for Jameson: “nostalgia in postmodern film is not so much a representation of a particular historical period as it is a re-creation of its *cultural artifacts*. The past is metonymically reexperienced, not only through the represented clothing styles and music, but also through the stylistic elements from films of the 1930s to the 1950s”<sup>55</sup>. As such, *nostalgia films* do not only return to old stories, but also to old film genres, “and to those genres’ imagistic and narrative signifying systems”<sup>56</sup>. As examples, he cites *American Graffiti* (George Lucas, 1973) —“set out to recapture, as so many films have attempted since, the henceforth mesmerizing lost reality of the Eisenhower era”<sup>57</sup>—; as well as examples of what Jameson calls “aesthetic colonization” of the American and the Italian 1930s”<sup>58</sup> in *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974) and *Il Conformista* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1970), respectively; and finally, *Body Heat* (1981), a remake of James M. Cain’s 1934 crime novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, where Jameson observes “the insensible colonization of the present” through an *intertextuality* that is *built into the aesthetic effect*, in which “the history of aesthetic styles displaces ‘real’ history”<sup>59</sup>. The nostalgia film blurs its own contemporaneity to make it possible for the viewer to receive the narrative “beyond real historical time”<sup>60</sup>, producing a *crisis in historicity*. As a result, warns Jameson, the nostalgia film tells us stories that are no longer our own.<sup>61</sup> At the center of this crisis, for Jameson, is the contemporary fetishization of the human body.

But how to *resist* nostalgia when a film reappropriates images from the past? And how to do so, specifically in the reworking of home movies, potentially one of the most nostalgic of all film forms? And more importantly for our purposes, how to resist the fetishization of the

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<sup>53</sup> Quinlan, Caitlin, “Self-Making and the Travelogue: Courtney Stephens’s *Terra Femme*”, *The Brooklyn Rail* (November 2020).

<sup>54</sup> Jameson, Frederic, “Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism”, *New Left Review* 146 (July-August 1984): 53-92.

<sup>55</sup> Dika, Vera, *Recycled Culture in Contemporary Art and Film: The Uses of Nostalgia* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2003), 10. In her research, Dika returns to films made between 1973 and 2003 that demonstrate a rise in a nostalgic style. In response to Jameson, she asks if acts of “resistance” can be “staged” within these films, even as they invoke stories, images and generic elements of the past. Although we are looking at a very different film corpus in this Chapter, i.e., experimental reappropriations of home movies, we are asking a similar question. While she studies films that “recall” the past in different ways, but never through the literal recycling of actual images and sounds from these films, we look at films that may “return to the past” in their re-appropriation of past materials, and specifically, in their return to the mugshot image, but that also also break away from this past by breaking away from the traditionally established ideological function of the mugshot in the home movie. For more on critical possibilities for nostalgia in film, see: Sprengler, Christine, *Screening Nostalgia: Populuxe Props and Technological Color Aesthetics in Contemporary American Film* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Jameson, “Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism”, 67.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>61</sup> Dika, *Recycled Culture*, 10.

face or mug in the home movie in reappropriations? In this Chapter, we are interested in looking at films that work with home movies in experimental and innovative ways that are also decidedly anti-nostalgic. We are interested in films that challenge “the ideological role” of the home movie that Odin describes<sup>62</sup>; just as in the previous Chapter, we were interested in appropriations of the criminal mugshot image that work against the original intention of the image.

If criminal mugshots have been historically used to classify, incriminate, and justify a criminal justice system (legal and illegal, as in the case of dictatorships for example), the face-image in home movies has been similarly used ideologically to uphold the family institution presided and represented by the father figure. Just as in the previous Chapter we discovered experimental and innovative ways of subverting the criminal mugshot in order to question the criminal justice system responsible for the arrest, and return agency to the criminalized individual, in this Chapter we will discover films that subvert the face-image and return the mugshot its original possibility of defiance. What we will discover is that the films that work with these materials in anti-ideological and anti-nostalgic ways, are often anti-narrative as well and as a result, much more experimental and innovative in their approximation to the archive. These films resist the “easy” (traditional, expected) way of showing these images (as representations of happy family life and nostalgia for the past) and try to explore what is *behind them* – that is, what is there but which often is obscured by nostalgia. These anti-ideological, anti-nostalgic, and anti-narrative explorations are also, as a result, anti-spectacular<sup>63</sup>. What we will find is that the main way in which these films resist nostalgia and narration is through experimental forms of refusal through sound. Our work hopes to contribute to archival and found footage studies, as they have often overlooked the importance of the sound component<sup>64</sup>.

### **Resisting Nostalgia: Contrapuntal Sound, Fragmentation, and Counter-Editing**

Danks’ essay on the *found home movie experimental film* is concerned with “the often explicitly autobiographical, analytical and self-critical uses made of home photographic materials in a range of broadly feminist experimental films”, as well as the “recontextualisation and representation of home movies in these films”<sup>65</sup>. The main focus of his analysis is Australian Merilee Bennett’s 1987 film, *A Song of Air*, which he situates within “a specific realm of feminist film practice that attempts to reorient, recontextualise and to essentially interrogate the film and photographic records ceded from parent to child”. *A Song of Air* uses footage selected from approximately 16 hours of home movies made by Merilee’s father, Reverend

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<sup>62</sup> Odin, “Reflections on the Family Home Movie as Document”, 260.

<sup>63</sup> “Popular discourse instructed filmmakers to exalt the everyday details of family living to a level of spectacle, wonder, and importance” and “It should have a story to tell...”. Zimmermann, *Reel Families*, 66.

<sup>64</sup> “Sound is an often an overlooked component of found footage cinema, its nomenclature alone prioritising the image. Nevertheless, sound is a key element in this tradition, whether it involves the manipulation of existing synchronised sound, the scoring of images to music or other found sounds, the presence of voice-over, or the marked ‘absence’ of a soundtrack in the conventional sense. The found footage soundtrack commonly acts as a means to regulate what might seem to be a largely scattered field of images (as it also does in many essay films, a closely aligned form) or as a counterpoint that can both resonate with and grate against what we are seeing”. Danks, Adrian, “The Global Art of Found Footage Filmmaking”, in *Traditions in World Cinema*, eds. Linda Badley, R. Barton Palmer and Steven Jay Schneider (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 248.

<sup>65</sup> Danks, “Photographs in Haunted Rooms”.

Arnold Lucas Bennett, between 1956 and 1975, re-edited in combination and juxtaposition of her own voice-over narration in the form of a letter addressed to her deceased father. Roger Odin has also written about this film. He emphasizes the violence of the original home movie images. He writes, “The film visualizes how the father used cinema to rule over the family: he occupies the center of the image, organizing the shooting and ordering people to perform in front of the camera. [He] uses cinema to mold his family”<sup>66</sup>. His expression of power and control is not only present in what is being filmed but also *how* he films it. “The images are shot on a tripod, well framed, and carefully directed”<sup>67</sup>, observes Odin. It is precisely because they are well made that they are to be feared. “Family movies that are too ‘well made’ exert violence on the family”<sup>68</sup>. Merilee rebels against family order and the films not only by choosing how and when to cut the images, but also in her own filming of images in video (“a dirty image”<sup>69</sup>) which she uses in opposition to her father’s “overpolished” images. The most significant of these images is of her own face –in profile– eyes-closed and in the middle of a scream (Figure 4.5). She returns to this image on several occasions to illustrate her inability to speak to her father –and the simultaneous desire/anger to tell him about her life and the pain she’s gone through– both while he was still alive and now in his absence. This image can be considered Bennett’s *counter-face-image*, a *response-image* to the images made by her father which, although “well-made”, do not capture how she *really* feels.



Figure 4.5. *A Song of Air* (Merilee Bennett, 1987)

The film deconstructs the image of the family, while emphasizing Bennett’s own subjectivity.

<sup>66</sup> Odin, “Reflections on the Family Home Movie as Document”, 257.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid: 258.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid: 259.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.



Danks brings attention to her use of voice-over in opposition to her father's images as an essentially feminist practice in film:

The act of speaking in one's 'own' voice is also central to the feminist project of the film. As contemporary viewers looking back at these materials, we often conceive of them as silent, indoctrinated as we are by the decorum of public screenings of other kinds of movies. But the experience of these films within the family is seldom marked by this lack of verbal discourse. It is this verbal narration that is often claimed as an essential component of this feminist project. It is also integral to women's roles in home image-making and family narratives<sup>70</sup>.

Unlike Odin, Danks places special importance on the voice, perhaps too much as he is unable to see Bennett's more radical response to her father's images that takes place in her own image-making through the less polished form of video. In Turim's analysis of *Daughter-Rite* (Michelle Citrion, 1980), the voice also takes center stage: "the home movie footage is always accompanied by a voice-over monologue, a spoken diary that creates a third autonomous narrative"<sup>71</sup>. For Turim, the voice-over takes too much space in the film, not allowing "a silent space in which to concentrate on the ways in which the reworked home footage is in itself articulate and suggestive"<sup>72</sup>. With the exception of films like *Covert Action*, in which the women are "posed as questions" that the film leaves unanswered, it seems that a "problem" or question in many found home movie experimental films is that of sound vs. silence and voice vs. voicelessness. It becomes clear that to speak of the appropriation of the mugshot in found home movie experimental cinema, we must also speak about the voice—and voicelessness—as one of the most important elements in these films.

For scholar Pooja Rangan, the "ocularcentrism" of feminist media theory devoted to the topic of the gaze has been so great that in comparison very little critical attention has been given to the voice, even though, as she acknowledges, "the soundtrack—and specifically the documentary convention of voice-over commentary—has become a central site of feminist intervention and medium of political expression since the 1970s"<sup>73</sup>, championed by filmmakers and scholars such as Trinh T. Minh-ha and Kaja Silverman<sup>74</sup>. From the 1990s onward, says Rangan, documentaries have turned to the voice-over as "the site of freedom and social recognition"<sup>75</sup>. These autoethnographic deployments of voice-over are "celebrated as subversive and reflexive", and yet, she insists, "The question of how precisely a speaking voice counters the objectification of a powerful gaze, and of whether a voice can, in fact, give rise to similar patterns of objectification, has not been satisfactorily answered"<sup>76</sup>. Rangan asks, "...To what extent does taking back the voice-over go hand in hand with giving up the grain of the

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<sup>70</sup> Danks, "Photographs in Haunted Rooms".

<sup>71</sup> Turim, "Childhood Memories and Household Events in the Feminist Avant-Garde", 91. For more on how voice is used in *Daughter-Rite* from a psychological-filmic-anthropological perspective, see: García Díaz, Noemí de los Ángeles, *Una Casa. El retrato familiar en el cine documental: Infancia, trauma, memoria y narración*", Tesis doctoral (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2021).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Rangan, Pooja, "In Defense of Voicelessness: The Matter of the Voice and the Films of Leslie Thornton", *Feminist Media Histories* 1(3) (2015): 96.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid: 97.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid: 106.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid: 96.

voice?”<sup>77</sup>. In other words, to what extent does this particular use of voice-over eliminate the possibility of ambiguity, mystery and uncertainty? While these films take the voice away from the father (original filmmaker) and “give it” to the daughter (new filmmaker), they arguably continue to dispel the false idea of objectivity that is so ingrained in the documentary form.

A film that responds to the question of how a speaking voice counters the objectification of a powerful gaze is *So Much I Want to Say* (Mona Hatoum, 1983)<sup>78</sup>. This video documents a live performance at the Western Front—a non-profit artist-run center in Vancouver founded by artist Katie Craig in 1973—that was transmitted to Vienna through a SlowCam video and telephone music exchange. It has been described in the following way by writer Kristen Hutchinson:

A pair of male hands covers Hatoum’s face. She struggles to remove the smothering hands with her own hands, by twisting her head and at times biting the fingers. But her struggle is in vain. The soundtrack, a repetition of the phrase “So much I want to say” drones on and on, reinforcing Hatoum’s struggle as a futile exercise. The claustrophobic framing device of a series of close-ups creates a visceral response, a feeling of fear and unease in the pits of your stomachs, as if watching a crime that you cannot do anything about it<sup>79</sup>.

We mention this film, even if it does not employ home movies in the most obvious sense (although it could be said that it fits the description of the home movie, as a film primarily concerned with the domestic space and intended for a more intimate spectatorship), as an important experimental work inscribed in a feminist film practice following second wave feminism that emphasizes the woman/filmmaker’s *inability to speak*, while at the same time playing with the close-up of a face in contradiction to the ever-present voice in repetition. As a woman born in Lebanon to Palestinian parents, Hatoum’s work explores the relationship between politics and the individual through performance. In *So Much I Want to Say*, the image of Hatoum’s face is transmitted through a SlowCam video that provides a scrolling effect, becoming fragmented through the transmission, and allowing for strange/playful and unexpected combinations to occur between her eyes, nose, mouth/teeth, and the man’s hands. The fragmentation of the woman’s face visually corresponds to the violence of censorship and being silenced expressed in the image, while the relentless sound playfully contradicts the fact that her mouth has been shut closed (Figure 4.6).

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<sup>77</sup> Rangan, “In Defense of Voicelessness”, 108. Rangan makes reference to another text by Roland Barthes: “The Grain of the Voice,” in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

<sup>78</sup> Film available on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/262094223>.

<sup>79</sup> Hutchinson, Kristen, “Intimacy and Distance: Mona Hatoum at the Western Front”, *Luma Quarterly* 19(5) (Winter 2020).



Figure 4.6. *So Much I Want to Say* (Mona Hatoum, 1983)

For Rangan, an experimental response to the problem of voice in documentary *disassociates the image and the sound*, as is the case in Leslie Thornton's *Jennifer, Where Are You?* (1981). Filmmaker and writer Su Friedrich summarizes the film very well in her article for *The Downtown Review* in 1981: "The dominant image is a tight close up shot of a small girl engaged in various activities: playing with lipstick, a mirror, matches. These shots are separated by black leader from other, upside down, images. The soundtrack consists of music, natural sounds (footsteps, water, etc.) and a man's voice repeatedly asking the title question"<sup>80</sup>. Unlike *So Much I Want to Say*, where we see a woman's face covered by a man's hands, and hear on the soundtrack the voice of a woman repeating "So much I want to say..." (without actually saying more), in *Jennifer, Where Are You?* the girl's voice is strangely absent. In her exploration of Thornton's work, Rangan offers a revisionist approach to the cinematic and intellectual history of the feminist turn in documentary. She argues that Thornton's experimental film practice "reveals the collusion of sound and image, voice and look, in the documentary dynamics of objectification", specifically as it regards the "material specificity of the voice"<sup>81</sup>. Thornton's experimental innovation resides in "her way of bringing our attention to the violence as well as the potential of the voice as a vexed site of interpellative contact"<sup>82</sup>. I would also add that by revealing the violence through an experimental approach to sound which emphasizes the materiality of the voice, Thornton is arguably making evident in the sound what has been invisibilized in the silent image of the close-up of Jennifer's face. It is difficult to *see* the violence behind the camera surveillance of a child by a grown-up as

<sup>80</sup> Friedrich, Su, "Jennifer, Where Are You?", *The Downtown Review* 3(1) (Fall-Winter-Spring, 1981-82): 8.

<sup>81</sup> Rangan, "In Defense of Voicelessness", 97.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*: 109.

well as the invisible violence in the relationships between adults and children. This violence is made present in the sound.

Thornton's "counter-intuitive" use of sound is innovative, according to Rangan, because it works against the cliché of "giving voice" to the marginalized or objectified social subject, and in doing so pushes the spectator's expectations regarding voice and representation. She writes:

In cinema, [Michel] Chion writes, a human voice commands the soundtrack much as a human face draws the eye in any shot composition. This unspoken principle of "vococentrism," he argues, is ultimately at stake in the "privilege accorded to the human voice over all other sonic elements" in the technical and aesthetic conventions of cinema. To state the inverse, we might argue that a voice in cinema connotes humanness only to the extent that it can serve as *the audiovisual equivalent of a human face* or, as Aristotle puts it, a sound with a (linguistic) meaning. But *unlike a face*, which is a discrete, visual, bounded thing, the phenomenal boundlessness of sound means that a speaking voice is alive with elements that threaten to disperse its semantic content. This explains why voices are often attributed to faces or "talking heads" in a variety of cinematic genres. On the surface, this innocent practice seems undeserving of comment, but in fact, it is a way to place a frame around sound and to reel in the inhuman, lawless otherness of the voice<sup>83</sup>.

Instead of "giving" the child a voice, Thornton "defends the voicelessness"<sup>84</sup>. By going against our expectations on voice (and its relation to the face), Thornton ultimately challenges the film medium itself. For Friedrich,

By forcibly conjoining Her gaze and His voice, the film makes us consider the implications of the film medium and our given environment, both of which can create such an agonized resonance between two disparate elements. The fact that we are each victims of our individual and shared memories complicates the effort to expose and analyze the dialectic between authority and resignation as it constructs our selves and our world. We are saturated by it; it is embedded in every institution and every relationship<sup>85</sup>.

The face image in the home movie known as "the mug" is an *essentially silent gesture* – one for which there is no voice. Thornton's way of working with sound, without recurring to an added or fictionalized voice for the child, in a way is more coherent with the original materiality of the home movie. Her "defense of the voicelessness" becomes a way to experiment in sound and image, employing and exploring the original materials *on their own terms* (fragmentation and division, child is all image and father is all sound) and at the same time making them say something entirely new. In challenging us to reconsider the relationship between image and sound, and between face and voice, Thornton makes the spectator rethink his/her relationship not only to the institution of family but more generally "every relationship" –including, of course, his/her relationship to film. This relationship is one that is built on nostalgia. As Friedrich observes, "Throughout *Jennifer*, Leslie Thornton makes it clear that terror and evasion are an inadequate, but nostalgic, sublimation of the need for genuine communication. And she makes it clear that we must break the cycle, or be broken"<sup>86</sup>. In breaking with a false harmonious unity between image and sound, Thornton also breaks away from nostalgia.

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<sup>83</sup> Rangan, "In Defense of Voicelessness", 119. Italics added.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid: 110.

<sup>85</sup> Friedrich, "Jennifer, Where Are You?", 9-10.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid: 10.



Figure 4.7. *Jennifer, Where Are You?* (Leslie Thornton, 1981): “She is all image”<sup>87</sup>

For Miriam de Rosa, modernity’s obsession with gesture is intertwined with the fascination for the archive, where the archive becomes a collection of human movement and the cinema (as a kind of archive), becomes an encyclopedia of gestures<sup>88</sup>. I would add that in the imposition of narrative unity and having to “tell a story”, films can often lose their fragmentary nature and the gesture (which is by definition a fragment) can become a symbol, a stand-in for some piece of information that supports or strengthens the narrative. The mugshot is one of these gestures. As De Rosa observes, “There is in fact an alternative in the reconsideration of the ordered, scientific, optimising, utilitarian element; it can be found by looking at gesture not as a means to achieve something, but at something in itself, in its nature, structure, and at the way it is deployed...”<sup>89</sup>. If we follow De Rosa’s proposal, the mug as it is appropriated by film has to be more than “a means to achieve something”: it has to be looked at as something “in itself”.

De Rosa argues that counter-editing keeps gestures fragmented and separated, instead of stitched together. The home movie, as an essentially fragmented text, becomes an ideal terrain for counter-editing and experimental film practice. Thornton’s film is a pioneer in this regard as it rejects unity in the image and sound, thereby reinforcing the film’s fragmentation and the child’s voicelessness. While Bennett’s film anticipates video as a political rupture with the more polished film form. Today, in contemporary post-digital experimental film practice, we see that this *fragmentation* and *rupture* can go even further. Not only does it occur between the image and sound (as it did in Thornton’s film) but also within the image itself. In the age of digital technology, each frame can be digitally fragmented through glitch and error and ultimately transformed.

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<sup>87</sup> Friedrich, “Jennifer, Where Are You?”, 9-10.

<sup>88</sup> De Rosa, Miriam, “On gesture, or of the blissful promise”, *NECSUS. European Journal of Media Studies*, #Gesture, 8(2) (2019): 114.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*: 114-115.

### Face-Glitch, Failure and Refusal: *Valeria* (Los Ingrávidos, 2016)

The short film *Valeria* from 2016 by the Ingrávidos Collective is a great example of just how fragmented the face-image and mugshot in home movies can become through digital reappropriation<sup>90</sup>. The film is title and explanation-free. A piercing soundtrack of found sounds processed by synthesizers and layered in the editing cuts through the images, turning each eye, nose, cheek and mouth to pieces of shard on the screen. The film consists of fragments of faces from Super 8mm home movies which have been filmed by a digital camera and then digitally distorted in the editing (Figure 4.8). At almost 9 minutes, the film's images and soundtrack are overwhelming. There is not even a hint of nostalgia here; only a sense that something is very, very wrong. Just as nostalgia is erased, the viewer's awareness of the historicity of the image is heightened by the film's chosen form. Digital distortion becomes a way to indicate to the viewer that his/her time is not the same as the original home movie footage: *your time*, the new images seem to say, *is now, not then*.



Figure 4.8. Faces like shards of glass  
*Valeria* (Los Ingrávidos, 2016)

<sup>90</sup> Film available on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/222050579>.

While from the 1990s onward, the idea was to identify with the female voice, through *her telling her own story* (a story that is not necessarily evident in the images and therefore must be heard in words), and by way of the voice-over (“as the site of freedom and social recognition”, says Rangan), today in contemporary experimental film practice we find films that forego identification and story-telling all together (in the spirit of the 1980s films of Abigail Child, Leslie Thornton, Mona Hatoum), in order to perceive that something is inherently wrong and that what is wrong is within the image and sound: within cinema itself. What is “wrong” is not beneath the image or under the image or over it or next to it, but within it, on the surface of its very materiality.

This approach becomes much more sensorial in the process. It is not so much about content than about the form. But interestingly, the form informs us about the content. If these images and sounds are fragmented it is because the story is fragmented, history is fragmented, *these people are fragmented*. The cut across the image and sound is a laceration that has been on our bodies and our history. Fragmentation impedes the spectator from seeing any of the faces clearly. The pixels and lines and supposed digital errors become masks for the girls and women depicted, as they are filmed, followed, interrupted by the camera (and the cameramen) and as they return-gaze. This mask works similarly to the mask that becomes Jennifer’s face in Thornton’s film, as Friedrich so well described:

In the last shot, Jennifer not Jennifer stares at the flame so stubbornly, with such absorption, that for the first time we find ourselves removed from her, by her. Until then, she had made “eye contact” with us. We had established a compassionate “dialogue” with her through her gaze. Now, as her seductive and playful gaze crumbles into a silent and angry mask, we are staring *at* her and feeling the full weight of her resistance. The situation is critical. She cannot leave, *but she can no longer participate*. The best she can do is to not move, not respond, and not look anywhere but into herself for the strength to ignore his command and to break the cycle<sup>91</sup>.

A return gaze becomes impossible in *Valeria* not because the women look away (they don’t) but because the image (and the faces) has been deformed, broken, turned into pieces of pixels and information on the screen (Figure 4.9). These women are not staring back at us asking us to step in and save them; these women are –to use Friedrich’s words– *no longer participating*, they have checked out. They are no longer there. And that is the most subversive aspect of the film: it makes it possible for these women to *leave the image* and makes evident that *they were never really there*. The face-image, after all, *is not the person*, it is merely a representation of the person. In the digital era of reproduction and appropriation, as the index further separates itself from the object, it becomes more possible to show this disconnection –and the staggering abyss – between the person and their image. A pixel cannot be a person; it can only be what it is: a pixel.

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<sup>91</sup> Friedrich, “Jennifer, Where Are You?”, 10.

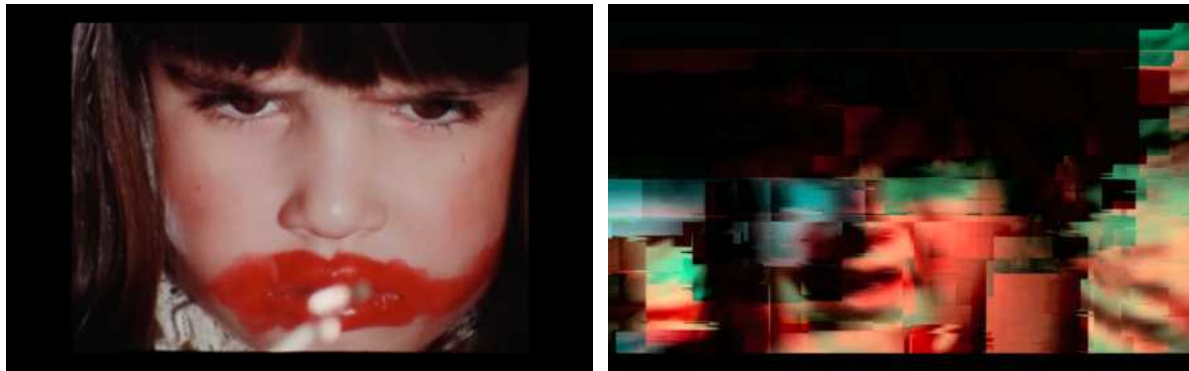


Figure 4.9. Masks, or the absence of return gaze  
*Jennifer, Where Are You?* (Leslie Thornton, 1981)/ *Valeria* (Los Ingrávidos, 2016)

Los Ingrávidos is a film collective that emerged in 2012 out of the #YoSoy132 University student-led movement in opposition to against the PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto and in response to the mass media coverage of the 2012 general election, directly connected to other Occupy movements developed since the so-called “Arab Spring” in late 2010 followed by the Spanish 15-M movement from 2011<sup>92</sup>. The collective began publishing videos through an anonymous YouTube channel for fear of retaliation, and to this date they continue to publish several videos every year on their Vimeo channel. As curator Almudena Escobar López writes, “Ingrávidos is a response against the consistent use of audiovisual materials as powerful tools of domination and control for those in power. Images of violence in the media are often isolated, decontextualized and even muted with a talking discourse over it. Ingrávidos emerges from the need to dismantle the audiovisual grammar from the aesthetic-television-cinematic corporatism”<sup>93</sup>. In their manifesto, they directly state their artistic and political objectives:

*Hay que destruir la pseudo-poesía, toda ella fallida, que el imperio televisivo reivindica.  
 Hay que destruir la horrible nitidez de sus cámaras millonarias. Hay que sincopar y desfasar.  
 Hay que sobreponer el ojo enfermo que soporta su colorimetría.  
 Hay que convertir en ruido su millonaria propaganda.  
 Hay que someter a continua destrucción la gramática audiovisual de Televisa Tradiciones.  
 Hay que demoler la inmediatez neutralizada que el frívolo romanticismo de sus imágenes suscita.  
 Hay que plantear la des(re)conexión sistemática de las imágenes y los sonidos<sup>94</sup>.*

Through a radical use of sound-image “dis-re-connection”, Los Ingrávidos position themselves against the imperial image and content of television, an imperial audiovisual grammar based on the sharp quality of its images and the “frivolous romance” of its propaganda

<sup>92</sup> Escobar López, Almudena, “Weightless Present.” Program notes for Colectivo Los Ingrávidos film programa, as part of the 2018 Alternative Film & Video film festival in Belgrade, Serbia: 71.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid: 73.

<sup>94</sup> Los Ingrávidos, “Manifiesto” (Proyecto IDIS, Universidad de Buenos Aires, December 14, 2014). “You have to destroy the pseudo-poetry, which has failed and which the television empire revindicates. You have to destroy the awful sharpness of their millionaire cameras. You must syncopate and phase shift. You have to superimpose the sick eye that supports its colorimetry. You have to turn their millionaire propaganda into noise. The audiovisual grammar of Traditional Television must be subjected to continuous destruction. It is necessary to demolish the neutralized immediacy that the frivolous romanticism of its images provokes. We must consider the systematic dis(re)connection of images and sounds”.



content.

The name referenced in the video's title belongs to Valeria Gutiérrez, an 11-year-old child who was raped and murdered on June 8th, 2017 in Nezahualcóyotl, Mexico<sup>95</sup>. "But [the title also references] the other 'Valeria(s)'" one of the members of the collective tells me in an interview. Femicide is an epidemic in Mexico, with official numbers indicating that at least 10 women are murdered daily. This video is part of a series produced on the subject, including *Génesis*, also from 2016, named after Génesis Urrutia, a journalism student who disappeared on September 29th, 2016. Veracruz is the city with one of the highest numbers of assassinations of journalists in the world (Mexico holds the second spot after Siria, which was at war). Both *Valeria* and *Génesis* apply similar digital processes to the image and sound, but while *Génesis* works with an originally digital image, *Valeria* has the added temporal step of working Super 8mm film which has been digitally processed.

One of the main digital processes used both in *Valeria* and *Génesis* is the *glitch*, a term for digital technoculture, typically viewed as an error, a mistake, a failure to function. According to Hito Steyerl, malfunction is one of the main constitutions of the reproduction of digital information because it is a sign of its very circulation. She says, "Digital information is thus characterised by transformation, degradation, circulation, but also by its surprising ability to mutate and produce unpredictable results. The glitch, the bruise of the image or sound testifies to its being worked with and working; being passed on and circulated, being matter in action"<sup>96</sup>. Thinking about the glitch in relation to gender and the body, author Legacy Russell writes about glitch's potential as a form of refusal. She writes, "The glitch is a passage through which the body traverses toward liberation, a tear in the fabric of the digital"<sup>97</sup>. In other words, glitch is "digital orgasm"<sup>98</sup>. More than a software malfunction, she proposes that we look at glitch as a call to action ("Be the glitch"<sup>99</sup>) where to embrace glitch means to celebrate failure "as a generative force, a new way to take on the world"<sup>100</sup>. In *Valeria* the glitch—as a digital process applied to an analogue format which has been digitized—becomes a possibility for these images of women (most likely photographed by men) to break the oppressive conditions of the original image. Glitch allows these bodies to liberate themselves from the home movie format and enter the imperfect digital realm.

Another more obvious way that glitch speaks to refusal is through the anonymity that it provides in the age of mass surveillance and police control on the Internet. *FaceGlitch* is a project on surveillance and glitch by artist Benjamin Gaulon who also works under the name *recyclism* (Figure 4.10)<sup>101</sup>. As a software that anyone can download online, *FaceGlitch* allows for real time face tracking and glitching via webcam, granting anonymity to the glitched subject. In *Valeria* the anonymity that *glitch* provides is not only in service to the subjects in

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<sup>95</sup> Varillas, Davani (Los Ingrávidos). Personal Interview. October 15h, 2021.

<sup>96</sup> Steyerl, Hito, "Artifacts: A Conversation Between Hito Steyerl and Daniel Rourke", *Rhizome* (March 28, 2013).

<sup>97</sup> Russell, Legacy, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (Verso Books: New York, 2020), 13.

<sup>98</sup> Russell, Legacy, "Digital Dualism and the Glitch Feminism Manifesto", *cyborgology* (December 10th, 2012): <https://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2012/12/10/digital-dualism-and-the-glitch-feminism-manifesto/>

<sup>99</sup> Legacy, *Glitch Feminism*, 153.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid: 30.

<sup>101</sup> See "Face Glitch", Benjamin Gaulon's Website/Portafolio:

<http://www.recyclism.com/faceglitch.html#:~:text=FaceGlitch%20is%20a%20project%20on,anonymity%20to%20the%20glitched%20subject.>

the image, but also as a mark or wound inflicted on the image. While apps and software downloaded online allow its users to humorously intervene directly on their (or other's) face-images as a form of self-protection of their "real image" (or protest), *Valeria* seems to suggest that digital wounds are just as "real" and painful as the ones that occur off-screen.

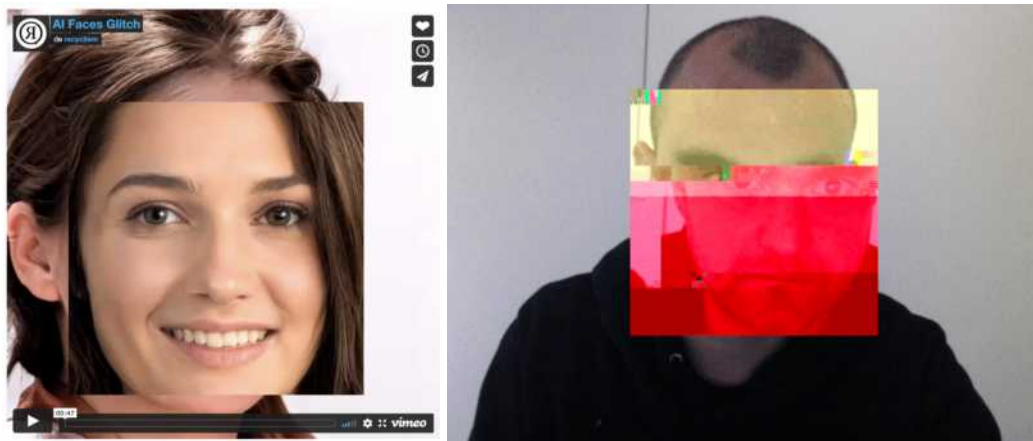


Figure 4.10. Left: AI generated faces from generated.photos + Face Glitch; Right: *Reciclism*.

### **Scratches and Manual Interventions on the Face-Image: Two Films by Annalisa D. Quagliata**

Another filmmaker working with found materials in order to bring attention to the cases of femicide in Mexico is the artist Annalisa D. Quagliata. Her film *Se busca (Un mar de ausencia)* (2016)<sup>102</sup> is composed of images from 50 different "Missing" ("Se busca") posts which have been digitally collected and rephotographed off of a computer with a 16mm film camera and then passed through a cyanotype process, giving the images their particular shade of blue (Figure 4.11). On the soundtrack, we hear sounds of water, which we will associate with the blue color and give the impression that these images have been "found" underwater. But we also hear found audio clips from different news programs and other YouTube videos, in which mothers and other family members give testimony to the disappearance of their loved ones.

While in *Valeria* Super 8mm was digitally filmed and digitally edited to produce glitch, in *Se busca* digital images have passed through a 16mm film process to produce analogue equivalents of glitch, in both image and sound. The processes are reversed but their effects are ultimately the same. A fragmentation and texture in the image separates the index from the image and dislocates the aura of the subject once photographed into the materiality of the image itself, which in both cases is neither entirely digital nor entirely analogue, but a hybrid between the two. In today's contemporary art scene, glitch has become an expression of this fragmentation; but with Quagliata's example we can also understand that this fracture can also be transmitted outside digital technology. While in *Valeria* the images and sounds cut through the digital screen, like a knife; in *Se busca* the textured image and water sounds tell the story

<sup>102</sup> Film available on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/202321554>.

of a generation of young women who are disappearing before our very eyes and drowning out of existence<sup>103</sup>. Digital technology intensifies and multiplies the wounds into a palimpsest of images and sounds. An interplay between analogue and digital technologies goes further because it accentuates a fracture in the very temporality of the image and sound.



Figure 4.11. *Se busca (un mar de ausencia)* (Annalisa D. Quagliata, 2016)

*Ñores (sin señalar)* (Quagliata, 2016)<sup>104</sup> is made in a similar way, with the exception that it does not pass through a cyanotype process. As the director writes, this film is about “The war against drug-trafficking, the violence against students and the people of Veracruz, the assassination of the journalist Rubén Espinosa, and the activists Nadia Vera, Yesenia Quirox, Mile Virgina, Alejandra Negrete in the Narvarte colony in Mexico City, as well as the assassination of 16 more journalists in Veracruz during the government of Javier Duarte”<sup>105</sup>. To make this film, Quagliata first edits a sequence of images taken from the Internet and then rephotographs the digital edit on black and white 16mm film. She develops the film manually and intervenes directly on the emulsion. As the film begins, the first image we see is of Rubén Espinosa’s face, a journalist who was murdered only months earlier (Figure 4.12). Quagliata

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<sup>103</sup> A recent video essay titled “Murky Waters: Submerging in an aesthetics of non-transparency” (Jaap Kooijman and Patricia Pisters, 2021) reflects on images of swimming pools in cinema in an attempt to “destabilise the swimming pool and its mostly white bodies as a privileged space by rendering it less transparent”. Using mostly films directed by white directors from Hollywood and European cinema (with the notable exception of Lucrecia Martel’s *La Ciénaga* (2001), the starting point for the essay), they want to “visualise the poetics and politics of the non-transparent, in rendering the transparency of the cool blue swimming pool water opaque by alluring to the violence that is hidden at the bottom of the pool, troubling the water, rendering it opaque indeed”. In *Song of Air*, the swimming pool visualizes both the feeling of “drowning” experienced by the filmmaker in her life and in relation to all that she hasn’t been able to say, as well as a space of reflection and of final reckoning with her past. In *Se Busca (un mar de ausencia)* the water also indicates a violence that has been done to the women who are no longer here. The *transparency* of the water, while “revealing” the faces of the disappeared, also indicates that something is still opaque at the bottom of the ocean. There are many more women, many more faces, yet to be uncovered. Kooijman, Jaap; Pisters, Patricia, “Murky Waters: Submerging in an aesthetics of non-transparency”, *NECSUS\_European Journal of Media Studies*, #Futures, Jg. 10(2)(2021): 121-126.

<sup>104</sup> Film available on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/214045217>.

<sup>105</sup> Taken from film synopsis provided in Vimeo channel.

intervenes directly on the film with chlorine and black ink (Figures 4.12 and 4.13). At first, the face is barely visible, but as the film continues the chlorine and black ink recedes. The well-known song “Veracruz” by Agustín Lara plays on the soundtrack, possibly recorded from vinyl. At less than two and a half minutes, the film lasts the length of the song. As the filmmaker told me in an interview, “I wanted Ruben’s face to emerge little by little out of the shadows. For the obscurity to enter in contrast with the romanticism of the song *Veracruz*”<sup>106</sup>.



Figure 4.12 and 4.13 (Above) and 4.14 (Below)  
*Ñores (sin señalar)* (Annalisa D. Quagliata, 2016)

Once the image “emerges” and is completely visible, a white scratch appears on the image – made by Quagliata with a knife– that will continue throughout the rest of the images of activists, students and journalists who have been murdered in Mexico (Figure 4.14). At the same time, the song says, “Y me fui...lejos de Veracruz” (“And I left, far from Veracruz”), and a *scratch* and loops begins on the sound so that “lejos de Veracruz” is repeated. Quagliata says, “Rubén had to leave Veracruz because he received death threats. He left to try to save his life”. This applied violence or *scratch* on the film’s emulsion *and soundtrack* gives the images and sounds (and the archive) a fragile quality. She says, “The film is a denouncement and the scratch is a mark on the celluloid’s body”. In fact, as the title suggests, the film is an exploration of what it means to “señalar” or to point. In conversation she told me:

"Señalar", que se define como:

<sup>106</sup> Quagliata, Annalisa D. Personal Interview. September 9th, 2019.

- Decir algo.
  - Llamar la atención hacia alguien o algo, designándolo con la mano o de otro modo.
  - Hacer señal para dar noticia de algo.
- y también puede significar:
- Hacer una herida o señal en el cuerpo, particularmente en el rostro, que le cause imperfección o defecto.

Me interesaba ese doble sentido de la palabra señalar: por un lado están los estudiantes, activistas/periodistas que señalan y denuncian la corrupción/violencia, y por otro lado está el Estado y el narco hiriendo y mutilando sus cuerpos para silenciarlos. La película es una denuncia y el scratch es una marca en el cuerpo mismo del celuloide. Al final de la película se escucha a Duarte (en ese entonces gobernador de Veracruz) diciendo "*yo no quiero señalar a nadie*" amenazando a los medios/periodistas pidiéndoles que "se porten bien" y que se "cuiden mucho"<sup>107</sup>.

The cut across Ruben's face calls attention to how journalists and activists' bodies are "marked" through violence. Significantly, she chooses Ruben's face as the site for this aggression. Once again, an interplay between digital and analogue images and sounds creates a palimpsest of wounds on the archival materials that represents the wounds and violence performed on the bodies by the State.

By rephotographing the digital Internet images in 16mm, Quagliata transposes these images to an aesthetic of the past, adding new layers of texture and time. For Jamie Baron, this aesthetic is part of the potential power of footage and she has called it "the archive effect". Defined as that which makes footage read as "archival", *the archive effect* works by creating a temporal disparity between some images in relation to another<sup>108</sup>. In *Ñores (sin señalar)*, an archival effect is generated in the images that have been rephotographed in 16mm. In other words, the temporality of the archive is not created in relation to the present-tense of the non-archival footage, but rather by the temporal ambiguity constructed within the image itself. Instead of continuing to reproduce images from the news as "new", Quagliata chooses to give or add to the images a historical time, re-connecting them to violences taken place in other decades in Mexico's history. As such, she re-creates a historical context for media images which, through the logics of digital media, are presented as un-related, anomalous cases of violence, instead of being products of systematic regimes of violence. What Jameson calls a "crisis in historicity" here becomes an opportunity to restore historical memory and resist a certain *amnesia* of the present. Although the face-images under analysis in this film and *Se busca* do not come from home movie footage, the inclusion of these films in our Chapter allows us to explore diverse strategies of reappropriation opened up by a hybrid (analogue-digital) filmmaking process.

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<sup>107</sup> Quagliata, Annalisa D. Personal Interview. September 9th, 2019.

<sup>108</sup> "When temporal and intentional disparity are uncertain, the viewer is faced with a constant struggle around how much authority to give the indexical recording. This struggle is crucial, because it both depends on and determines what we give the status of archival evidence. Whether or not the archive effect occurs for different viewers of the same appropriation film may result in very different experiences and understandings of a single text, and hence, of what constitutes archival 'truth'." Baron, Jamie, "The Archive Effect", *Projections* 6(2) (Winter 2012): 118-119.

## Collective Healing and Disappropriation: *Fantasmas del Adiós* (Ximena Cuevas, 2019)

Author Cristina Rivera Garza writes in her book from 2019 titled *Los muertos indóciles*:

México es un país en el que han muerto, dependiendo de las fuentes, entre 60 y 80 mil ciudadanos en circunstancias de violencia extrema durante los años de un sexenio al que pocos dudan en denominar como el de la guerra calderonista. [...] Los diarios, las crónicas urbanas y, sobre todo, el rumor cotidiano, todos dieron cuenta de la creciente espectacularidad y saña de los crímenes de guerra, de la rampante impunidad del sistema penal y, en general, de la incapacidad del Estado para responder por la seguridad y el bienestar de sus ciudadanos. Poco a poco, pero de manera ineluctable, no quedó nadie que no hubiera perdido a alguien durante la guerra<sup>109</sup>.

She goes on to pose the question: What does it mean to write in this daily context of job precariousness and death? The Mexican films that we have included here (which is only a selection of what is being produced there) can be understood as a response to this question, posed from the space of literature, but responded to from the realm of cinema. This is more than appropriate as so much of the violence takes place through –and is communicated to the masses in the form of– images, including news reports, photographs, testimonies, and moving images. Instead of *reappropriation*, she proposes to speak of *desapropiación* (disappropriation), defined as a writing practice critically opposed to author-centric modes of writing: “Desapropiar significa, literalmente, desposeerse del dominio sobre lo propio”<sup>110</sup>. Appropriating the term *tequio*, or relations of collective work in the mesoamerican *pueblos*, she proposes that writers make the effort to visibilize the collective effort and work that goes into the production of language, in opposed to other forms of writing that are centered on the singular author (the “genius”) and ownership. Within this collective effort she gives a particular place to the dead. Disappropriation, Rivera Garza argues, is essentially about finding ways of maintaining conversations with the dead.

Returning to the films under consideration here, we propose to understand these analogue and digital reworkings of the archive as forms of non-ownership of the archive, where the face-image becomes a kind of open door to the ghosts of the past. But the “ghosts” or the dead are two-fold: they are both the women and students that are systematically murdered and whose bodies are often “disappeared”, and they are also the archives themselves, which are lost, buried, or missing<sup>111</sup>. To work from the awareness of this absence, where “[I]as imágenes-fragmento son rastros de una memoria incompleta”, as fellow scholars J. Pablo Romo Álvarez and Elissa J. Rashkin eloquently declare, “nos obliga a considerar lo faltante como un aspecto fundamental”<sup>112</sup>. A consideration of absence becomes a political position and method for the

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<sup>109</sup> Rivera Garza, *Los muertos indóciles*, 16.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid: 67.

<sup>111</sup> In the article “Archivo, Memoria y Resignificación: Acercamientos al cine de reapropiación en México” published in *Aniki* in 2022, authors J. Pablo Romo Álvarez and Elissa J. Rashkin, both from the Universidad Veracruzana of Mexico, propose that the overwhelming disappearance of archives in Latin America, and specifically in Mexico, has a consequence on the form(s) that archival research projects take, where the absence becomes part of the story/the aesthetic proposal.

<sup>112</sup> The authors continue, “Plantear la ausencia como condición primordial que estructura el análisis es una propuesta que comparten investigadores en diferentes campos historiográficos, particularmente con respecto a sujetos excluidos o marginados del archivo como institución: las mujeres (en general), las sexualidades no

reappropriation and *disappropriation* of archival materials. To work with these materials again means, in the first place, to undo their burying. But this unburial does not give these materials “life”; it will not bring the dead back, as painful as that might be. Therefore, it cannot be understood as a new type of nostalgia film, as Jameson defined it. It also does not necessarily have to kill them again (as in the double death, discussed in Chap 2). For Rivera Garza, it is about making the dead part of the conversation and rendering their absence part of what is visible. In our case, it is also about returning to materials long considered “dead” and finding, through forms of montage, ways of recontextualizing these materials within history as interconnected, systematic, and relevant to our time.

*Fantasma del Adiós* (*Ghosts of a Goodbye*, Ximena Cuevas, 2019) is a found footage film made with home movies and family album photographs of the Mexican painter José Luis Cuevas, created by his daughter in response to his death in 2017. Romo Álvarez and Rashkin describe the film in the following way: “A través de diversas técnicas de montaje, la realizadora logra transmitir una sensación de evanescencia, en la que las imágenes devienen en presencias borrosas que funcionan como huellas de lo que alguna vez fue, haciendo evidente la fragilidad de la existencia, la vulnerabilidad del recuerdo y lo fragmentario e incompleto de la memoria”<sup>113</sup>. In one moment which we would like to highlight here insofar as it relates to the reappropriation of face-images, Cuevas creates slow fades between an image of their faces next to one another and his face many years later, already dying. She repeats the gesture a second time, flipping the image of them together horizontally so as to compositionally match the image of her father lying on his deathbed (Figure 4.15). For Álvarez and Rashkin, this image of her father dying, which the film returns to several times in its short (two-minute) duration, pushes the limits of what is traditionally conceptualized as a family image or *imagen familiar*<sup>114</sup>. This image, considered on its own, brings to mind David Wojnarowicz’s photographs of his friend and former lover, Peter Hujar, at the moment of his death from AIDS-related causes in 1987 (*Untitled*, 1987). These images of Hujar’s face, hands, and feet, were instrumental in bringing attention to the AIDS crisis at a time when the virus was systematically and homophobically denied by the US government. Similarly, Cuevas’ film gives death *an image*; she makes it visible and, carefully and affectionately, includes it in her family album.



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heteronormativas, las comunidades indígenas, la infancia, entre otros”. Romo Álvarez and Rashkin, “Archivo, Memoria y Resignificación”, 142.

<sup>113</sup> Romo Álvarez and Rashkin, “Archivo, Memoria y Resignificación”, 155.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid: 156.

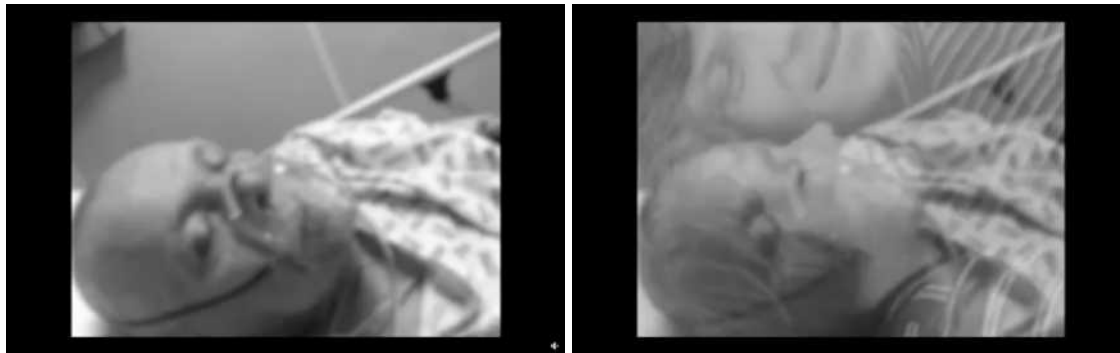


Figure 4.15. *Fantasmas del Adiós* (Ximena Cuevas, 2019)

*Fantasmas del Adiós*, like the previously mentioned *Song to Air*, materially (cinematographically) explores the death of the filmmaker's father. Cuevas makes his absence felt, not as a betrayal (as it might feel for Bennet) so much as a *void*, an absence. And this void is not only physical but material, expressed in the image which, although digitally reversed, cannot undo his death. Her father cannot *speak*, he cannot respond *in sound*, but somehow the image transmits his fading presence as an after-image.

In *Valeria*, *Se busca (un mar de ausencia)*, *Ñores*, and *Fantasmas del Adiós*, we find diverse attempts at critical healing. While *Fantasmas del Adiós* is a more personal film, responding to the death of the filmmaker's father, the other films analyzed, made by more recent generations of Mexican artists, are explorations in experimental forms of *collective* healing. "Valeria" becomes many "Valerias"; "Rubén" turns into many "Rubens".

### Home Movies and Police Mugshots in *Familiar* (Paz Encina, 2015)

Continuing with the previous Chapter's focus on criminal portraiture and mugshots that are reappropriated in three films by Portuguese filmmaker Susana de Sousa Dias, and in reference to how we began the present Chapter, posing the mug in home movies as the key gesture in this genre and in relation to the mugshot in criminal portraiture, we have one more question left to ask: do these images –in anthropometric photography and home movies– share more than a name ("the mugshot")? What binds the mugshot in home movies to the mugshot in police archives? Can home movies and police archives be thought of in relation to one another? And what does connecting these images in experimental reappropriations provoke or suggest regarding the face-image?

In Paz Encina's *Familiar* (2015) home movies and police archives are brought together in surprising and innovative ways. This film is the second of the *Tristezas* series of three shorts made with the police image and sound archives of Paraguay's 35-year dictatorship from 1954 to 1989 (the longest dictatorship in Latin America), preceded by *Arribo* (2014) and followed by *Tristezas* (2016). The archives, belonging to the Centro de Documentación y Archivo para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (Documentation and Archive Center for the Defense of Human Rights), also known as the "Archives of Terror", were made public in 1992. Encina became familiar with them in 1998 and ten years later dedicated herself to researching and



working with these materials in film and installation. In her words<sup>115</sup>, “Me dedicué primero a mirar las imágenes. Vi todas fotos, todas las fichas, todas las detenciones, las ejecuciones, todo.... En ese momento, la sensación más importante que tuve, fue la de que todos aquellos sonidos de mi infancia, comenzaron a tener imágenes.” She adds, “Aquellos nombres que escuché de niña, entre gritos y secretos, tenían rostro.” Later she finds audio cassettes of “Delaciones, interrogatorios.... Músicas.... Mucha música” and remembers that during sessions of torture in the middle of the night, music (“Bach, Mozart, y hasta Roberto Carlos”) was played loudly to cover the screams. “Es que eso pasa en la infancia, no quieren que los niños veamos las cosas, pero escuchamos todo...”. In her approximation to the Archivos del Terror, first through the images and then through sound, Encina begins to explore the relationship between these two aspects of the archive –and cinema– (sound and image) and how they connect to memory.

The film combines the police mugshot of Apolonia Flores, a 12-year-old child who survived the military police attack which resulted in the disappearance, torture, murder and burial of ten campesinos, including Flores’ family members. *Familiar* is made when Encina and her team discover a box full of audiotapes, one of which includes a statement given by a man snitching out Apolonia’s brother, Catalino Flores. Not including the final credit sequence, the film can be divided into five carefully-edited and distinct parts. First, a brief prologue in which on the soundtrack we hear the beginning of an oath by the dictator Alfredo Stroessner presenting himself as the president of Paraguay, and in the image we see fragments from a home movie shot on film apparently of local soccer teams preparing for a match. The fragment of the oath is repeated so that the dictator’s name is heard several times and the home movie footage is intercut repeatedly with a less distinct image (that the film will come back to in the final seconds). These images occupy the entire screen and then cut to black. Second, home movie images take up only part of the screen, accompanied by the audio (mentioned earlier – the audio that made this film possible) about Catalino Flores. When the audio mentions his name, we see the fingerprints of Apolonia’s identification card under the images of the home movies (Figure 4.16). The camera moves over the ID card, including details about her family members (“familiares”), stopping upon the image of her face (her mugshot). Third, as we continue looking at Apolonia’s face, a text begins to scroll above with the “Antecedentes” of the case and the image goes black. Fourth, classical music begins –Johann Strauss’ “An der schönen, blauen Donau” (“The Blue Danube”, 1866)—over black, and a few seconds later a home movie of people dancing on the right side of the screen, then another one on the left of ballerinas, and a third film in the middle of a religious procession in the street with many children formally dressed marching. And finally, in a kind of epilogue, the screen turns black again and we see a blurry image of what appears to be a person. This blurred image was also seen in the prologue. We will come back to this image at the end of this Chapter.

The decision to combine Apolonia’s mugshot and identification card with anonymous home movie material is an interesting one. Why bring these materials together? For one thing, they were found in the same archive, making them both a part of Paraguay’s dark history. As such, these materials share a temporal or historical context; a time and a place, perhaps

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<sup>115</sup> The following quotes come from: Encina, Paz, “Reflexiones íntimas sobre mis días en los Archivos”, February 2017. Unpublished.

authorship, even when their form is aesthetically very different. In combining home movie material, police identification card and mugshot and audio from a statement recorded by the police, Encina makes the spectator question the division between the personal and the public. Are the home movies more “personal” than Apolonia’s mugshot? Is an identification card more “public” than a home movie? For Van Alphen (2011), “the imposition of History on personal time never works smoothly... personal time and Historical time are in radical tension with each other”<sup>116</sup>. In Encina’s combination or mixing of home movies and police mugshots, the tension between personal time and Historical time is made visible. Some children are being killed and arrested as other children are marching down the street with their local church, filmed by their proud parents. These events are occurring at *the same time* and they are being recorded through soundless image. The sounds come later: the discovered sounds of men ratting out on each other, the classical music that is used to cover up the sounds of torture. In the Archive of Terror, images and sounds are separate, and in “real life” it seems to be the same. Encina knew the faces of those who were being disappeared around her as a child, but she did not know their names. She could hear the classical music playing, but she did not have the images of what was happening in the room next door. Cinema is also a place where image and sound are separate, brought together only by montage.

Following Farocki’s *soft montage* editing style<sup>117</sup>, Encina does not put these materials one-after-the-other, but rather together, one on top of the other. It is not “this or that”, but rather, “this *and* that”. This is a form of *counter-editing* (De Rosa), mentioned earlier.



Figure 4.16. Left: Still from *Familiar* (Paz Encina, 2015); Right: Detail from previous still. The fingerprints of Apolonia’s identification card can be seen underneath the clothing of the people dancing in the home movie.

Not only do these images belong to the same time and the same archive, but they are also intertwined. The system of surveillance and control of the Paraguayan dictatorship not only targeted potential dissidents, but also their families. If we recall, this is also the subject of *Luz*

<sup>116</sup> Van Alphen, Ernst, “Towards a New Historiography: The Aesthetics of Temporality”, in *Cinema’s Alchemist: The Films of Péter Forgács*, eds. Bill Nichols and Michael Renov (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 60.

<sup>117</sup> Term coined by Farocki and Kaja Silverman with reference to *Número deux* (Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville, 1975). What animates soft montage, according to Farocki, is “a general relatedness, rather than a strict opposition or equation”. Farocki, Harun and Kaja Silverman, *Speaking about Godard* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998), 142.

*Obscura* (2017), the third film by Susana de Sousa Días that we studied in the previous chapter, in which police mugshots and family portraits –also taken by the police– are edited together to tell the story of the family of Octávio Pato and Albina Fernández, two political prisoners of the Portuguese Dictatorship whose children were also detained. Similarly, Apolonia’s detention was not individual; her entire family was detained and/or disappeared. In fact, the police surveillanced these families for a long time before engaging in detentions, collecting information about their home locations and whereabouts. It becomes clear then that these materials have much more in common than might be expected at first glance. What’s more, as the only survivor in her family of these forced disappearances, Apolonia became a well-known figure in the media. An orphan, Apolonia is offered to be adopted by Stroessner, the dictator and a known pedophile. Apolonia refuses. We can imagine that Apolonia could have had home movies taken of her, by a stepfather who would also be the murderer of her people (and dictator of her country) –but she refused, and instead of being turned into an image of nostalgia in home movies, she is forever immortalized and criminalized in police mugshots. Apolonia’s face, recycled by Encina, becomes the link between the mug in the home movie genre and the police mugshot. She is a child that has been criminalized, and this process of criminalization occurs first and foremost through the photographic image of her face.



Figure 4.17. Apolonia Flores, in Encina’s *Familiar* (Paz Encina, 2015)

Encina’s camera moves over Apolonia’s identification card and then stops at her face –as if it was heading there the entire time (Figure 4.17). It remains there for almost two minutes –the longest shot in the entire film– as Apolonia stares back, motionless and voiceless. Although Apolonia herself does not speak, the folds and wrinkles in the image (wounds on the image’s materiality) speak of an image that has been crumpled, stashed away or moved around, unfolded, and seen and unseen.

In putting home movies next to Apolonia’s mugshot, Encina contextualizes the home movie within a political and collective history. She does not use these films for their nostalgic effect –nor use them for the false idea that home movies sometimes give us that they could be

of *anyone, anywhere*— instead, she grounds these materials within a particular time in Paraguay history. What Ruth Balint says about Forgács films can also be said about *Familiar*: “In [his] hands, the notion of home as safe haven is exposed as a myth, its status of security revealed as an illusion. The private is never free of the public, the family never free of the tyranny of the state, the individual never free of the forces of history”<sup>118</sup>.

There is one image that is unlike the rest, even if it is not noticed at first glance. It is a blurry image, most likely of a woman, and it belongs to a home movie (Figure 4.18). This image appears at the very beginning, in the 40 second prologue, and then again at the very end. It is a mysterious image, undefined and unclear, which escapes the spectator’s attention and view. The image seems to be of a person who turns her back to the camera and walks away – but it is difficult to be sure.

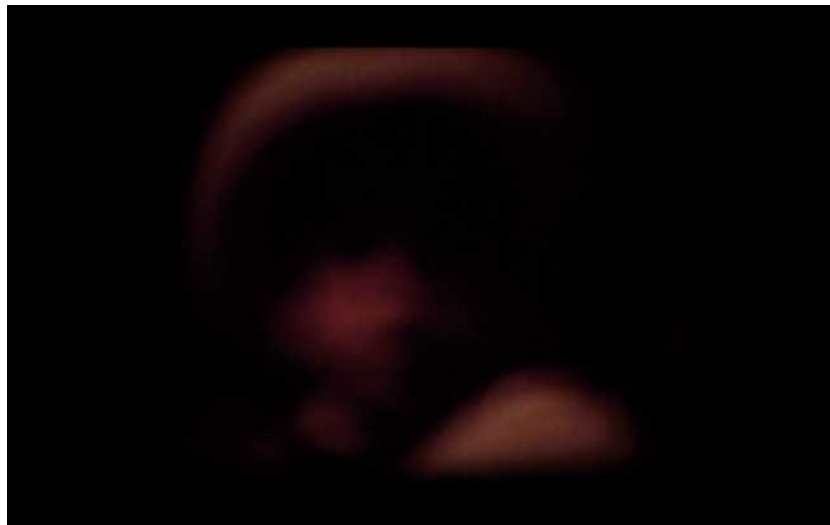


Figure 4.18. An unknown and unseen face: blurred, distant and anonymous in *Familiar* (Paz Encina, 2015)

Could this be an imagined image of Apolonia, a child who not only never had home movies but whose very home (and family) were taken from her? And what does it tell us that Apolonia chooses to be blurry and undefined? Is her new anonymity a way of resisting the image, a way of resisting the scientific, ordering and cataloging fascination of the photograph? Is Cinema her way out? Or has Apolonia always been there, in the undefined and invisible corners of the filmic image, and we just did not or could not or chose not to see her?

What is done to the image is also subtly taking place in the sound. As María Luisa Ortega has observed, the main sound archive that is recycled in *Familiar* is a report that is heard in Guaraní, an indigenous language and one of the two official languages of Paraguay, spoken by over 8.5 million people across the Southern Cone Region<sup>119</sup>. While we hear this

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<sup>118</sup> Balint, Ruth, “Representing the Past and the Meaning of Home in Péter Forgács’s *Private Hungary*”, in *Amateur Filmmaking*, eds. Laura Rascaroli, Gwenda Young and Barry Monahan (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014): 198.

<sup>119</sup> Ortega, María Luisa, “‘El mañana empezó ayer’. Tradiciones y rupturas en el documental de América Latina”, *Territorio y memorias sin fronteras: Nuevas estrategias para pensar lo real* (Bogotá: Cuadernos de ALADOS, 2021): 35.

report, the camera searches for Apolonia in the image. The untranslated Guaraní text intensifies our dependence on the image, as it is a language that many spectators may not comprehend, and draws attention to the fact that it is a language that exists outside translation (the aural equivalent of something happening off-screen)<sup>120</sup>.

Just as in *Jennifer, Where Are You?* and *Valeria, Familiar* suggests that what is wrong is within the very image and sound of cinema itself, on the very surface of its own materiality and also in our incapacity –for lack of interest or simply because we are not able– to see and hear clearly. In fact, these films put the very concept of “seeing and hearing clearly” in question. It is because these films emphasize the fragmentary nature of image and sound through the technical separation of the two, as well as the fragmentary quality of the image which can be silent (*Jennifer*), broken (*Valeria, Se busca*) and placed on top or below another (*Familiar*) through a counter-editing practice, as well as a soundtrack that is left audibly untranslated (*Familiar*), that we can finally “see” and “hear” that the image and the sound always hide something that is not there. We are able to see and hear precisely *that we are not able to see and hear*, and in the impact of this realization the experimental film and counter-cinema practice teaches us to be cautious of cinema. At the same time, these films resist nostalgia by refusing to give into the idea that these images could be anyone, anywhere, at any time. Even when using images from the past, these are films that are unequivocally present and that situate the spectator in the *now*. Returning to Jameson, these films could never be accused of longing for another historical time: they are films for today’s spectator, and they bring past archives into the questions and concerns of the present.

In the body of films discussed in this chapter, the women whose faces we see in the image are all voiceless where the sound is concerned. The filmmakers do not “give a voice” to these women, however, which is evidence of an interesting and important break away from the feminist film practice of the 80s and 90s. In these films, there is no artificial unity of these faces through narrative structure or music, voices or sound. In fact, the opposite is true: the sound, as the image, only reinforces the essentially fragmentary nature of this material and in doing so puts in question the ideological function of the home movie archive in relation to an idealized family (and national) narrative. As we have argued here, this occurs *precisely through the liberation of the face-image or mugshot*, whose diverse reappropriations make visible the social and political meanings hidden behind these silent images, waiting, if never to be heard, at least to be seen – or not, as in the case of Encina’s blurry and anonymous subject.

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<sup>120</sup> In Chapter 6, the same will occur when we hear Arabic spoken in *The Image Book*.

**Chapter 5: Black Radical After-Images for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Century: The Fugitive Face-Image in *Reckless Eyeballing* (Christopher Harris, 2004) and *An Ecstatic Experience* (Ja'Tovia Gary, 2015)**

Tomorrow will be the 22nd century.  
It will be, it will be, it will be.  
-Exuma, “22nd Century”<sup>1</sup>

Frederick Douglass, the self-emancipated author, activist and philosopher, became the most photographed man of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>. One of the first to understand the political power of the new photographic medium, as well as one of the most prolific writers on the subject in his time, Douglass personally commissioned with great care and detail each of his photographic portraits (including daguerreotypes taken in the 1840s and 1850s, *cartes-de-visite*<sup>3</sup>, albumen prints and cabinet cards, fine-art portraits and frontispieces), creating his very own visual archive up until his death in 1895. Working against the dehumanizing caricatures and stock archetypes of African Americans propagated by cartoons, scientific diagrams, medical drawings and political iconography of the day, Douglass proposed a theory of portraiture that would “do justice to ‘the face of the fugitive slave’ by conveying the ‘inner’ via the ‘outer’ man”<sup>4</sup>. How could the photographic image convey the inner via the outer man? Precisely through the face-image.

While European portrait painting tradition commonly dictated that the subject of a portrait surround him or herself with symbolic properties<sup>5</sup> –and other emancipated slaves of his time, including Sojourner Truth, had their portraits taken in this tradition (Figure 5.1)– Douglass made a point of excluding all other objects and decorative embellishment and centering the photograph –and the spectator’s attention– entirely on his face. Working “in conjunction with his blank backdrop and dramatic use of lighting to illuminate rather than obscure each line on his physiognomy”<sup>6</sup>, the viewer of Douglass’ self-image was made to focus

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<sup>1</sup> “22<sup>nd</sup> Century” is a song written by Macfarlane Gregory Anthony Mackey, known professionally as Tony McKay and Exuma, recorded on the album “Do Wah Nanny” on the Kama Sutra Records label released in 1971. Nina Simone covers the song that same year on her album titled “Here Comes the Sun”, released by RCA in 1971.

<sup>2</sup> According to researchers John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, in their publication on the subject: *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century’s Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), xi. They have identified 168 separate photographs of Douglass taken from 1841 right up to his deathbed.

<sup>3</sup> The *carte-de-visite* took over the daguerreotype as the dominant form of photography when it was introduced in France by Disdéri in 1854. The photographic *cartes-de-visite* were printed on paper from glass negatives; from one glass plate it was possible to make over eight copies. The *carte-de-visite* made possible a system of mass production for the photographic image that was characterized by its rapidity, low cost, and the ability to be possessed by the person who receives it. Tagg, John, *El peso de la representación* (1988), trans. Antonio Fernández Lera (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gil, 2005): 67, 54. In the 1860s, these images also included portraits of the most notorious murderers. Frizot, Michel, “Body of Evidence: The Ethnophotography of Difference”, in *A New History of Photography*, ed. Michel Frizot (Köln: Konemann, 1998), 263.

<sup>4</sup> Bernier, Celeste-Marie, “A Visual Call to Arms against the ‘Caricature [sic] of My Own Face’: From Fugitive Slave to Fugitive Image in Frederick Douglass’s Theory of Portraiture”, *Journal of American Studies* 49(2) (Cambridge University Press and British Association for American Studies, 2015): 327.

<sup>5</sup> Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1973).

<sup>6</sup> Bernier, “A Visual Call to Arms”, 343.

entirely on his carefully self-directed expression. By way of self-imaging, Douglass hoped to translate “the liminal position of the ‘fugitive slave’ into the liberatory potential of the fugitive image”<sup>7</sup>.



Figure 5.1. Sojourner Truth, *carte-de-visite* from 1864. Frederick Douglass, *carte-de-visite* also from 1864<sup>8</sup>.

Photography, for Douglass, was a tool for the crafting of his own critical public identity. His photograph was often the first encounter between him and his readers and he understood their importance. “No man thinks of publishing a book without sending his face to the world with it”, reflects Douglass. “He may be handsome or homely, manly or otherwise, it makes no difference; the face, the inevitable face, must be there to meet the smiles or frowns of his readers. Once in the book, whether the picture is like him or not, he must forever after strive to look like the picture”<sup>9</sup>. He understood, at a time when many still did not, the power that pictures would one day have in the political and public sphere (“The portrait makes our president”). Therefore, it should come of no surprise then the importance that Douglass gave photographs –and their circulation– in his journey towards the representation of himself and other former slaves as men and as citizens. He actively worked towards the dissemination of his photographs. He gifted them to family members, friends, and colleagues, but he also sold them to promote individuals and organizations devoted to black rights, as well as his own talks given in the battle to end slavery.

<sup>7</sup> Bernier, “A Visual Call to Arms”, 331.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen H. Waite, April 15, 1864. 271 Main Street, Hartford, Connecticut. *Carte-de-visite*, 2 ½ x 4 in. CHS. Source: *Picturing Frederick Douglass*, 2015: 173.

<sup>9</sup> Douglass, Frederick, “Age of Pictures” (1862), in: *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century’s Most Photographed American*, ed. John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), 132.

As he had more and more photographs taken of him, his photographic self inevitably began to evolve. What pose he would assume, the expression on his face, how he was dressed and had his hair, all of these elements played a part in his self-imaging. As a slave he had been punished and beaten for *looking*, but as a free man he was able to finally look at the camera if he so desired<sup>10</sup>. In a daguerreotype from 1850 (Figure 5.2), for example, he stares into the camera lens, which is something that 1840s photographic manuals did not recommend. Rather, they suggested that “Eyes should be fixed on some object a little above the camera, and to one side, but never into, or on the instrument”<sup>11</sup>. His stare—which as researchers have found, was crafted over time— “sent a message of artful defiance or majestic wrath, and with minor variations, it became his visual voice from the late 1840s through the Civil War”<sup>12</sup>.



Figure 5.2. Unknown photographer. c. 1850 (copy of lost c. 1847 daguerreotype)

If for Douglass, the most well-known and recognized “fugitive face” of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, photography had allowed a certain level of control over his self-imagery and the possibility of generating alternative representations of “the fugitive slave” from those offered by caricatures and archetypes in newspapers (pre-photography), then for political activist Angela Davis, as the “modern fugitive” of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, photography has played a much more complicated role. Photographic images of her face have been used throughout the 1970s, arguably until the present, to dehumanize, fetishize, and *criminalize* both her and other Blacks in the United States, as caricature had done previously for Douglass.

In this Chapter we will look at *Reckless Eyeballing* (Christopher Harris, 2004), a found footage collage film which recycles Angela Davis’ image and afterimage in the form of Pam

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<sup>10</sup> Described in: Gates, Jr. Henry Louis, “Frederick Douglass’s Camera Obscura: Representing the Antislave ‘Clothed and in their Own Form’”, *Critical Inquiry* 42 (Autumn 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Henry Snelling, in *Picturing Frederick Douglass*, xxvi.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*



Grier, and re-edits these images with other materials, including a Hollywood film trailer of *Foxy Brown*, footage from *Birth of a Nation*, and diverse audio tracks. This film is an example of what avant-garde film historian and author William C. Wees, calls the self-referential and media-referential quality of found footage film:

[...] Recycled images call attention to themselves as images, as products of the image-producing industries of film and television, and therefore as pieces of the vast and intricate mosaic of information, entertainment, and persuasion that constitute the media-saturated environment of modern –or many would say, postmodern– life. By reminding us that we are seeing images produced and disseminated by the media, found footage films open the door to a critical examination of the methods and motives underlying the media’s use of images<sup>13</sup>.

For Wees, the most successful of these films use montage to confront the media on their own terms.

We will study this film, as well as *An Ecstatic Experience* (Ja’Tovia Gary, 2015), a film that recycles many media images including a documentary interview with fellow Black Panther revolutionary Assata Shakur, in the light of Douglass’ theory on portraiture in order to think about how the face-image is being reworked today as a possibility for rethinking radical Black history. As we will discover, in these films the face-image becomes the outlet for a critical exploration of commercial film conventions on whiteness and a platform for a radical counter-aesthetics.

### **Angela Davis is Wanted: Fugitive Images, Glamour, and the Commodification of the Black Revolutionary Image**

Angela Davis’ photographed face became a world-famous “fugitive image” when she was placed on the FBI’s Ten Most Wanted list in October of 1970. Of all the photographic images that were taken of the Black Panthers activist and Communist Party member during this time - by journalists, undercover policemen, and movement activists- the head shot from the wanted poster circulated most widely, playing “a major role in both the mobilization of public opinion against me *and* the development of the campaign that was ultimately responsible for my acquittal”<sup>14</sup>. It is interesting to observe the two covers of *Life* magazine, one from 1968 featuring a 1853 daguerreotype of Frederick Douglass and the other from 1970 featuring a photograph of Angela Davis with the words “The Making of a Fugitive” written across the cover (Figure 5.5). While the golden frame around Douglass’ portrait emphasizes the images historical and archival significance as an “image of the past” (appropriately, the text reads “The Search for a Black Past”), the Davis text (“The Making of a Fugitive”) inevitably shapes how the image is received, just as the words “Wanted by the FBI” and “Murder, Kidnaping” shape how viewers received her mugshot that year.

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<sup>13</sup> Wees, William C. *Recycled Images* (New York: Anthology Film Archives. 1993), 32.

<sup>14</sup> Davis, Angela, “Afro Images: Politics, Fashion, and Nostalgia”, *Critical Inquiry*, 21(1) (Autumn, 1994): 39.



Figure 5.3. Wanted by the FBI, Federal Bureau of Investigation, August 19, 1970

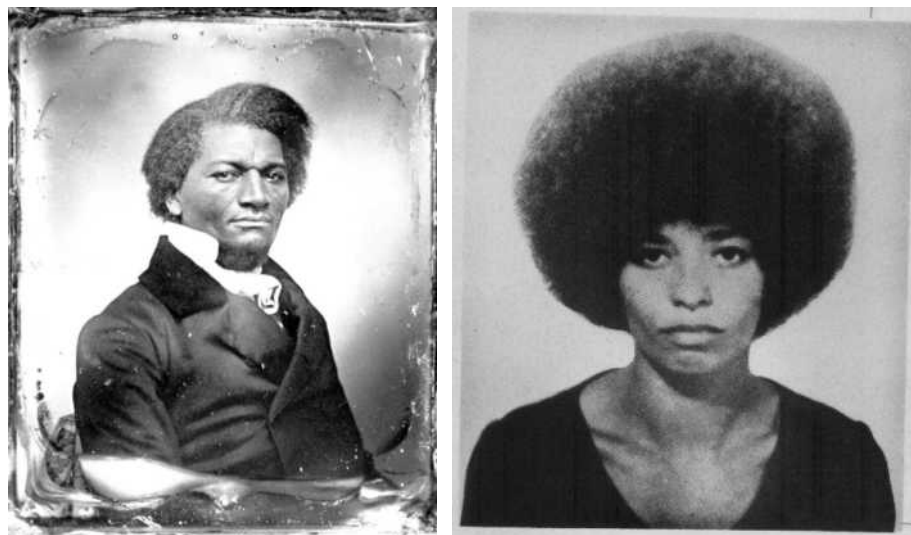


Figure 5.4. Frederick Douglass and Angela Davis, fugitive faces of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries

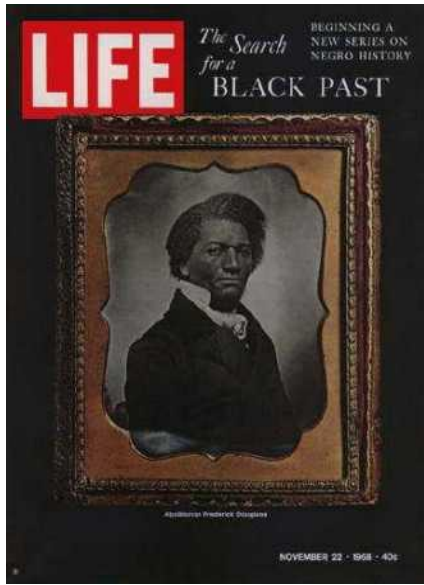
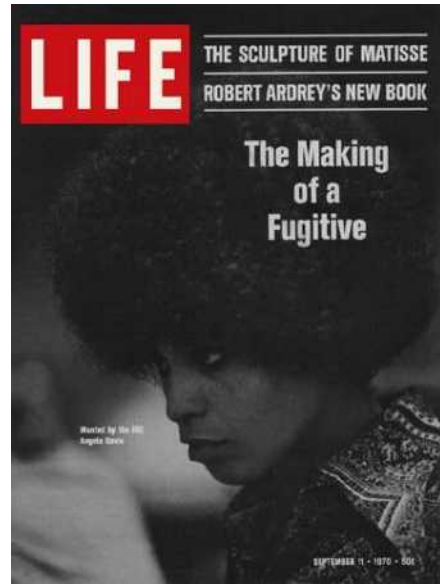


Figure 5.5.  
*Life* magazine, November 22, 1968



*Life* magazine, September 1, 1970



Figure 5.6. F. Joseph Crawford's photograph of Angela in 1969 was the source for Félix Beltrán's 1971 poster. When *The Black Panther* put Crawford's photo on its cover, they flopped the image.



Figure 5.7. Félix Beltrán’s 1971 poster

In a 1994 essay titled “Afro Images: Politics, Fashion, and Nostalgia”, Davis admits to a certain reluctance on her part to reflect on the power of the visual images during her trial. She writes, “Perhaps this is due to my unwillingness to confront those images as having to some extent structured by experiences during that era. The recent recycling of some of these images in contexts that privilege the Afro as fashion –revolutionary glamour– has led to reconsider them both in the historical context in which they were first produced (and in which I first experienced them) and within the ‘historical’ context in which they often are presented today as ‘arrested moments’”<sup>15</sup>. Significantly, it is because of the reproduction of these images –their recycling in advertisements and films– that she decides to write about the power that these images have had on her. In the case of the photographs taken of her which would become famous around the world, she writes:

With the first public circulation of my photographs, I was intensely aware of the invasive and transformative power of the camera and of the ideological contextualization of my images, which left me with little or no agency. On the one hand I was portrayed as a conspiratorial and monstrous Communist (that is, anti-American) whose unruly natural hairdo symbolized Black militancy (that is, antiwhiteness). ... On the other hand, sympathetic portrayals tended to interpret the image –almost inevitably one with my mouth wide open– as that of a charismatic and raucous revolutionary ready to lead the masses into battle. Since I considered myself neither monstrous nor charismatic, I felt fundamentally betrayed on both accounts: violated on the first account and deficient on the second<sup>16</sup>.

Once felony charges were brought against Davis, these photographs became a source of fear for Davis, bringing forth “a cycle of terror”.

As her face-image was reproduced everywhere, Davis quickly had to acquire a disguise. In her autobiography, she describes what went into its making, including hairstyle and makeup:

Before we left Chicago, a young Black woman, to whom I identified myself as David’s cousin in trouble, gave me another wig that was straight and stiff, with long bangs and elaborate spicurls. She pulls out half of my eyebrows, glued false eyelashes to my lids, covered my face with all sorts of creams and

<sup>15</sup> Davis, “Afro Images”, 38-9.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. These two sides of the spectrum –the monstrous and the charismatic- represent two possible interpretations of the revolutionary’s face-image.

powders and put a little black dot just above the corner of my life. I felt awkward and over-painted, but I doubted my own mother could have recognized me<sup>17</sup>.

In preparing the disguise that might save her life, Davis chose *glamour* as the antithesis of the revolutionary face: “Never having seriously attempted to present myself as glamorous, it seemed to me that glamor was the only look that might annul the likelihood of being perceived as a revolutionary”<sup>18</sup>. Paradoxically, the “revolutionary face” that Davis was trying to cover up, later became appropriated by publicity and magazines into a face of glamour. She writes, “It never could have occurred to me that the same ‘revolutionary’ image I then sought to camouflage with glamor would be turned, a generation later, into glamor and nostalgia”<sup>19</sup>.



Figure 5.8. Cynda Williams photographed by Albert Watson for *Vibe* magazine, 1994<sup>20</sup>.

John Berger understands glamour as a modern invention<sup>21</sup>. Publicity, says Berger, is “the process of manufacturing glamour”<sup>22</sup>. As revolutionaries become appropriated into publicity images, revolutionary images and radical aesthetics become converted into images of glamour, for consumer purposes. This is because, as he writes, writes, “Publicity can translate even revolution into its own terms”<sup>23</sup>. This can be seen, for example, in how publicity began

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<sup>17</sup> Davis, Angela. *An Autobiography*. New York: International Publishers. Edition from 2017: 10.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*: 11.

<sup>19</sup> Davis, “Afro Images”, 39-41.

<sup>20</sup> “Free Angela: Actress Cynda Williams as Angela Davis, a Fashion Revolutionary”, *Vibe* 2 (Mar. 1994): 16.

<sup>21</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 1973.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*: 146.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*: 151.

to sell the “afro” as both a glamorous and revolutionary hairdo in the 1990s. Davis expressed both humiliation and humility to discover that new generations are re-living the historical past that she participated in –and went to jail for– as a hairdo (Figure 5.8). “It is humiliating because it reduces a politics of liberation to a politics of fashion; it is humbling because such encounters with the younger generation demonstrate the fragility and notability of historical images, particularly those associated with African American history”<sup>24</sup>. What is at stake in the glamorization of revolutionary aesthetics for Berger and Davis is the erasure of history.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century photography had offered Douglass the opportunity to visibilize the uniqueness of his face –as well as its evolving nature– against the generalizations and stereotyping of other images at the time. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, Davis’ photographed face, as it circulated in mass media, was used to both over-individualize and decontextualize her political struggle, while simultaneously serving to create a generalized image of Black womanhood. These images of Davis’ face were used in “structuring people’s opinions about [Davis] as a ‘fugitive’ and a political prisoner” –which came in very useful in the FBI’s hunt for Davis– while also serving as “generic images of Black women who wore their hair ‘natural’” and therefore also useful for the justification of the harassment and arrest of “hundreds, perhaps thousands” of Afro-wearing Black women by police, FBI and immigration agents during the two months that Davis spent underground<sup>25</sup>.

While these images of Angela Davis were circulating in the 1970s, mainstream films very quickly began to appropriate images of her face, afro and personal style, transporting and diluting Davis’ revolutionary image for commercial purposes. According to writer Cedric J. Robinson, in his essay titled “Blaxploitation and the Misrepresentation of Liberation” published in 1998<sup>26</sup>, “One of the most effective and clever manoeuvres of the Blaxploitation genre was the appropriation and re-presentation of Angela Davis’s public image. [...] [Film] transported Davis’s form from a representation of a revolutionist to that of an erotic Black nationalist, largely devoid of historical consciousness”<sup>27</sup>. The “principal impersonations” of Davis of this period –near the end of the Civil Rights era– were performed by Pam Grier and Rosalind Cash<sup>28</sup>. But as Robinson observes, these were impersonations “with a difference”. In the case of Grier, hers consisted of an eroticisation of Davis, in films with themes of rape and castration. The first film where she “plays” Angela Davis is in the Roger Corman-produced *The Big Doll House/Women’s Penitentiary I* (Jack Hill, 1971), a film credited with establishing new conventions for the women’s prison genre<sup>29</sup>. Following appropriations included the second Corman-Hill collaboration *The Big Bird Cage* (Jack Hill, 1972), followed by *Hit Man* (George Armitage, 1972), *Black Mama, White Mama* (Eddie Romero, 1972), *Coffy* (Jack Hill, 1973), *Foxy Brown* (Jack Hill, 1974), *Friday Foster* (Arthur Marks, 1975) and *Sheba, Baby* (William Girdler, 1975). As Robinson observes, “In each of these films, Grier wore Afros and revealing

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<sup>24</sup> Davis, “Afro Images”, 37.

<sup>25</sup> Davis, “Afro Images”, 42.

<sup>26</sup> Many thanks to filmmaker Christopher Harris for bringing my attention to this article and for discussing it with me.

<sup>27</sup> Robinson, Cedric J. “Blaxploitation and the misrepresentation of liberation”, *Race & Class*, 40, 1 (1998): 5-6.

<sup>28</sup> Cash’s films: *The Omega Man* (1971) and *Melinda* (1972).

<sup>29</sup> This genre dates back to as early as the 1920s. For more on this genre and the conventions introduced by *The Big Doll House/Women’s Penitentiary I* (Jack Hill, 1971), see: Shai, Oren. “The Women in Prison Film: From Reform to Revolution 1922-1974”, *Bright Lights Film Journal*, January 31st, 2013.

attire; toted pistols, revolvers and shotguns; kickboxed, mutilated and ‘smoked’ her antagonists; lectured enemies and friends on the necessity of upholding the law, protecting the community and its innocents’ and eventually resorted to vigilantism”<sup>30</sup>. As we can see in the film posters below (Figure 5.9), in just a few years Grier went from being the only Black woman in a group of predominantly white cast to being the main protagonist in the latter group of films made between 1974 and 1975.



Figure 5.9. Posters for: *The Big Doll House/Women’s Penitentiary I* (Jack Hill, 1971), *The Big Bird Cage* (Jack Hill, 1972), *Black Mama, White Mama* (Eddie Romero, 1972), *Foxy Brown* (Jack Hill, 1974), *Friday Foster* (Arthur Marks, 1975) and *Sheba, Baby* (William Girdler, 1975).

The epitome of these representations of Davis is Pam Grier’s performance in *Foxy Brown*, the 1974 Blaxploitation film directed by Jack Hill that grossed \$2.46 million in

<sup>30</sup> Robinson, “Blaxploitation”, 7.

domestic film rentals<sup>31</sup>. Removed from community and political organizations, Grier’s Angela Davis (Foxy) is a kaleidoscope lit-funky beat-dancing avenger, driven by race envy and female rage<sup>32</sup>, often filmed nude or nearly there for the spectator’s voyeuristic pleasure. In one scene described by Ed Guerrero (Figure 5.10), a direct allusion to Angela Davis and the Black Panthers is made evident: “In a moment and mise-en-scene fairly rare for Blaxploitation, but consonant with the black political mood of the times, Foxy argues, against a backdrop of George Jackson posters, that her cause is not personal revenge but justice for all black people”<sup>33</sup>. In the Bad Black Woman subgenre/narrative of the 1970s<sup>34</sup> –of which, according to Robinson, *Foxy Brown* is a key example– “Black racism is displaced by female rage: Black woman rage at the betrayal and abandonment by family, community, and society” and White woman rage at “the betrayal they sense in white male desire”<sup>35</sup>. In these films, the Black woman’s body becomes the site for sexual voyeurism, where “[t]he pleasure of the flesh convenes with the excitement of revenge so that they might double for a notion of social justice”<sup>36</sup>. Furthermore, the “Bad Black Woman” fights alone, removed from any sense of community. As a result, these films take part in rupturing “the transmission of Black radical thought” through the reimagining of Angela Davis, drawing audiences “away from the reality of the liberation movement”<sup>37</sup> and into what Robinson calls a “counter-liberationist realm”<sup>38</sup>.



Figure 5.10. *Foxy Brown* (Jack Hill, 1974)

<sup>31</sup> Parish, James Robert Parish and George H. Hill, *Black Action Films* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1989), 142.

<sup>32</sup> Robinson, “Blaxploitation”, 11.

<sup>33</sup> Guerrero, Ed, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 99.

<sup>34</sup> A companion genre to Blaxploitation films, according to Robinson, and differentiated from the earlier forms of Blaxploitation from the 1930s (following D. W. Griffith’s 1915 *Birth of a Nation*), specifically, the “jungle genre”, named by Rhona Berenstein (“White heroines and hearts of darkness: race, gender, and disguise in 1930s jungle films”, *Film History* (No.6, 1994), pp.314-39), and exemplified by such films as *Ingagi* (1930), *Trader Horn* (1931), *The Blonde Captive* (1932), *The Savage Girl* (1932), and *King Kong* (1933), and the “plantation genre”, named by Ed Guerrero (*Framing Blackness*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1993), and for which *So Red the Rose* (1935), *Jezebel* (1938), and *Gone With the Wind* (1939) serve as key examples.

<sup>35</sup> Robinson, “Blaxploitation”, 10-11.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Robinson, “Blaxploitation”, 11.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*: 8.



Drawing on feminist film scholarship, Mia Mask has a different understanding of Pam Grier's performance. In *Divas on Screen: Black Women in American Films*, Mask argues that Grier's career "as a subversive phallic femme" was "predicated on her narrative function as an *intertextual archetype*"<sup>39</sup>, or her ability to be cited, reiterated, revised and transformed into diverse reappropriations<sup>40</sup>. Mask proposes that we see Grier as one of many *intertextual signifiers* that can "reveal the instabilities, ambiguities, and contradictions of their construction as well as the contradictions of the culture industry", including the US fascination with the "star system"<sup>41</sup>. In the specific case of the characters played by Grier in Blaxploitation films – of which she highlights *Foxy Brown's* precursor *Coffy* (Jack Hill, 1973)– and the subsequent re-interpretations of her Blaxploitation characters in the form of female vigilantes in action films, neo-Blaxploitation, and neo-noir cinema, Mask suggests the existence of "structural continuity between old and new films as well as the existence of cult cinema's intertextual archetypes –preestablished, frequently appearing types recycled by innumerable texts, provoking *deja vu* in the spectator"<sup>42</sup>. *Jackie Brown* (Quentin Tarantino, 1997) would be then what she calls "a perfect example of postmodern nostalgia"<sup>43</sup>. Surely, Frederick Jameson would agree<sup>44</sup>.

Despite Blaxploitation's quick demise in the mid-1970s shortly after *Foxy Brown's* release<sup>45</sup>, which saw Pam Grier's career quickly discarded with the exception of the very successful *Jackie Brown*<sup>46</sup>, *after-images* of Angela Davis in mainstream culture remain and are constantly being updated<sup>47</sup>. However, none of these representations have generated as many reproductions as Pam Grier's performance.

In both the movies and advertising, Angela Davis' image has often been reappropriated into what Jameson has called *pastiche*, as a form of "blank parody" that arises in the postmodern age.<sup>48</sup> Davis finds it useful to return to Jameson's analysis of "nostalgia films" for the interpretation of these fashion images. For example, in 1974, when preparing for the photograph on the cover of her autobiography, which would be taken by the photographer Phillippe Halsman, he assumed that the photo would re-create a symbolic visual representation

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<sup>39</sup> Mask, Mia, *Divas on Screen: Black Women in American Film* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 95.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid: 2-3.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid: 3.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid: 95.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid: 100. Grier, in the leading role, is named Jackie Brown, in homage to her most famous character. The film, says Mask, "not only reanimated the myth of the phallic woman striving for revenge, it also reinvented Grier's former persona" (ibid). Out of *Jackie Brown* came even more *after-images* (now not of Angela Davis, but of Pam Grier herself), including *Bones* (Ernest Dickerson, 2001) and the television series *The L Word*.

<sup>44</sup> For a discussion on Jameson's writings on "the nostalgia film", see Chapter 4.

<sup>45</sup> For a description of the multiple and complex factors in the demise of Blaxploitation films, see: Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 1993.

<sup>46</sup> "Both women's talents were pretty much confined to articulating the sex-violence-action scenarios of cheap Blaxploitation vehicles, and when the studios unplugged the genre, both were unceremoniously dumped, their fates in this sense paralleling those of so many black women with talent and high expectations before and after them in Hollywood's long discriminatory history. Like the vast majority of enthusiastic actors who rose to recognition during Blaxploitation's high moment of cultural influence, Grier and Dobson had all but disappeared from the commercial screen by the end of the decade". Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 99-100.

<sup>47</sup> In 1994, for example, Davis writes that she has received "an astounding number of requests for interviews from journalists doing interviews on 'the resurgence of the Afro'", Davis, "Afro Images", 1994: 42.

<sup>48</sup> Jameson, Frederic, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", *New Left Review* 146 (July-August 1984).

of Black militancy: black leather jacket, Afro hairdo, and raised fist. She and her editor Toni Morrison had “to persuade him to photograph me in a less predictable posture”<sup>49</sup>. She writes,

Perhaps by also taking up Berger’s call for an ‘alternative photography’ we might develop strategies for engaging photographic images like the ones I have evoked, by actively seeking to transform their interpretative contexts in education, popular culture, the media, community organizing, and so on. Particularly in relation to African American historical images, we need to find ways to of incorporating them into ‘social and political memory, instead of using [them] as a substitute which encourages the atrophy of such memory’<sup>50</sup>.

Resisting nostalgia here has to do with finding an “alternative photography” (Berger)<sup>51</sup> or, in our case, an *alternative cinema* that will not continue to reproduce past *types* for nostalgia, nor use images to illustrate an argument or to demonstrate a linear thought, but to incorporate these images into social and political memory, in dialogue with *other* images, sounds, and texts.

As we will argue here, contemporary avant-garde film practices, through found footage, collage, and montage strategies, offer the possibility for an *alternative cinema* capable of reworking the revolutionary’s after-image in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Grier/Foxy/Davis Face Amalgam**

The idea for Christopher Harris’s 14-minute collage 16mm film *Reckless Eyeballing* (2004) – a film that is “made in the editing”<sup>52</sup>– “began with the images of Angela Davis and Pam Grier because I was thinking of the way Davis’ persona and iconography were sort of subsumed by the Pam Grier Blaxploitation films ...].” The film confronts images of Angela Davis’ FBI wanted poster with a 35mm trailer for *Foxy Brown*, together with a 35mm trailer for *Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1915), audio from a self-help audiocassette for men, words and phrases pulled from technical notes explaining how to calibrate the color temperature of motion picture filmstock, audio from an old 1960s English dubbed Italian B-movie called *Medusa v. the Son of Hercules* (Alberto de Martino, 1963), audio from a recording of Paul Robeson performing Othello, and audio of Anna Freud’s daughter “talking about the psychosexual merging of sex and aggression (fear and desire) which is more or less at the heart of *Reckless Eyeballing*”. Through montage, the film combines and juxtaposes these diverse images, sounds, and texts, to present a counter-representation of the Black female revolutionary, while simultaneously critically examining the very nature of the original media images themselves.

As a collage film, *Reckless Eyeballing* creates visual and aural associations between images, words, and sounds, from the diverse materials that have been reappropriated into the film. Despite the multitude of visual and audio sources, the central images of the film can be reduced to two, precisely the images with which Harris began making the film: face-images of Angela Davis and Pam Grier. Recycled images (of Angela Davis’ face on Wanted Ad, Pam Grier’s face in *Foxy Brown*), texts (of Wanted Ad), and sounds (“She will never look” and

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<sup>49</sup> Davis, “Afro Images”, 41.

<sup>50</sup> Davis cites John Berger’s “Uses of Photography”, *ibid*: 60.

<sup>51</sup> “The task of an alternative photography is to incorporate photography into social and political memory, instead of using it as a substitute [...] Normally photographs are used in a very unilinear way -they are used to illustrate an argument, or to demonstrate a thought which goes like this”. Berger, “Uses of Photography”, 62-64.

<sup>52</sup> Harris, Christopher. Personal Interview. April 28th and May 6th, 2019. All quotes in this paragraph come from the same interview.

continuous beeping sound) are cleverly edited to connect –in the spectator’s “mind-screen”<sup>53</sup>– two women: Angela Davis and Pam Grier<sup>54</sup>. In the following sequence at the very beginning of the film, we can clearly see this association, literally “written” across the screen. The screenshots, when placed together, read: “Angela Davis...”, black screen, photograph of Angela Davis’ face, “Alias”, “Pam Grier” and film still with face-image, “Is Wanted”. Angela Davis, alias, Pam Grier, Is Wanted (Figure 5.11).



Figure 5.11. “Angela Davis...Alias... Pam Grier...Is Wanted”

*Reckless Eyeballing* (Christopher Harris, 2004)

<sup>53</sup> Comolli, Jean-Louis and Vincent Sorrel, *Cine, modo de empleo: De lo fotoquímico a lo digital* (Buenos Aires: Manantial. 2016), 323.

<sup>54</sup> In the following Chapter, we will see another example of this kind of editing by association in Godard’s *The Image Book* and how he combines a face-image from a photographer and fragments from an Albert Cossery novel to re-image Cossery’s character known as “Samantar”.

Associative editing is used here to transform individual Grier/Foxy (actress/character) and Davis (the modern fugitive) images into a singular Black radical female character made of all two/three women (which we will refer to as Grier/Foxy/Davis). If we look closely frame by frame, this Black radical female has many different faces. But when seen continuously, the film constructs *one face* out of all the recycled images.

*Reckless Eyeballing* reverses *Foxy Brown*'s counter-liberation/commercial qualities so that these images can regain their subversive edge. Harris' decision to mix and confuse name and face by way of association in the editing is particularly poignant when we consider Davis' caution regarding the individualization of her case, i.e. that people would consider her story as extraordinary. She describes this in the Preface of her autobiography:

I was not anxious to write this book. [...] I felt that to write about my life, what I did, what I thought and what happened to me would require a posture of difference, an assumption that I was unlike other women—other Black women—and therefore needed to explain myself. I felt that such a book might end up obscuring the most essential fact: the forces that have made my life what it is are the very same forces that have shaped and misshaped the lives of millions of my people.<sup>55</sup>

In the reproduction and reappropriation of her face-image, Angela Davis is no longer an individual; she is an icon and a symbol, and her identity is not separated from the visible world. If *Foxy Brown* intended to remove politics and history from Davis' after-image, *Reckless* cleverly uses the same supposedly depoliticized face (Grier's) to do the opposite: that is, to connect collective history (including film history) to the individual and plural face. Davis, Grier, and Foxy become one as a form of rejection of mainstream media's over-individualization of Davis' fight.

### **Repetition With a Difference and the Disarticulation of Glamour**

The two structuring principles for the film are repetition (with a difference) and eye-line matches. As Harris explains, "No sequence of shots is repeated exactly even though many of the shots recur throughout. They always appear in a different sequence and/or a different appearance (sometimes positive, sometimes negative, sometimes grainier or less so, sometimes sped up, sometimes slowed down, etc.)"<sup>56</sup>. Through repetition with a difference and Harris' treatment of the image, which has been re-photographed several times in different ways, draws attention to the very *imageness* of the image, that is, the materiality of the image. The Grier/Davis/Foxy face is treated first-and-foremost as an image. It is plastic, two-dimensional, has a surface, can be scratched, manipulated, both manually or through the camera. Take for instance these two images of blackness (Figure 5.12); they are not the same. One is a black screen with white dots, the other is the grainy black of Davis' afro captured on film, abstracted by the limits of the frame.

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<sup>55</sup> Davis, *An Autobiography*, xv (Preface).

<sup>56</sup> Harris, Christopher. Personal Interview. April 28th and May 6th, 2019.



Figure 5.12. Expressions of material blackness in *Reckless Eyeballing* (Christopher Harris, 2004)

Significantly, repetition with a difference works to eliminate any potential *glamour* that could have been present in the Grier/Davis/Foxy face-image and upon which the entire Hollywood star system-publicity machine relies. Harris de-beautifies the face, choosing to emphasize, instead, the image's imperfections and errors (Figure 5.13). This is highlighted not only in how he has re-photographed the images –adding grain, zooming out to make visible the optical sound track and frame line, etc.– but also in his decision to manually develop the footage by hand. As he explains,

I developed much of that footage by hand “spaghetti style” in a bucket (i.e. it was all tangled up in the developing chemistry). This causes more scratches and imperfections in the image that I wanted. For example, sometimes you can see sprocket holes on the image which resulted from the film folding back on itself in the bucket so that the chemistry developed parts of the film-strip that were exposed through the sprocket holes without developing other parts of the filmstrip. I also used something called the Sabattier effect where I flashed the film with light for a second during the developing stage which causes the image to reverse tonality (from negative to positive or vice versa)<sup>57</sup>.

Rephotography, optical printing, and film development by hand, become strategies by which the image is *un-glamoured*. The treatment of the image brings the image down to its essential material nature, becoming porous, grainy, fragmented, irregular, and inconstant. It is prone to deterioration and easily destroyed. By rejecting glamour, the face-image in *Reckless* subverts mainstream media's desire to transform Davis' face and look into a marketable fashion trend<sup>58</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> Harris, Christopher. Personal Interview. April 28th and May 6th, 2019.

<sup>58</sup> In “Afro Images: Politics, Fashion, and Nostalgia” (1994), Davis describes how this occurred.



Figure 5.13. Are you Angela Davis?<sup>59</sup>  
*Reckless Eyeballing* (Christopher Harris, 2004)

Harris' use of *repetition with a difference* does for the mass-media image what Douglass' rhetorical strategy of *chiasmus* did for racist language. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has written about Douglass' play with language: "One of his favorite tropes was chiasmus, repeating two or more words or clauses or grammatical constructions, balanced against each other in reverse order; a rhetorical *x* somewhat akin to a linguistic seesaw. 'You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man'"<sup>60</sup>. Suddenly, writes Gates, Jr., Douglass "reverses these associations, turning them upside down just as surely as if he had grabbed the two branches on each side of the *x* of the chiasmus with both hands and flipped them, showing that we had gotten these associations wrong all along, that there was nothing natural or fixed about them after all..."<sup>61</sup>. Chiasmus was his chosen form for reversing the world's order and for demonstrating that what seems fixed is actually arbitrary, and therefore ready to be changed and switched at any time.

In photography, Douglass used repetition with a difference as he had used the chiasmus in writing. It became a strategy for "registering through image of himself after image of himself that the Negro, the slave, was as variable as any human being could be, not just in comparison to white people, but even more importantly among and *within* themselves"<sup>62</sup>. "Not only do all black people *not* look alike, Douglass repeatedly is attesting through these photographs, but even one black subject doesn't 'look alike' over time"<sup>63</sup>. For Gates, Jr., this was very much connected to Du Bois' concern with roll-film cameras' "sameness" in its depictions of black

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<sup>59</sup> Davis, *An Autobiography*, 15.

<sup>60</sup> Gates, Jr. Henry Louis. "Frederick Douglass's Camera Obscura: Representing the Antislave 'Clothed and in their Own Form'", *Critical Inquiry* 42 (Autumn 2015): 34.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*: 37.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* "Douglass's job, the political work of his rhetoric, is to strip away the veil behind which this universe of illusion operates, defining its functional processes and machinery and unveiling its systems, apparatuses, thereby subverting its claims to be natural and fixed", Gates, Jr., "Frederick Douglass's Camera Obscura", 35.

subjects. Plate cameras, on the other hand, captured *difference*, argues Gates, Jr., “even *differences within difference*”, and Du Bois understood the importance of depicting the specificity and uniqueness of the black community in the struggle for civil rights<sup>64</sup>. This is why Du Bois curated 363 images of American Negroes and American Negro Life at the American Negro Exhibit at the Paris Exposition in 1900 (Figure 5.14). Exhibiting photographs from his collection of the middle and upper classes, Du Bois’ intention was to show a large range of “blackness” that had finally been made visible in nineteenth-century plate photography.



Figure 5.14. Four African American women seated on steps of a building at Atlanta University, Georgia. Photographer Thomas E. Askew, 1850?-1914. Part of the collection of Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868-1963. Exhibited at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1900.

In *Reckless*, repetition with a difference becomes a rhetorical strategy, a way to subvert associations made by mass-media images that are often taken for granted by the spectator<sup>65</sup>. The face-image is stripped of its potential glamour and beauty, rephotographed so many times until the image is no longer even recognizable as a face. What was once the image of a “criminal”, someone who the FBI wanted the viewer of the image to help them to identify in a crowd, becomes unrecognizable, and therefore impossible to identify. The

<sup>64</sup> Ibid: 37.

<sup>65</sup> Thank you to Christopher Harris for calling my attention to the essay “Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture”, by James A. Snead. “Black culture”, says Snead, “is a concept first created by Europeans and defined in opposition to ‘European Culture’” (215). In its conception, it was seen as the lowest stage in the development of culture; since it did not have writing, it was seen as lacking in self-expression. Snead reads many of these first definitions of Black culture –principally, Hegel- against the original intentions of the authors, to make the case that Black culture is characterized by its cyclical nature, of repetition and “cuts”. This cyclical view of history was also part of European history, very much connected to the regeneration of biological and agricultural systems, observes Snead, but was suppressed by the coming of scientific progressivism (2018). In African music and it that of their descendants –including slave-songs, blues, spirituals, and jazz, says Snead, but we could also add other musical forms of African ancestry- repetition has prevailed as a form of refusal towards more linear forms of thought and expression. See: Snead, James A., “Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture”, *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (The New Museum of Contemporary Art: New York, 1990).

photographic image is stripped of its “scientific” power of *evidence of something/someone*. In this case, we cannot argue that the images show an *evolution* of a person, as Douglass attempted in his photographs, because unlike these, the images recycled by Harris are not images *taken over time*. They are images that through their repetition and manipulation are transformed, *over the time that the film takes to be seen and heard*. This means that the evolution is not in the subject, captured by the photographic device, over time, but rather in the image itself, as it is manipulated by the filmmaker at the editing table. This evolution is within the image, and not in the person (Figure 5.15).

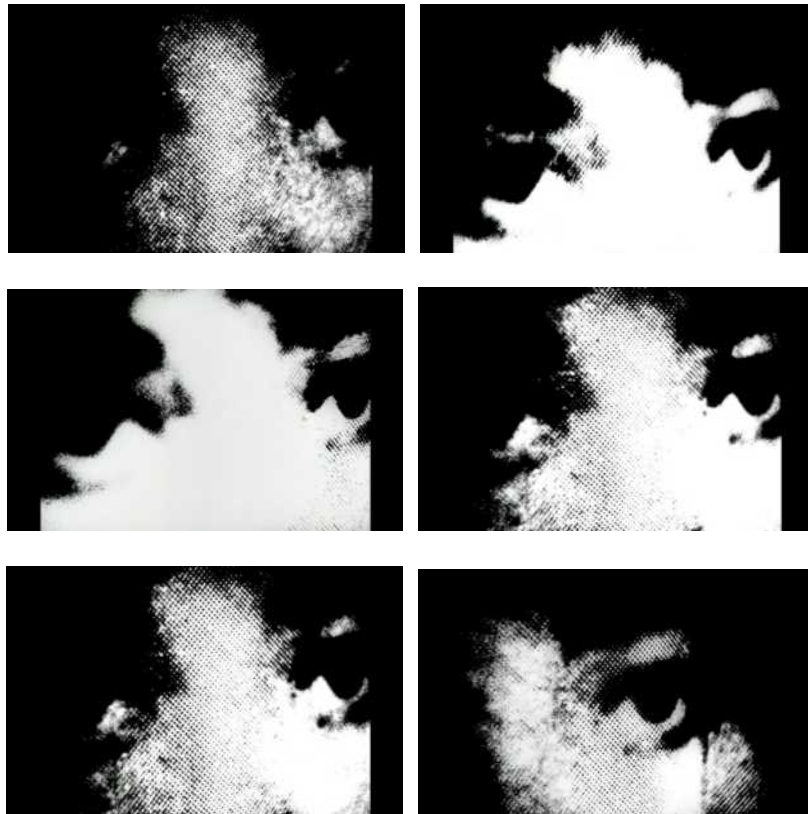


Figure 5.15. Repetition with a difference in *Reckless Eyeballing*

Rather than commenting on the malleability of identity as Douglass did many years ago, or as Du Bois on the plurality of Blackness in the United States, Harris’ manipulation of found footage in this film comments on *the malleability of the image itself*. The *punctum*, in reference to Barthes, is not in the face, anymore. It is in the grain itself, in the white light, in the delicate border between white and black. The *punctum* is in the *materiality of the image*, no longer in the *aura* of the person who has been photographed. And this materiality also speaks to the person, because it comments on how this image of a Black woman—for instance—has been hunted down and turned into a criminal—and then an object of desire, in Blaxploitation films—by way of an image that emphasizes her color, her face, her Blackness. This “Blackness” is what the face-image, in its original use by mass-media, “represents”. In Harris’ found footage film, it is stripped bare, shown for what it “really is”, at least materially: Blackness is Blackness only when next to Whiteness. When I shared with Harris my observation that the film seems to move towards whiteness, Harris agreed: “This film is really about Whiteness, not



Blackness”. To speak about Blackness, this film seems to say, we must really look at Whiteness. They are interconnected, materially-speaking, and this rhetorical reversal of “the order of the world” is made visible through film manipulation.

For Harris, whiteness is encoded into the language of cinema through continuity editing:

[Whiteness] gets encoded into the language of cinema in a way that gets structured into continuity editing. Continuity editing creates a phenomenological experience for the viewer that is, in effect, analogous to the spatiotemporal experience of whiteness. The space is constructed for a subjectivity in which the viewer can be anywhere at any time, there’s no place they can’t go. And if they can’t see it, it’s not important, right? [...] It constructs a world in which the viewer is always in the right place at the right time. Well, that’s antithetical to the idea of Blackness, where Blackness is always in the wrong place at the wrong time<sup>66</sup>.

If Blackness is “always in the wrong place at the wrong time”, Harris will use collage and found footage filmmaking – in many ways the antithesis of continuity editing—to sew Blackness into the visible screen space and hijack the viewer’s supposedly “right” –and white– place.

### **Blackness and Whiteness: Contradiction and the Negative Image**

Harris’ analogue explorations with the materiality of blackness bring to mind similar explorations made by the Italian expanded media pioneer, poet and counter-cultural activist Aldo Tambellini in the 1960s. His Black Film Series, a sequence of seven films made between 1965 and 1969, including *BLACK IS*, *BLACK TRIP 1*, *BLACK TRIP 2*, *BLACK PLUS X*, *BLACKOUT*, *MOONBLACK*, and *BLACK TV*, focus on “the merging of the private dimension of everyday life and the public dimension of television”<sup>67</sup>. The videographic work *BLACK TV* (1968), for instance, uses a split-screen to create a relationship between two images which repeat and vary throughout the film. In this case, the public events filmed from the television screen relate to the assassination of Bobby Kennedy, police brutality in Chicago, and images of starving children in the war in Vietnam, intercut with images of television static, the television itself, and close-ups of faces of public figures, but mostly of anonymous children, black and white, *watching* (Figure 5.16). This montage of public events –including boxing matches, race cars and sports competitions– intercut with images of faces *looking*, and combined with repetitive sounds including a voice which repeats “Senator Kennedy has been shot –is this possible?” and “It is possible, ladies and gentlemen”, creates a violent and tragic narrative of the world in 1968, as it is transmitted on television, but where the transmission itself is also part of the violence. For Tambellini, who was publicly critical of television and how it would affect our way of seeing, it seems that not only the public events, but also the transmission itself, is part of the problem. In this media landscape, faces become impotent onlookers, witnesses to crimes that occur on the other side of the screen, without being able to do anything more than just watch the madness unfold.

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<sup>66</sup> Harris, Christopher, “Film Show 012: Christopher Harris”, *Tone Glow* (September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

<sup>67</sup> From Tate Museum Website for exhibit titled “Aldo Tambellini: Retracing Black” from October 9-14 2012: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/aldo-tambellini-retracing-black>.

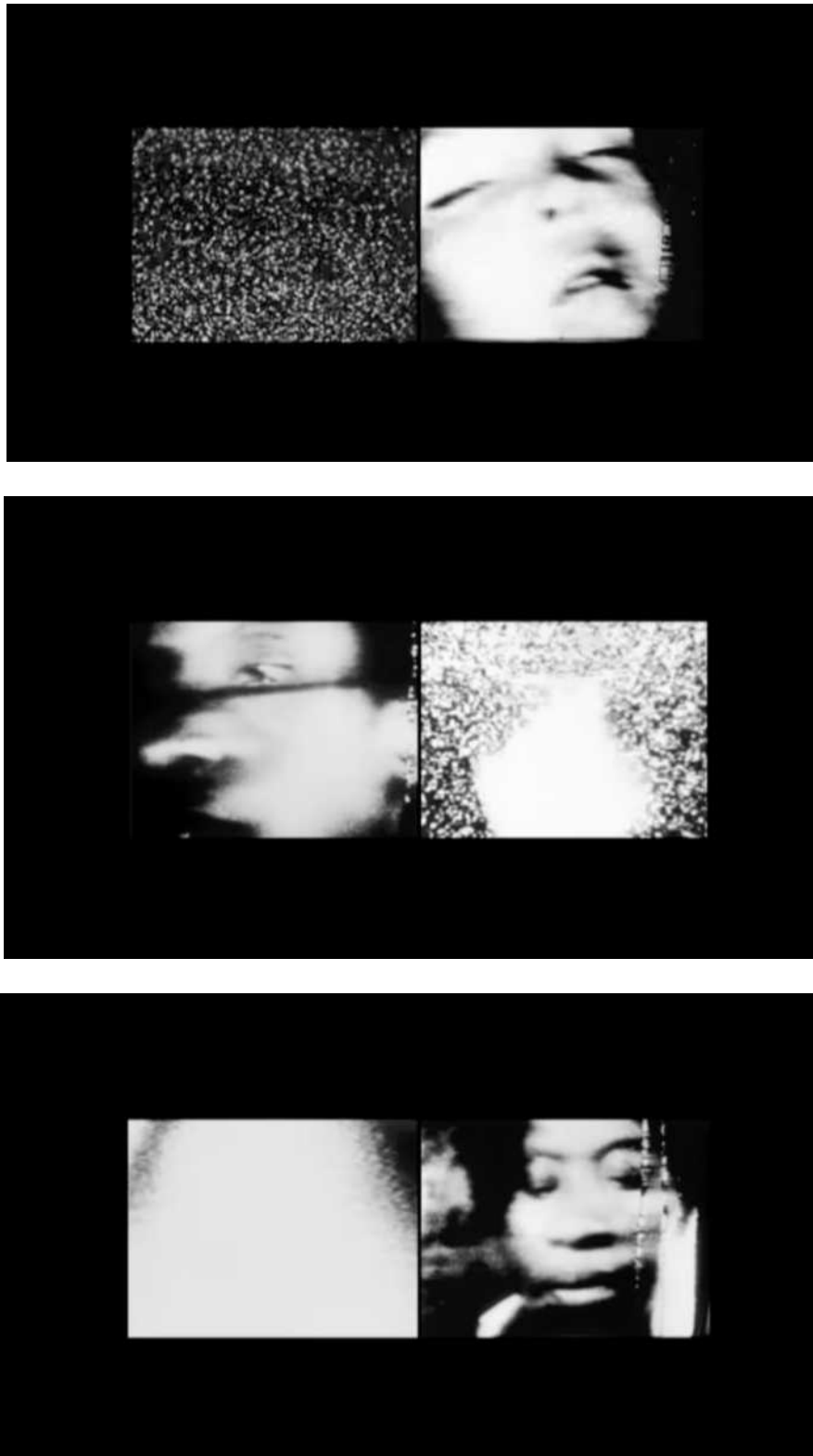


Figure 5.16. *BLACK TV* (Aldo Tambellini, 1968)

For Tambellini, blackness is inherent to film itself: to explore blackness formally is to explore the depths of the very screen and the infinite void of cinema. Blackness is commonly understood as the absence of image, but in Tambellini's films blackness *becomes image* through his manual intervention on the celluloid itself. He applies chemicals, including paint,

ink and stencils, as well as slicing and scraping the celluloid directly. While Tambellini works towards a cinematographic reconceptualization of blackness as a way of opening up and appropriating the television format, *Reckless Eyeballing* does the same with Classical Hollywood Cinema. The Black Film Series and *Reckless* are explorations of blackness as a key for unlocking how both mediums –film and television– construct exclusive forms of visibility through the invisibility of others.

Wees explains how found footage filmmakers reclaim public images in order to criticize standardized representations of the world:

In addition to their innate interest as gestures of personal expression, the visual effects added by the filmmaker assert the individual filmmaker's power to reclaim the terrain of public images for personal use. Thus even the most painterly and abstract found footage films offer an implicit critique of the film industry's conventional, standardized representations of the world, and like other kinds of found footage films, they interrupt the endless recirculation and unreflective reception of mass media images<sup>68</sup>.

The found footage filmmaker *interrupts* these mass media images precisely from *within*, using the very media's formal rhetorical strategies of montage<sup>69</sup>. What Harris' film proposes is to use the very same strategies of montage of mainstream media (continuity editing, eyeline matching, associations created between images and which act on viewer prejudice and expectations) that are responsible for the appropriation of public images of Angela Davis that eroticize and de-politicize Blacks, in order to reclaim and subvert these mechanisms of filmmaking (and the same images) for his own purposes.

While for Farocki, the innovation of *Numéro Deux* (Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville, 1975) –which we understand now was not quite new, as Tambellini was already doing the same many years before– was to show two images occurring at the same time (Figure 5.17) or what Godard calls “simultaneity”<sup>70</sup> (a discovery that Farocki attributes to video, as video editing typically occurs in front of two monitors, one displays the edited material and the other the unedited footage), in Harris' film the revelation is that an image can be one thing and another, *at once*. A split-screen is no longer needed to create a *soft montage*, because the same image can be reproduced several times, with variation, and in that same image simultaneity is possible through the force of contradiction.

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<sup>68</sup> Wees, *Recycled Images*, 31-32.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*: 25.

<sup>70</sup> Wolfried Reichart, “Interview mit Jean-Luc Godard”, trans. Michael Klier, *Filmkritik*, n.242 (February 1877), 61. Cited in Farocki, Harun and Kaja Silverman, *Speaking About Godard*, 206.



Figure 5.17. Simultaneity in *Numéro Deux* (Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville, 1975)

Contradiction is exemplified in Harris' film in the use of positive and negative images and changes in speed. The same image is first positive, then negative. Fast, then slow. These different processes are done for the same image. The image contains the "and" in itself. Or rather, the image goes from one point (black) to the other (white), from fear to desire, through the editing. The film becomes increasingly whiter as it moves forward, ending with a blinding image of light/whiteness on Pam Grier/ "Angela Davis" face (Figure 5.18). But even as the image becomes lighter, even as the face becomes white, the spectator knows that the image is of a black woman and of a black face. The image, then, has a contradiction inside of it. When I mention this to Harris in an email exchange, he responds that contradiction is key to his work: "The idea of a single image being two things at once is fundamental to this film and my body of work in general. I try to make films that are divided against itself, that function through internal contradictions, where the "and" means this "and" the opposite of this"<sup>71</sup>.



Figure 5.18. Towards whiteness. *Reckless Eyeballing* (Christopher Harris, 2004)

According to Gates Jr. this "and" was also a part of Douglass' own identity, as fugitive slave and free man, as both black and white<sup>72</sup>. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this contradiction was difficult to understand, to make visible, to represent in a picture. Douglass' portraits can be seen as

<sup>71</sup> Interview with filmmaker. Godard will say something very similar in Chapter 7.

<sup>72</sup> Because Douglass' father was a white man, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. writes that Douglass "[...] stood at the center of the gray area of mixed-race overlap", Gates, Jr., "Frederick Douglass's Camera Obscura", 45.

attempts at representation of the black community, not as a “pure” race necessarily, but inevitably as a mixed race, and of a common humanity:

Douglass used these photographs to mark both the differences *and* the resemblances of black people to the larger human community. But he also was displaying, *prima facie*, the inextricable social *and* biological connection between the slave and his master, between bondsman and lord, between black and white. That was his first and most subtle intention<sup>73</sup>.

In his 1854 speech “The claims of the Negro, ethnologically considered”, Douglass understood that the problem between the white and black people of the United States was the vital question of his time<sup>74</sup>. He described the power of picture-making and the task of picture-makers as one in which to “see what ought to be by the reflection of what is, and endeavor to remove the contradiction”. This is perhaps the ultimate goal: for the contradiction to be removed. What films like *Reckless Eyeballing* try to do, however, is assume and embrace the contradiction *as an essential part of the image itself*. The question is how to visibilize the contradiction within the image (perhaps this is necessary in the long journey to one day having it removed...). The “removal” of the contradiction could be called upon because montage “did not yet exist”. Montage would come into the world and influence our way of thinking only after cinema’s invention. However, looking through the collection of photographs of Douglass contrasted with the engravings made with negative representations of him, as the book *Picturing Frederick Douglass* proposes, we can already begin to imagine a kind of montage between the photographs that, with or without cinema, Douglass may very well have himself imagined.

Now, in contemporary film practice, contradictions –including that of black *and* white– provoke, *require* and eventually *find* new aesthetic forms. The negative image, as used by Harris, is one of these (Figure 5.19).



Figure 5.19. Black *and* white – *Reckless Eyeballing*

<sup>73</sup> Gates, Jr., “Frederick Douglass’s Camera Obscura”, 46.

<sup>74</sup> Douglass, Frederick, “The claims of the Negro, ethnologically considered: an address before the literary societies of Western Reserve College” (July 12, 1854).



Figure 5.20. Frederick Douglass  
Positive/Negative (Manipulation by the author)

Tambellini's film *BLACK PLUS X* (1966) also explores the force of the negative image as an aesthetic exploration on whiteness and blackness. In this film, Tambellini films contemporary life in a black community. Black children play in an oceanside amusement park and in the water. The camera moves closely into their faces, in repetitive movements that fragment the face (Figure 5.21). The majority of these images, with the exception of a short fragment towards the end of the film, have been processed as negatives. The "X" in the title refers to the X-ray-type filmic device "by which a black person is instantaneously turned into white by the mere projection of the negative image"<sup>75</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> "BLACK PLUS X (1966) – Tambellini here focuses on contemporary life in a black community. The extra, the "X" of Black Plus X, is a filmic device by which a black person is instantaneously turned white by the mere projection of the negative image. The time is summer, and the place is an oceanside amusement park where black children are playing in the surf and enjoying the rides, quite oblivious to Tambellini's tongue-in-cheek "solution" to the race problem", Grove Press Film Catalog, cited on Aldo Tambellini's website: <https://tambellini.no-art.info/film-en.html>.



Figure 5.21. *BLACK PLUS X* (Aldo Tambellini, 1966)

The use of negative filmic images in relation to questions of race has been most recently explored in Travis Wilkerson’s *Did You Wonder Who Fired the Gun?* (2017). In this documentary murder mystery, the filmmaker goes on the road to uncover the assassination of a black man named Bill Spann, murdered by his great grandfather, S.E. Branch, in 1946. Throughout the film, Wilkerson returns several times to the film *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Robert Mulligan, 1962), based on the novel from 1960 by Harper Lee, and starring Gregory Peck as Atticus Finch, a lawyer set out to defend a black man accused of raping a white woman. The choice of film is revelatory. Released in December 1962, the film has been (nostalgically) described as a “time capsule, preserving hopes and sentiments from a kinder, gentler, more naive America”<sup>76</sup>. Less than a year after the film’s release, John F. Kennedy would be assassinated, followed by the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert Kennedy, Malcolm X, and Medgar Evers. The book remains to this day one of the most beloved novels ever written in the United States and Finch, a character based on Lee’s father, still represents a national white moral hero. Wilkerson chooses this character, also from Alabama, as a fictional representation of precisely what his film is not. As he says at the beginning of the film, “Trust me when I tell you this isn’t another white savior story. This is a white nightmare story.”

Wilkerson returns to this figure as a kind of screen-double of his great grandfather – and himself–, not only of what his relative never was but also arguably as a parody of his own self-aggrandizing role as detective, documentary filmmaker and morally heroic individual. The negative image’s transparency indicates a search for “the truth” that characterizes Finch and the detective-like quality of the documentary filmmaker, but its application also reveals that

<sup>76</sup> Ebert, Roger, “To Kill a Mockingbird”, *RogerEbert.com* (November 11, 2001).

something might still remain occult in this universally loved character (Figure 5.22). The negative image also changes Finch's "skin tone" –and that of all the whites in the film– to black, calling attention to the actual black man –Tom Robinson– whose face is left out of the hero story. It must be observed here that *Did You Wonder* never resorts to *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a source of nostalgia. This is because the images and sounds from *To Kill a Mockingbird* are incorporated into the film always in relation to other images, sounds, texts, and ideas that are historically situated. *Did You Wonder* does not stay in the past of the previous film, neither thematically nor stylistically, but rather uses the film to complicate the expected role of the filmmaker, the law, and the truth, in the present.



Figure 5.22. *Did You Wonder Who Fired the Gun?* (Travis Wilkerson, 2017)

Negative images become a powerful aesthetic choice for the interruption and queering of racial representation in experimental film. In Tambellini's and Harris' film, this process is analogue, and the negative image is physically part of the image, while in *Did You Wonder* the image is digitally modified into a negative. In both cases, however, the films *play* with an in-between-point between whiteness and blackness in order to explore precisely where this dividing line lies. How do we see blackness, how do we see whiteness? And how much of this is determined by a visual function of the eye? If the film-eye is to revert how the human-eye sees, the films seem to suggest, we might be able to see more clearly just how limited our seeing is. Furthermore, if blackness and whiteness are merely visual aspects of the color of one's skin that can be easily altered by a negative image, then what are racism, racial inequality, and White supremacy actually about? What is most significant is how these questions are explored primarily –and radically– in the form.

Once the image is transformed through the process of negativity, it becomes possible to introduce other colors into the palette. In *Did You Wonder?* Wilkerson adds a third color



(red) to the images from *To Kill a Mockingbird*, gesturing, perhaps, to the films of Santiago Álvarez<sup>77</sup> who, for example, in *LBJ* (1968) uses a red color on former US president Lyndon B. Johnson's face-image to graphically call attention to Johnson's –and the United States'– war criminal history (Figure 5.23). Contrasted with images of Johnson with his child, in the pose of good all-American family man, Álvarez creates a portrait of Johnson that includes his participation in the Vietnam War, directly responsible for the deaths of thousands of Vietnamese men, women, and especially, children, for which he was never held accountable.



Figure 5.23. *LBJ* (Santiago Álvarez, 1968)

The color red is indeed a powerful way to “enunciate” the image, as we can also see in the work of artist Carrie Mae Weems. *From Here I Saw What Happened and Cried* (1995) is comprised of appropriated photographs of slaves in the American South and other 19th and 20th century photographs of Africans and African Americans that Weems found in museum and university archives (Figure 5.24). Among the photographs that she intervenes, are daguerreotypes of portraits of slaves commissioned by Swiss naturalist Louis Agassiz in the United States South in 1850. Agassiz intended to use these portraits as visual evidence to support his theories of the racial inferiority of Africans and to prepare a taxonomy of physical types in the slave population. His efforts were unsuccessful, however, as they were only shown once to a group of other scientists and intellectuals and then never again. As Gates, Jr. describes, “Though compelled to strip naked for the photographer, the black ‘object’s’ inner subjectivity had deconstructed and derailed a most racist intention”<sup>78</sup>. And, in reference to Douglass, he adds, “The slave, once again, has performed the chiasitic function, unveiling the wickedness of the so-called the master”<sup>79</sup>. The implication being that these images have “a life of their own”; although they were taken for one purpose, they very quickly worked against

<sup>77</sup> Wilkerson has often spoken about Santiago Álvarez as a reference and inspiration for his own work. He also made a film about Álvarez titled *Accelerated Under-Development: In the Idiom of Santiago Álvarez* (1999).

<sup>78</sup> Gates, Jr., “Frederick Douglass’s Camera Obscura”, 50.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

their commissioner, to unveil *his* “wickedness”. As a result, “In the mirror of history, these photographs condemn Agassiz...”<sup>80</sup>. Weems intervenes the images through re-photography, enlargement, and re-printing with colored filters, using blue and red, and circular mattes to suggest the lens of a camera.



Figure 5.24. *From Here I Saw What Happened and Cried* (Carrie Mae Weems, 1995)<sup>81</sup>.

Christopher Harris made a film-response to these same photographs appropriated by Weems, titled *A Willing Suspension of Disbelief + Photography and Fetish* (2014). In this 17 minute film shot on 16mm and transferred to HD for a 3-channel and split-screen video installation, Harris uses re-enactment and performance as a way of responding to these images (Figure 5.25). He uses a split-screen composition to create associations between three images at a time, of performer Shaneeka Harrell re-enacting the poses from the photographs, mixed with on-screen texts taken from the poem “Death and the Maiden” by Franz Schubert from 1817, as well as passages read aloud by Harrell from Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida* from 1980. While Agassiz’s photographs are fixed, in Harris’ cinematographic re-enactment they “come alive”, acquiring movement, sound, and the ability to “look back”. The return-gaze becomes a way to address the viewer directly, making him/her a participant in the act of seeing. In the following section, we will look at how *Reckless Eyeballing* creates an image of a black female spectator in order to challenge dominant questions of spectatorship constructed in Hollywood films. As we can see in *A Willing Suspension*, these are preoccupations that the filmmaker develops in several of his works and over time, returning again and again to entanglements of looking and power.

<sup>80</sup> Gates, Jr., “Frederick Douglass’s Camera Obscura”, 50.

<sup>81</sup>Chromogenic color prints with sand-blasted text on glass, 28 works: 26 3/4 x 22" (67.9 x 55.8 cm); 4 works: 22 x 26 3/4" (55.8 x 67.9 cm); 2 works: 43 1/2 x 33 1/2" (110.4 x 85 cm). More information available on the Museum of Modern Art Website: [https://www.moma.org/learn/moma\\_learning/carrie-mae-weems-from-here-i-saw-what-happened-and-i-cried-1995/](https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/carrie-mae-weems-from-here-i-saw-what-happened-and-i-cried-1995/).



Figure 5.25. *A Willing Suspension of Disbelief + Photography and Fetish* (Christopher Harris, 2014)

As we can see in the image below (Figure 5.26), the negative image is also used in this film to create a dialectical relationship between the images. They are “the same”, and yet something has changed in the image. The reflection, as a “mirror image”, creates a relationship that draws attention to the aesthetic and political possibilities of repetition and variation for representation. In the “mirror of history”, these images can acquire new purposes and meanings.

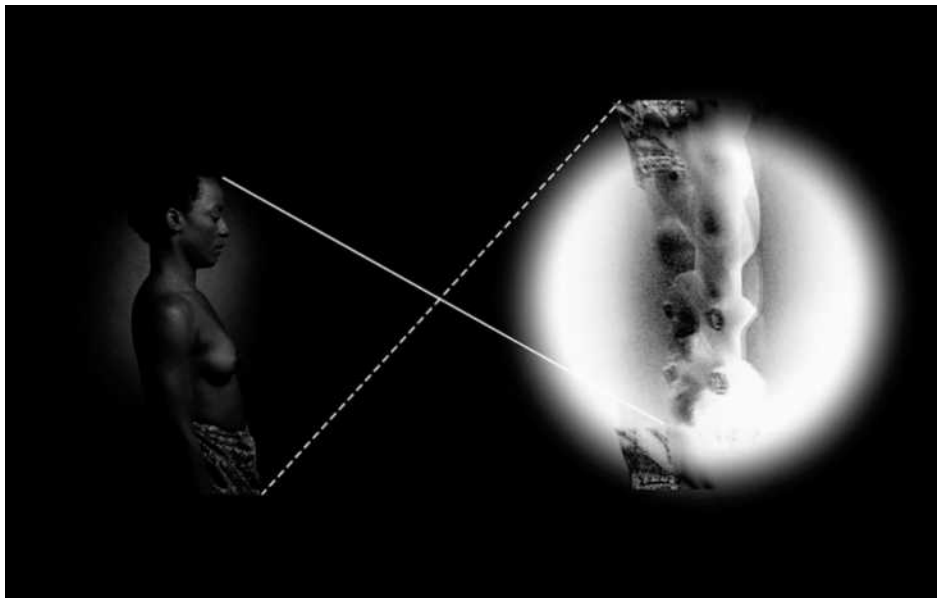


Figure 5.26. *A Willing Suspension of Disbelief + Photography and Fetish* (Christopher Harris, 2014)

### **Eyeline Matching and the Oppositional Gaze**

In addition to associative editing and repetition with a difference, *Reckless* uses eye-line matching to “interrupt” the original intention of the recycled mass media images. While we have spoken primarily about the associations and relationships formed in the editing between the Pam Grier and Angela Davis’ face-images, there is another material we have not yet discussed which is also central to this film, and that is the reappropriation of scenes from *Birth of the Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1915). Originally titled *The Clansman*, as a film adapted from Thomas Dixon Jr.’s 1905 novel, *Birth of a Nation* tells the story of two families, one from the South, the other from the North, during the Civil War and Reconstruction eras. It is a nostalgia film, in the most literal sense, longing for the “pleasant” days of pre-war slavery and White

superiority. The film has been acknowledged as an inspiration for the rebirth of the Klu Klux Klan, which took place only a few months after its release, as well as for being the first film shown in the White House on February 18, 1915. Both of these anecdotes have only increased the film's commercial success, which has also been grossly exaggerated to give rise to the film's iconic place in film history.

Harris reworks material from one key scene in the film, where a black Captain (Gus, played by the white actor Walter Long in blackface) follows the youngest daughter of a white Southern family (Flora Cameron, played by Violet Wilkey) and looks at her with desire. These "looks" are communicated to the viewer through close-ups of his face, as his eyes gaze—and his body moves—almost uncontrollably towards her. In the original scene, Gus sees Flora, expresses his desire to marry (her, perhaps, though it is only implied), causing her to run away from him. He chases after her and she runs to a cliff, telling him to stay away or she will jump. As he grabs out to her, she jumps to her death. This scene is intercut with images of Flora's older brother who has just founded the Klu Klux Klan (Benjamin Cameron, played by Henry B. Walthall) searching frantically for her—in the role of the "White savior". Of course, what is implied is that the white woman's innocence would be corrupted by the black man's sexual desire. She would rather die than have him lay his hands on her. The myth of the black man as a biologically sexual monster that ruin young white women and girls for white men is filmically represented here to justify the formation of the Klu Klux Klan and the lynchings that occurred in the Reconstruction era.

From this scene, *Reckless* includes only the images of Gus behind a bush, moving towards the camera (and towards the white woman). Instead of showing Flora, the white female object of sexual desire, Harris cuts to images of Grier/Davis/Foxy's face. Through eye-line matching, these two characters who exist in films from vastly separate periods of film history, are brought to the same filmic space and time. They look at each other, again and again, in a staring match fueled by fear and desire<sup>82</sup>.

In his autobiography, Frederick Douglass wrote about being punished for looking. Later, when photographed as a free man for his book, he stares back into the camera, returning the gaze. That he was able to do so does not take away from the force of this gesture and the power that it conveyed to his readers, followers, as well as to those who hated him for the color of his skin. Author and activist bell hooks relates the fact that white slave-owners punished enslaved black people for looking to her own childhood, and to being punished for staring back at grown-ups:

Since I knew as a child that the dominating power adults exercised over me and over my gaze was never so absolute that I did not dare to look, to sneak a peep, to stare dangerously, I knew that the slaves had looked. That all attempts to repress our/black people's right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming looking to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze<sup>83</sup>.

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<sup>82</sup> Scholar Terri Francis has written about this subject in her essay titled "She Will Never Look" (2011) in relation to "scary subjectivity" in spectatorship and in representations of black womanhood. Francis, Terri Simone, "'She Will Never Look': Film Spectatorship, Black Feminism, and Scary Subjectivities", in *Reclaiming the Archive*, ed. Vicki Callahn (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2011). Francis titles her essay after a phrase heard on the soundtrack of *Reckless Eyeballing*. She uses it to "address issues of who can look and how the cinematic gaze is constructed or disallowed in particular films along racial and gendered lines", 99.

<sup>83</sup> hooks, bell, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. (Massachusetts: South End Press, 1992), 115-116.

An “oppositional gaze” is, by definition, “a critical gaze, one that ‘looks’ to document...”<sup>84</sup>. In *Reckless Eyeballing*, Harris creates an oppositional gaze through montage and the union of the Grier/Foxy/Davis face amalgam with the gaze of Gus’ character taken from *Birth of a Nation*. The woman’s return-gaze is the missing counter-shot in Griffith’s original film. While in Griffith’s film Gus looks at Flora who innocently flirts with a squirrel, in *Reckless* Gus is not only the one who looks, he is also *seen*. In Harris’s reappropriation, Foxy’s face not only “looks to document”, but it also looks to be seen. Scholar Terri Francis makes the case that this look is an example of a “scary subjectivity”, defined as the unruly political body<sup>85</sup>. She understands *Reckless Eyeballing* as an appropriation of the Medusa story in which a woman’s gaze threatens to turn a man into stone, where Foxy Brown is in the Medusa role and Gus the Renegade is the threatened, desirous man. In Harris’s remix, Foxy becomes “the primary, scary character”, while Gus becomes both desirous and afraid (Figure 5.27). By incorporating phrases like “She will never look” and “Don’t look at her, you will turn to stone!” repeatedly throughout the soundtrack, Francis argues that Harris creates a representation of a fear of the black woman’s gaze<sup>86</sup>.



Figure 5.27. *Reckless Eyeballing* (Christopher Harris, 2004)

<sup>84</sup> hooks, *Black Looks*, 116.

<sup>85</sup> Francis, ““She Will Never Look””, 100.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*: 111.

Essential to this black woman's gaze, however, is the return-gaze directed not only towards Gus but also towards the spectator who is watching her. For hooks, "Even in the worse circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency"<sup>87</sup>. Harris understands cinema as one of these "structures of domination". When the character returns the spectator's gaze by looking directly at the camera, this represents a rupture with a structure of domination in cinema that asks for –demands, actually– its own invisibility through hard-montage editing, continuity editing, non-awareness of camera, etc. By replacing Flora's image –"the paragon of white female purity-as-vulnerability and victimhood"<sup>88</sup> –with Pam Grier, and by revising a film that has from its premiere in 1915 come to represent not only White US culture but also set the precedent for the very structure of Hollywood cinema, *Reckless* "unmasks and upsets the understructure of white female desirability that is fundamental to classical narrative continuity as the eyeline match"<sup>89</sup>.

Breaking with these conventions of film montage, *Reckless* challenges the structures of domination of film itself. When Davis/Grier/Foxy returns the spectator's gaze she is opening up the possibility of agency within the filmic structure. While the recycled audio repeats the line "She will never look", the image tells a different story. She *will* look, the image says. She will look *again and again*. And she will look at *you*, too. By participating in the shared act of looking, the spectator becomes an accomplice to this other form of cinema which breaks from cinematic convention –by way of cinematic convention–; the spectator becomes an *anti-spectator*. Francis' concept of "scary subjectivity" is useful here to think about what an anti-spectator might look like. She uses it to refer to black female spectators "whose unruly behavior, specifically through humor and the use of absurdity, has particular meanings and implications within the film culture of African Americans"<sup>90</sup>. But she also widens the definition to include anyone whose behavior does not conform to established norms for watching movies, thus making him –or herself– a spectacle in the movie theater"<sup>91</sup>. She attributes these characters with the self-awareness of an outsider who does not "seem to regret their inability to become absorbed into the movies in the 'right' ways"<sup>92</sup>. Once again, we return to Harris' reflection on how blackness is "in the wrong place, at the wrong time". The being *out of step* with expectations on spectatorship, on what should be seen and when, and who gets the right to look and who does not, is also a form of "oppositional gaze" that is useful to the spectator of reappropriation, remixes, and contemporary reworkings of classical Hollywood materials.

### **Face as Fate, Fate as Face: Premonition Images in *An Ecstatic Experience* (Ja'Tovia Gary, 2015)**

For Jean-Louis Comolli and Vincent Sorrell, the spectator's face is the only true counter-shot of the face-image.

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<sup>87</sup> hooks, *Black Looks*, 248.

<sup>88</sup> Francis, "'She Will Never Look'", 111.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*: 101.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*: 102.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*: 103.

Faces filmed in close-up are directed as much towards the spectator, if not more so, than towards the diegetic partner who is off-screen. The close-up separates the “other” from the screen, be it the interlocutor or a lover: it is a shot without a reverse-shot, aside from *the spectator*... The other’s gaze reaches me and goes through me more, without a doubt, because it is filmed in close-up, but even more painfully because I know that there is no one behind the gaze, that the gaze is only the fact that I am watching and that it is reflected by me<sup>93</sup>.

No film perhaps comes closer to better visualizing the shot-countershot or *face-counter-face* image than Godard’s *Vivre sa vie* (1962), when Nana (played by Anna Karina) watches Carl Dreyer’s *Le Passion de Jeanne d’Arc* (*The Passion of Joan of Arc*, 1928) in a movie theater, her tearful face mirroring Joan’s face on-screen (Figure 5.28). While Dreyer’s 1928 film isolates the face, avoiding “the shot-reverse shot procedure which would maintain a real relation between each face and the other”<sup>94</sup>, Godard’s 1962 film adds the missing reverse shot: a close-up of Nana, the woman spectator who watches the film and inevitably identifies with the character of Joan of Arc. This identification is expressed in the matching close-ups of faces. For Farocki,

Perhaps one might say that the relationship between Jeanne and Nana is at this point primarily ‘morphological.’ Both have ‘talented faces.’ With the cinema machine which scrutinizes faces in such an unprecedented way, something new has come into the world: the facial talent. Once God was believed to select a few people for great and meaningful things –people like the illiterate Jeanne d’Arc. Nowadays one’s appearance can be a vocation: a vocation which the bearer of the face cannot understand, but has to follow<sup>95</sup>.

The fate of Nana’s character, as of Joan’s, is expressed in her face. In this way, the face becomes a premonition image: face as fate, ad fate as face<sup>96</sup>.

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<sup>93</sup> Comolli, Jean-Louis and Vincent Sorrel, *Cine, modo de empleo: De lo fotoquímico a lo digital* (Buenos Aires: Manantial, 2016), 303. “Los rostros filmados en primeros planos se dirigen tanto, sino más, al espectador que los contempla que al compañero diegético, al otro de la secuencia, el que está fuera de campo. Filmar en un plano cerrado evidentemente es apartar al otro de la escena, al interlocutor, al enamorado o enamorada: un campo sin otro contracampo *además del espectador*... La mirada del otro filmado me alcanza y me atraviesa tanto más, sin dudas, porque está filmado en un primer plano, pero tanto más terriblemente en cuanto sé bien que no hay nadie detrás de esa mirada, que esa mirada solo es el hecho de ser espejada por mí”. Translation by the author.

<sup>94</sup> Deleuze writes: “It is an extraordinary document in the turning towards and turning away of faces... Dreyer avoids the shot-reverse shot procedure which would maintain a real relation between each face and the other, and would still be part of an action-image. He prefers to isolate each face in a close-up which is only partly filled, so that the position to the right or to the left directly induces a virtual conjunction which no longer needs to pass through the real connection between the people”. Deleuze, Gilles, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image* (1983), trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986): 107. It is interesting to think about this film in relation to Harris’ on the basis of shot-reverse-shot procedure and eyeline matches. On *Le Passion de Jeanne d’Arc*, Steimatsky writes: “His breakdown of eyeline matches, his assertive foregrounding of empty spaces, his recursive interference with temporal flow –under the guise of strict linearity, with Dreyer underscored by shooting in chronology- all these isolate and accentuate the one element consistently charged and overdetermined in the film: the human face which persists as if on its own, and against our routine effort to comprehend its situation, orientation, and communicative meanings”. Steimatsky, Noa, *The Face on Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 57.

<sup>95</sup> Farocki, Harun and Kaja Silverman. *Speaking about Godard* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998), 22.

<sup>96</sup> This premonition-image is created by the director in the montage. Godard intervenes in the film’s subtitles to create a repetition of the word “death” that will become meaningful for the film’s story and for the character’s (Nana’s) fate. Kaja Silverman describes this intervention in detail: “*My Life to Live* shows the word ‘death’ twice

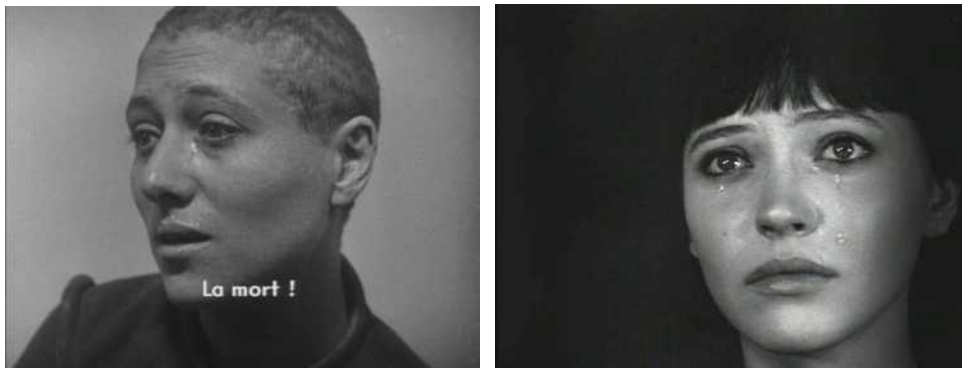


Figure 5.28. Face as fate  
*Vivre sa vie* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1962)

Ja'Tovia Gary's found footage film *An Ecstatic Experience* (2015), part of the ongoing exhibition at the Whitney Museum titled "An Incomplete History of Protest", arguably creates a premonition-image through a montage of faces. Her film recycles four audiovisual documents, in the following order: black and white 8mm footage from *Black Delta Religion* (William and Josette Ferris, 1968), of black churches in the Mississippi Delta, produced by Center for Southern Folklore and accessed by Gary online<sup>97</sup>; black and white footage from the "Slavery" episode for the *History of the Negro People* series broadcast on NET in 1965 of African American actress Ruby Dee, re-enacting a dramatic performance written by Ossie Davis based on an account given by Fannie Moore, a former slave whose story was recorded and preserved by the Federal Writers' Slave Narrative Project and the Library of Congress in 1937; a fragment from a 1987 television interview with Assata Shakur, an African American woman and member of the Black Liberation Army who escaped imprisonment in the United States and found political asylum in Cuba; and finally, amateur videos shot during the protests in Ferguson, Missouri, following the murder of 18-year-old Michael Brown by police officer Darren Wilson in 2014.

Unlike *Reckless* which is strictly analogue, *An Ecstatic Experience* recycles both analogue and digital materials. First, she intervenes the footage manually and then she manipulates the materials digitally, through techniques known as direct animation and camera-filmmaking. As she describes:

I am working in a technique known as direct animation which sees me making marks directly onto the surface of the film. I am scratching the film's emulsion, sometimes I am stripping it away all together,

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during the projection of *Jeanne d'Arc* – once before we see Nana's tear-filled eyes, and once after. The second time, that word is available only to us; it is thus Godard, not Nana, who insists upon the relation between her and Jeanne. This repetition also represents an unequivocal enunciatory intrusion in a second way. The word 'death' appears only once in Dreyer's film, and when it does so, it is printed in black against a white background. The second citation is added by Godard to the bottom of the image of Jeanne, as her lips form the word 'death,' and it assumes a different form. On a second viewing of *My Life to Live*, this repetition represents the most emphatic enunciatory anticipation of what will later happen to Nana. If the film has until now given us nothing to justify the metaphoric alignment of Nana with Jeanne, that is because it is what Nana will become, not what she is, which links her to Jeanne", Farocki and Silverman, *Speaking about Godard*, 22.

<sup>97</sup> Gary, Ja'Tovia. Personal Interview. May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019.



other times I am only removing parts of the emulsion through a technique called masking. The scratching, masking, etching, and painting are all techniques that can be defined under direct animation or camera less filmmaking. This is done by hand, frame by frame if you want to be precise with your mark making. Or if you are painting you can of course paint several frames in one fell swoop. ... The analogue manipulation of the footage comes first. I have it digitized at a lab, then I bring the file into the edit where I manipulate it digitally and mix it with contemporary footage<sup>98</sup>.

Working digitally allows Gary to incorporate materials which are not readily available in analogue format, such as the Ferris footage which was found online, as well as actual, digitally filmed materials like the Ferguson footage available on YouTube. The analogue and digital co-exist in this piece, sometimes simultaneously, other times one after the other, and work to create a correspondence between history (the past) and current affairs (the present). This correspondence does not only work chronologically or linearly, beginning with Ferris (1968) and ending in Ferguson (2014), but also works in a circular direction, creating echoes and fissures in the images and sounds which recall previously seen materials (already forgotten by the spectator perhaps), thereby creating a woven fabric of time, past and present combined into six-minutes of Radical Black History.



Figure 5.29. White marks on film frame the face  
*An Ecstatic Experience* (Ja'Tovia Gary, 2015)

The William Ferris *Black Delta Religion* footage is intercut with strips of film painted by hand, while the Ruby Dee images are intervened directly through white scratches and drawings, which help to bring attention to Dee's face and work to emphasize key words and emotions expressed in her performance. As we can see (Figure 5.29), a white triangle marked by hand frames Dee's face as if to say: "Look here –and listen". In her re-enactment of Fannie Moore's account, she reminisces about her mother's (Moore's mother's) refusal to be a slave. Her mother tells her, "Someday we ain't going to be slaves no more...I'm free, I'm free, I'm free." Her desire for freedom makes it palpable.

Dee's face, framed in Gary's white markings, becomes a sort of premonition image for what follows. After Dee's performance, the film cuts to an interview with Assata Shakur by

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<sup>98</sup> Gary, Ja'Tovia. Personal Interview. May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

WABC's *Like It Is* host Gil Nobel in Cuba. Born in New York City in 1947, Shakur was a leading figure in the 1970s Black Liberation Army. In 1977 she was convicted of murdering a white police officer (for which there was no evidence) and sentenced to life in prison. Two years later, she escaped from the United States and has been living in Cuba ever since. In 1998, she penned an open letter which begins: "My name is Assata Shakur, and I am a 20<sup>th</sup> century escaped slave"<sup>99</sup>. In 2013, on the 40th anniversary of her arrest and under the presidency of Barack Obama, the FBI placed her on Ten Most Wanted Terrorist List, doubling the reward for her capture to two million dollars. Although none of this is mentioned in Gary's film, and although this is information that the viewer may or very well may not know (afterall, it is very biasly covered by mainstream media), it is information that inevitably plays a part in the film's narrative structure.



Figure 5.30. "My name is Assata Shakur, and I am a 20<sup>th</sup> century escaped slave"

In the excerpt of the interview with Shakur included in *An Ecstatic Experience*, Shakur speaks about her escape from prison, saying repeatedly, "It was time". When she is asked to say more, she looks momentarily to the side and pauses. She seems to be remembering the escape, returning to it in her thoughts, before responding to the camera. In this look off to the side, there is a quick "flashback" cut to Dee's face from the previous scene, a sort of echo of what the spectator has just finished seeing (Figure 5.31). It is an image that jolts the viewer's memory, reminding him or her of Dee's re-enactment, and of what her speech represents: slavery and resistance. This is both a *memory image* for the spectator (for what she/he has just seen), as well as for Shakur (an image that represents her past, as prisoner, before her escape). In this way, Gary constructs a freedom narrative through the joining together of fragments from

<sup>99</sup> Shakur, Assata, "An Open Letter from Assata Shakur" (March 31, 1998). Shakur's letter continues: "Because of government persecution, I was left with no other choice than to flee from the political repression, racism and violence that dominate the U.S. government's policy towards people of color". <https://www.workers.org/2014/12/30/open-letter-assata-shakur-20th-century-escaped-slave/>

different sources, cut and pasted together, to produce a patchwork of images and sounds of the Black experience in the United States.



Figure 5.31. Ruby Dee and Assata Shakur, the Thankful One  
*An Ecstatic Experience* (Ja'Tovia Gary, 2015)

After the interview with Shakur, we see images taken during the Ferguson unrest in 2014, following the shooting of Michael Brown. Edited one after the other, the Ferguson images are a kind of future-image of what the Black slave (played by Dee) calls forward in her moving exclamation, emphasized aesthetically through the montage and markings on film, “I am free! I am free! I am free!” (Figure 5.32).

Dee’s face, on film intervened manually by Gary, acts similarly on Shakur and on the Black militants seen in the Ferguson footage as Joan of Arc’s face acts on Nana: the future of Black struggle is sealed in her face. Like Joan’s, it is a face of suffering. But unlike Joan’s, Dee’s face is also smiling, despite the tears in her eyes. She smiles because she knows she will be free. If Nana’s fate was death, Shakur’s and the African American female spectator’s fate (she who looks back at Dee) will be, must be, freedom.



Figure 5.32. *I'm free, I'm free, I'm free, I'm free!*  
*An Ecstatic Experience* (Ja'Tovia Gary, 2015)

### **Futurity and Freedom in the Archive**

For Douglass, a key aspect of his self-imagery was the creation of “the face of the fugitive slave” that would in its outer appearance (the face) reveal the inner person (the individual, which was also a collective person: “the fugitive slave”). These “fugitive images”, fully controlled by Douglass, constructed an “alternative visual archive in which his physiognomic expression was neither self-evident nor exaggerated but remained ambiguous and emotively off-limits while he adopted an erect and stationary – rather than bent over or running – posture to ensure that his physique was not grotesquely rendered”<sup>100</sup>. “Pained”, “tortured”, “yet ultimately unfathomable”, Douglass’ face-image was exposed but “not fully” to the spectator<sup>101</sup>. Resisting audience expectations which regarded “black bodies as proof” (proof of slavery, proof of torture, proof of injustice), Douglass relied on “an emotive use of a traumatized yet defiant facial expression to ensure that psychological questions regarding the “look of a ‘fugitive slave’ took precedence over corporeal realities”<sup>102</sup>.

This face, exposed yet not unfathomable, open but not entirely available, represented for Douglass the “fugitive image”, an image that would more accurately represent the true fugitive experience without being reduced to a generic type. (How can an ambiguous image be reduced to a type? It is not possible). If we understand a “fugitive” to be a runaway, then what is the fugitive image running away from? Perhaps it is running from fixation, generalization, stagnation. Where does the fugitive image run to? Towards the future, towards what is possible, towards whatever the viewer can imagine. As such, the “fugitive face”, as Douglass envisioned it, is an image that calls forward a future which, although not yet completely here, *is in fact already visible to the camera*.

<sup>100</sup> Bernier, “A Visual Call to Arms”, 337-338.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid: 339.

Scholar Tina Campt defends a grammatical practice of futurity as a definition of freedom. She argues that: “Refusing the impossibility of black futurity in the contemporary moment demands extremely creative forms of fugitivity”<sup>103</sup>. One possibility can be found in Twitter photograph series #If They Gunned Me Down, Which Picture Would They Use? created in response to the proliferation of negative photographic representations of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. In this series, young men and women pose in graduation caps and gowns, military uniforms, medical scrubs, and prom dresses, next to negative representations of black urban life. In doing so, the sitters “actively anticipate their premature deaths” in the image, while fashioning a futurity of their own construction. “Rather than accept the narrative of black urban depravity ascribed to them, their photographic juxtapositions disrupt and disorder the terms of life imposed upon them even in death. This collection of twinned photos simultaneously reclaims respectability and swagger, filiality and disobedience, dignity and rebellion, mourning, loss, melancholy, and lament”<sup>104</sup>. These photographs propose an alternative futurity that is created within the image, just as the self-produced photographs of Douglass showed viewers a free black fugitive slave, who was also *a man*, who was also part white, who was also a US citizen and a citizen of the world. Both photographic archives (the one on Twitter today, the one of Douglass yesterday) “embrace the future they want to see—*now*”<sup>105</sup>.

If we can accept, as I am suggesting here, that the face on screen creates a fate for the subject who is looking, both on-screen and off, and that this fate is represented by the corresponding face-image of the spectator, and if we believe—as Douglass did—that the image (of a fugitive slave, for example) has the power to call forward a new being (the free Black man who is equal to white man, for example), then let us for a moment ask ourselves: as it is used in contemporary archival cinema, and in this case, in found footage collage films, what kind of future/face can the face-image call forward for the spectator who returns the gaze to the screen?

If *Reckless* is an indication, the spectator’s face/fate is uncertain because it is filled with doubt. It is not easy to distinguish who is good and who is bad, who is right and who is wrong, what is black and what is white, what is true and what is false. Who is at one moment a criminal, becomes a witness to a crime; while the voyeur, or the looker, can quickly become a criminal. The future remains unclear, uncertain, and difficult to determine. The spectator’s choice and the spectator’s ability for critical viewing and critical spectatorship become the first step towards the possibility of a future. Otherwise, it’s a repetition of the same old images. *Repetition with variation*. The variation is precisely what asks for the spectator’s heightened observation. And without this ability to see the difference, without the construction of critical thought and critical spectatorship (which are the same), we are blind.

For Gary, the face-image is also a memory-image of the collective past, in this case, slavery and a longing for freedom. The face of the slave who dreams of freedom is recalled by a rapid insert: Shakur remembers her past and this “remembering” is visualized in a previously seen image of a face. The spectator’s face/future will be uncertain, indicates *Reckless*, but it

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<sup>103</sup> Campt, Tina M., *Listening to Images* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), 136.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid: 133.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid: 137.

will also contain the images that came before, suggests *An Ecstatic Experience*. It will be a face that will recall past faces. It will be a future called forward by a face that existed time ago but that still flickers on the screen, as memory.

John Berger has written of the analogy of *possessing* and the way of seeing of oil painting<sup>106</sup>, a relationship which reached its peak in traditional oil painting, period encompassed from 1500 to 1900. After this, photography took the place of oil painting as the “principal source of visual imagery”<sup>107</sup>. For Douglass, the birth of photography coincided with his own emancipation. It is no surprise then that Douglass would find in photography the means by which his freedom could be visually imagined. Photography opened up for Douglass, and for many others, the possibility of imagining himself free of objectification. Through self-imagery, he would finally be able to create a true image of himself, an image that was both open and closed, revealing yet not fully exposed, and through which he would finally be able to see himself and be seen as a person, and no longer an object, nor anyone’s private property. Very quickly however, it becomes clear that the photographic image and then the cinematographic image of the face (and of the person) becomes commodified as well, just as it does in European oil painting. Angela Davis’ face-image appropriation in Blaxploitation films in the 1970s is an example of this, as well as her face’s appropriation in publicity and advertisements throughout the 1990s.

How to make these fugitive images free again? Or how to make them free, finally? One way is through reappropriation, found footage and collage. As we have seen in the films studied in this Chapter, reappropriation –as it occurs here– is a fugitive process, one that can recreate spatial and temporal associations that were not possible before, disrupting continuity editing and allowing for the visualization of new forms of spectatorship. It is our argument that the found footage film, as a form of filmmaking that recycles images and sounds from elsewhere, freeing the materials from their original context and more importantly, without necessity of paying for their rights, offers the possibility of freedom in the age of reproduction. A freedom that abolitionist Frederick Douglass might have considered a natural continuation that the power of picture-making afforded “of enlarging the margin and extending the boundaries of –man’s– existence”<sup>108</sup>. *Reckless Eyeballing* and *An Ecstatic Experience* are testament to a certain freedom that the artists working in both analogue and digital filmmaking have to recycle and re-use images and sounds from Hollywood films, mixed with sounds and photographic images, amateur films and videos found online, without even having to give credit to the original sources in the final credits (which neither film has).

The face-image in the found footage film is a free or freer image today, as Douglass perceived his face in photography a century ago. But it is arguably more so, because it is an *orphan* image, or an image without an owner. The fugitive image, understood both as an image of a man or woman who has escaped slavery and as a runaway image, has found a home (at last) in the found footage film. Free people, free images and sounds. As long as filmmakers continue to have access to images from their film/audiovisual histories/archives (in some countries there is greater access than in others), and as long as these images continue to be free

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<sup>106</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 1973: 83. “To have a thing painted and put on a canvas it not unlike buying it and putting it in your house”.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid: 84.

<sup>108</sup> Douglass, “Age of Pictures” (1862), 148.

in their after-lives (some images are freer than others), the freedom of the face-image in the found footage film will be, it will be<sup>109</sup>. If the 19th century was, for Douglass, the “age of pictures”, the 21st Century has very well been and continues to be the age of *after-pictures*.

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<sup>109</sup> Chapter 7 will further explore the relationship between the (dis)possession of archives and potential freedom of these materials.

## Chapter 6: The Making of “Samantar”: Digital Reinscription as Anti-Botox in the Reappropriation of the Face-Image in *Le livre d'image* (*The Image Book*, Jean-Luc Godard, 2018)

¿What is a false image?

There, where the image and sound [appear to be] true.

-*Le gai savoir* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1969)

Swiss-French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard has explored the face on film over the past 60 years. As a filmmaker who began as a critic, his filmmaking has consistently reflected back on film history while simultaneously pushing film form forward. Critic Amy Taubin declares that “From the first, Godard’s movies have been informed by his belief in film as the medium in which the history of the 20th century is written”<sup>1</sup>. His entire filmography can be understood as an exploration of how, with each transformation of the film medium itself, history has been *re-imaged*, re-told, and re-inscribed in film form<sup>2</sup>. He worked on celluloid between 1960-1972, before switching to video and television between 1975 and 2004, including the series produced and transmitted on television between 1988 and 1998, *Histoires du cinema*. Now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Godard works in digital cinema since 2010 to the present. One of the histories reinscribed in digital cinema is the history of the face. First with video<sup>3</sup>, and now with digital cinema, the face has become, for Godard, the *face-image*: an image that is extracted from one medium that can or cannot be cinematographic, and reinscribed into cinema through montage. In this Chapter, we will look at one of these reinscriptions.

*Le livre d'image* (*The Image Book*, Jean-Luc Godard, 2018), originally titled *Image et*

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<sup>1</sup> Entire quote: “From the first, Godard’s movies have been informed by his belief in film as the medium in which the history of the 20th century is written. His collage films, beginning with the epic *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-1998), describe how the medium in which this history of the world is inscribed shifts from celluloid, which is projected to a collective audience in theaters, to videotape, the Internet, and discs, all available for personal viewing; and how these works also could be used to “write” image histories as personal as literary histories always have been. To these mediums has been added, in the 21st century, digital cinema. Godard’s collage films, then, are about the inscription of the world in moving images and the re-inscription upon re-inscription of that history in keeping with the transformation of the moving image medium itself”. Taubin, Amy, “The Hand of Time: Interview with Fabrice Aragno on *Le livre d'image*”, *Film Comment* (January-February 2019).

<sup>2</sup> According to Michael Witt, “The common tendency to divide the Godardian corpus into successive discrete periods—the New Wave, the political work, the video years, and so on—emphasizes discontinuity over the sense of a single developing artistic project. It is clear that Godard’s oeuvre to date is in fact characterized by a striking degree of continuity”. Witt, Michael, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013, Kindle Edition), 1102. We have chosen to divide his work according to format/film medium for the sake of this text, but it is clear that the work can be divided in different ways, depending on the subject of analysis and the point that the author wants to make. We mention Witt’s phrase because it highlights the continuity in Godard’s work, something that other authors have ignored.

<sup>3</sup> With video, Godard began to cut and copy archival materials, combining film clips with extracinematic sounds and images, including television and radio, drawings, paintings, photographs, cartoons, and texts, extracts of songs and music, as well as staged sequences. These images and sounds are made to “speak cinematically through montage”. Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard*, 99.



*Parole (Image and Speech)*, is a film divided in six parts: five which represent the five fingers of a hand and a sixth which represents the hand that includes them all<sup>4</sup>. Just as Godard's work can be divided into distinct periods, each film can also be seen individually or as a part of multiple (re)arrangements of his filmography. In this case, *Le livre d'image* can be understood as the third of his digital films, produced since 2010, including *Film Socialism* (2010), *Goodbye to Language* (2014)<sup>5</sup>, but it can also be read as an epilogue or sequel to *Histoire(s) du cinéma*<sup>6</sup>, his eight-part collage-film made with fragments from film history intervened through video editing software. While *Histoire(s) du cinéma* was limited to the history of Hollywood and European film, however, *Le livre d'image* turns to the depiction of what Godard calls "the Arab world", combining images from Western classics with snippets of ISIS videos and other image representations of the Middle East and Northern Africa.

Egyptian film critic Joseph Fahim divides the film in two parts: one that "is almost entirely framed from a white Western perspective ... which has informed the global understanding and perception of cinema in the past century", and a second part that "takes an unexpected turn (...) in a series of jolting sequences, a barrage of carefully edited images from the Arab cinema playbook"<sup>7</sup>. Fahim identifies several films that US, French and Latin American critics have not: from Egypt, Youssef Chahine's *Bab al-Hadid (Cairo Station, 1958)*, *Jamila al-Jaza'iriyya (Jamila, the Algerian, 1958)* and *Heya Fawda (This is Chaos, 2007)*; and from Tunisia, Nacer Khemir's *Wanderers of the Desert* (1984) and Férid Boughedir's *Halfaouine* (1990)<sup>8</sup>. These images from Egypt and Tunisia "are introduced and contrasted by the stereotypical representation of Arabs found in the likes of Italian Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1974-Moroccan shot, *Arabian Nights*". For Fahim, this final chapter "...transpires as a deconstruction not only of the Arab narrative imparted by the West since the invention of cinema, but of the occidental control of cinema history"<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> "It really started when I thought of the five fingers. I said to myself: "We'll make a film where there are five fingers and then what the five fingers make together, the hand." And then that's when I thought of...maybe another part afterward. But this took time. The five fingers came quickly: the first finger is remakes, copies; the second finger is war, and then I found this old text in French, *Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg* (Joseph de Maistre, 1821); and then the third was a verse by Rilke ("those flowers between the rails, in the confused wind of travels"); the fourth finger was—right, the fingers came almost at the same time—it was Montesquieu's book, *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748); and the fifth was *La région centrale*, which is by an American, Michael Snow, that I shortened: we don't see all of this anymore [*He makes a gesture imitating a circular panoramic*]. And then I had the idea that the central region was the love between a man and a woman, which is taken from Dovzhenko's *Earth*." Godard, Jean-Luc, "'Words Like Ants': Interview with Dmitry Golotyuk and Antonina Derzhitskaya", *Mubi Notebook* (January 25 2019).

<sup>5</sup> The digital films are *Film Socialism* (2010), *Goodbye to Language* (2014) and *Le livre d'image* (2018).

<sup>6</sup> Brody, Richard, "The Image Book Reviewed: Jean-Luc Godard Confronts Cinema's Depiction of the Arab World", *The New Yorker* (January 25, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Fahim, Joseph, "Cannes 2018: Reclaiming the Arab Narrative One Film at a Time", *Middle East Eye* (May 21, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Many of these films are European co-productions.

<sup>9</sup> At this point, it might be wise to mention that I am writing from the position of a US-Latin American, who lives in South America but grew up and studied film in the United States. Although I took the only course on Middle Eastern Cinema offered at Wesleyan University for my Bachelor's degree, my knowledge of Middle Eastern film is very limited. This explains the fact that I recognized many of the US and European references in *Le livre*, but failed to recognize the Middle East references. Also, even though I speak French, the version of the film that I saw for my research was subtitled in English and meant for English-speaking audiences. Since there is often multiple layering of sound, text, and image, I often relied on the subtitles for my comprehension of what was being said. So although I was

In this Chapter, we will look only at the final 18 minutes of the film (of the 84-minute film), in the section of the film referred to as the “Arabie heureuse”<sup>10</sup> or “La région centrale”<sup>11</sup>, and which Fahim described as “the Arab cinema playbook”. As well as the reappropriation of images and sounds from films, this section also incorporates documentary footage filmed specifically for *Le livre* in Tunisia, by Godard and his associates Fabrice Aragno and Jean-Paul Battaglia. Even though this section only appears at the very end of the film, it is arguably the beginning point for the rest of the film: as critic and collaborator on the film Nicole Brenez has shared, the points of departure for the film were three-fold: the Palestine experience, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), and Albert Cossery –so much so, in fact, that the film was initially thought of as an adaptation of Cossery<sup>12</sup>.

In this section of the film, Godard and his editing team employ editing and narrative devices to create a false or fictional association between a face and a name, between image and speech, in a very similar way to the amalgam created between Pam Grier’s face and Angela Davis’s face and name in *Reckless Eyeballing*. In our Chapter on *Reckless*, we spoke of this new “character” made in the montage as “Foxy/Grier/Davis”. Here we will refer to the character created by Godard as “Samantar”. But while Foxy/Grier/Davis was created with visual elements that are very well-known to the intended US audience –images from the commercially successfully and historically recognized film *Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1915), as well as the highly publicized police search for Angela Davis– the cinematographic, photographic and literary elements that comprise “Samantar” (image and text) are relatively unknown for the intended Western (US/European) audience. These elements, far from mere citations, are treated as *extracts* that constitute “Samantar’s” *DNA*, a DNA that is artificially produced by methods of *found footage* and found literature, or adaptation and *intertextuality*.

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able to “catch” certain plays with words in the French language, which undoubtedly enriches my experience of the film, my understanding of the film is mediated by the English translation. This means that not only how I see, but also how I hear and read the film, are determined by my position as an anglophone. What follows is most certainly written from this particular spectatorial position.

<sup>10</sup> “L’Arabie heureuse” is the French term translated from the Latin “Arabie Felix”, used by geographers to describe South Arabia, or what is now Yemen. “Felix” can be translated as “happy”, but also as “fertile”, indicating Arabia’s wealth and importance in the ancient world.

<sup>11</sup> In reference to the experimental Canadian film titled *La Région centrale* (Michael Snow, 1971), which was shot over a period of 24 hours using a robotic arm and consists entirely of preprogrammed movements. This title might allude to the “preprogrammed” movements of film history itself and its depictions of “the Arab world”.

<sup>12</sup> Koza, Roger, “En búsqueda de la última imagen: Un diálogo con Nicole Brenez sobre *El libro de imagen*”, *Con los ojos abiertos* (13 de noviembre de 2018).



Figure 6.1. “Samantar” in *Le livre d'image* (Jean-Luc Godard, 2018)

In this Chapter, we will look at the different elements which make up “Samantar”, with particular attention to the role that the face-image plays in this fabrication, but knowing very well that the image itself is only one part of the image-construction (other important elements include sound, voice and text). We will study *Le livre d'image* in order to attempt to answer the following questions: What are the elements that are unique to the digital medium? And how do these elements transform, heighten, lower, build, destroy, the *face-image* and the place of the face-image in the *re-inscription of history*? Finally, we will ask, how does the digital element make visible the transformation of the moving image medium itself? What is the relation between image, medium, and history? And what role does the face-image play in this relationship? Is “Samantar” only a face, or is it/he more than that? What can a face-image *do*? Rather than argue that digital technology is superior to forms of analogue filmmaking, we take the position that digital technology continues exploring many of the aesthetic and ethical questions raised by Godard’s analogue-made films. In previous chapters, the reappropriation of the face has been achieved in analogue and digital works by rephotography, reframing and deframing, respites and reordering, repetition and variation, double exposure, adjustments of aperture and light, addition of sound and text, extreme magnification, glitching, eyeline matching, and the use of shot-counter-shot, often with other found footage materials including Hollywood films. In the present Chapter, we will return to many of these techniques for “unlearning” the image, but will include one more, previously undiscussed way that the image is reworked through reappropriation: the voice.

We will analyze this sequence despite, as author Niels Niessen has warned, it would be unwise to take any of Godard’s images at *face-value*. As he writes, “In Godard’s films all images and statements are potential clichés, linguistic or visual commodities whose use-value has been worn out and hence do not really reveal or express anything”<sup>13</sup>. At the risk of discovering nothing,

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<sup>13</sup> Niessen, Niels, “Access Denied: Godard Palestine Representation”, *Cinema Journal* 52(2) (Winter 2013): 12.

we will look at this sequence not only as representative of how Godard continues to explore many of the questions of cinema newly posed for the digital age, but more importantly, in order to make the case that the face-image is a construction, a fabrication, that –given a name and a story– can create a character. As it is used here, the face-image is at once the shot *and* the reverse-shot; it is at once the knowledge that “This is he” and the absolute negation of that fact. How digital reinscription works in this sequence in the image (the face-image), the sound (the voice), and the text (in the subtitles) to produce both a truth and its negation is our main concern here.

**Image et Parole: *Algerien: L’Algérie* (Dirk Alvermann, 1960) and *Une ambition dans le désert* (Albert Cossery, 1984)**

The name “Samantar” and the text that is read in this section of the film comes from *Une ambition dans le désert* (*An Ambition in the Desert*), a 1984 novel about a fictitious state on the Persian Gulf previously untouched by conflict due to its lack of oil, written by the Egyptian-born French writer Albert Cossery (1913-2008)<sup>14</sup>. Although he lived most of his life in Paris and only wrote in the French language (eight novels in total), Cossery’s novels are all set in his home country of Egypt or in an imaginary Middle Eastern country and are characterized by a particular blend of humor and politics. His characters are mainly vagrants, thieves or dandies, or as his first published novel is titled, “Men God Forgot”<sup>15</sup>. He was considered to be the last “anarchist” or free-thinking writer of western culture, often dubbed “The Voltaire of the Nile”. He inspired several writers, including Henry Miller, who wrote the introductions to the English translations of his work.

*Une ambition dans le désert* tells the story of two men, one with ambition and the other radically without it. The man with ambition, the cheikh Ben Kadem, is the Prime Minister of the Dofa Emirate, an imaginary country in the Gulf. While the countries nearby have oil, and have quickly been overtaken by imperialist powers, Dofa is petroleum-free, to the disgrace of bureaucrats and men of ambition, who would like to profit from this oil and from the imperial attention that it would inspire. Samantar, Kadem’s nephew, is not one of these men. For him, the absence of oil has made his country remain peaceful. However, a series of bombings in the city led by so-called revolutionaries, threaten to interrupt this peace and tranquility. Samantar takes it upon himself to figure out who is behind these attacks, which presents problems for Kadem who sees the bombing as a way to call attention to his nation and, in the process, make himself more important in the region. Samantar embodies the Cossery hero: at once skeptical, intelligent, wise and “lazy”. He is a character who wants to live in peace in a peaceful land<sup>16</sup>. The voice-over included in *Le livre d’image* reads fragments from different parts of the book, focusing on passages that describe Samantar’s ideas regarding his country’s politics, his general mistrust of Ben

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<sup>14</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, I have read the Spanish translation: Cossery, Albert, *Una ambición en el desierto*, trans. Federico Corriente. La Rioja: pepitas de calabaza, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Cossery, Albert, *Men God Forgot* (Gotham Book Mart: New York, 1946).

<sup>16</sup> Mitrani, Michel, “Conversación con Albert Cossery” (1995), trans. Diego Luis Sanromán, La Rioja: Pepitas de calabaza, 2013: 98.

Kadem's ideas and the activities of the Liberation Front, and on conversations/discussions between him and Ben Kadem about their opposing ways of thinking about their country and region.

Now that there is a name and a "story" or text, all that is missing in the re-inscription of "Samantar" is a face, an image that will come to represent and signify this man whenever he is mentioned in the film. The face chosen is that of an anonymous Algerian fighter photographed by the German photographer Dirk Alvermann during the Algerian War<sup>17</sup>, which was fought between France and the Algerian National Liberation Front from 1954 to 1962, and led to Algeria's independence from France, after having been a French military colony since 1834. Although Godard himself has said very little about the origin of this image<sup>18</sup>, through a fortuitous encounter in Quito when my partner and I stumbled across a book of poetry that had the same photograph on the cover, we traced the image to Alvermann's book *Algerien: L'Algérie*, published in Berlin in 1960<sup>19</sup>. An 18-year-old "rebellious West German teenager" at the time, Alvermann crossed over from Tunisia to the Eastern Algerian war zone with a unit of the Algerian liberation army, "determined to keep a photographic record of the events unfolding there"<sup>20</sup>. When he returned to West Germany to publish the photographs, he intended to do so in the most accessible form available: "The book should go from hand to hand like a political manifesto"<sup>21</sup>. However, when the book was finally published, it was done so as a hardcover, and not in the way that Alvermann had intended. From the titles of the six parts of the book –which in themselves read like a manifesto– we can understand the photographer's position towards the Algerian Revolution: 1. "... die Kolonisation kennt weder Humanität nach Gerechtigkeit, weder Zivilisation noch Fortschritt" ("... colonization knows neither humanity according to justice, neither civilization nor progress."); 2. "Sie achten das Recht aller Völker ..." ("They respect the law of all peoples ..."); 3. "Die es gewagt haben, sich zu erheben ..." ("Who dared to rise ..."); 4. "... eine organisierte Revolution und keine anarchistische Revolte" ("... an organized revolution and not an anarchist revolt."); 5. "Die Befreiung Algeriens wird das Werk aller Algerier sein ..." ("The liberation of Algeria will be the work of all Algerians ..."); 6. "... durch das Volk und für das Volk." ("... by the people and for the people.").

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<sup>17</sup> Also known as the Algerian Revolution, the Algerian War of Independence and sometimes in Algeria as the War of 1 November.

<sup>18</sup> "...The one you see in the film, who is the nephew of Sheik Ben Kadem, that's a photo taken during the Algerian War of an Algerian fighter", Godard, "Words Like Ants", 2019.

<sup>19</sup> After the first publication of *Algerien*, Alvermann published several more books of photography, as well as his own documentary film and worked as cinematographer on Peter Nestler's *Menschen in Sheffield* (1965).

<sup>20</sup> Book description from Josef Chladek Website that sells the book: [https://josefchladek.com/book/dirk\\_alvermann\\_-\\_algerien\\_-\\_lalgerie](https://josefchladek.com/book/dirk_alvermann_-_algerien_-_lalgerie)

<sup>21</sup> A new edition, published by Steidl after Alvermann's death in 2012, adopted the artist's original intentions, in the rororo (pocket book series) format. From Josef Chladek Website: [https://josefchladek.com/book/dirk\\_alvermann\\_-\\_algerien\\_-\\_lalgerie](https://josefchladek.com/book/dirk_alvermann_-_algerien_-_lalgerie).



Figure 6.2. Image/Parole (Image/Word)  
 Photograph by author

When we look at the original image in the book, there are a few aspects of the image which should be stated: first, the photograph is one in a book of many photographs, and the process of looking at this image occurs within the context of the images that come before and after. While looking through the book, we can see that some photographs occupy the entire page spread, while on other pages, two or more photographs are placed side by side (sometimes they occupy an equal amount of space on the page, but other times one image is slightly larger than the other and placed non-symmetrically on the page). All of the photographs are of people (mostly men), of different ages, often in the middle of an action, usually involving work, or of children at school, carrying the Algerian flag. Some, like the first image in the book, are of details of the body or of objects that indicate a body (many people's feet gathered around; fists in the air; the close-up of a child's fist; a pair of worn-out shoes), while the majority are close-ups of people's faces or of many faces in a mass. Sometimes the layout is such that the image of an Algerian man occupies one side of the book, while an image of a French colonizer occupies the other side. In these juxtapositions, a relation is made between both sides of the conflict, where the French presence (often represented by older white men in military uniform and dark sunglasses, or the detail of a Catholic cross across their chest), visually oppresses the Algerian side (sometimes represented by individuals, but also by groups of people). Sometimes the same people appear in more than one image, giving the person who looks through these images a particular sense of time. In many photographs, the people photographed look at the camera (usually they are children). In the third part, "...who dared to rise...", there are several compositions where the juxtaposition between images occurs not only

with what images are next to one another (horizontally) but also with the images above (of eyes) and so the relationship is vertical as well. In this way, the relationship of political organization and the relationship of political oppression are visualized through gazes. The first horizontally, as a relationship between equals, and the second vertically, as one group of people watching and surveilling another (Figure 6.3).



Figure 6.3. *Gazes in Algerien: L'Algérie* (Dirk Alvermann, 1960)

The photograph chosen by Godard belongs to the fifth part of the book titled, "Die Befreiung Algeriens wird das Werk aller Algerier sein ..." ("The liberation of Algeria will be the work of all Algerians ..."). This part contains some of the first images of Algerians, including many women, smiling. The photograph is located on the left side of the book and is accompanied by another image on the right (Figure 6.4). In this case, the image beside it is of an Algerian child, joyfully embracing a goat. The stern, attentive look of the Algerian freedom fighter on the left, a young man perhaps of about eighteen years of age (certainly no more than twenty), is juxtaposed with the innocence of the child. A possible relationship is made between the two young Algerians photographed and the differences between their expressions; a story can be imagined in this relation. The fact that the man looks towards the camera, while the child is caught in a moment with her eyes closed, also helps to tell the story of perhaps two dialectical aspects of the Revolution and of the moment captured by Alvermann: on the one hand, the joy of liberation, and on the other, the constant struggle that this freedom represents, as well as the necessity to stay vigilant in order to protect and maintain the freedoms attained.

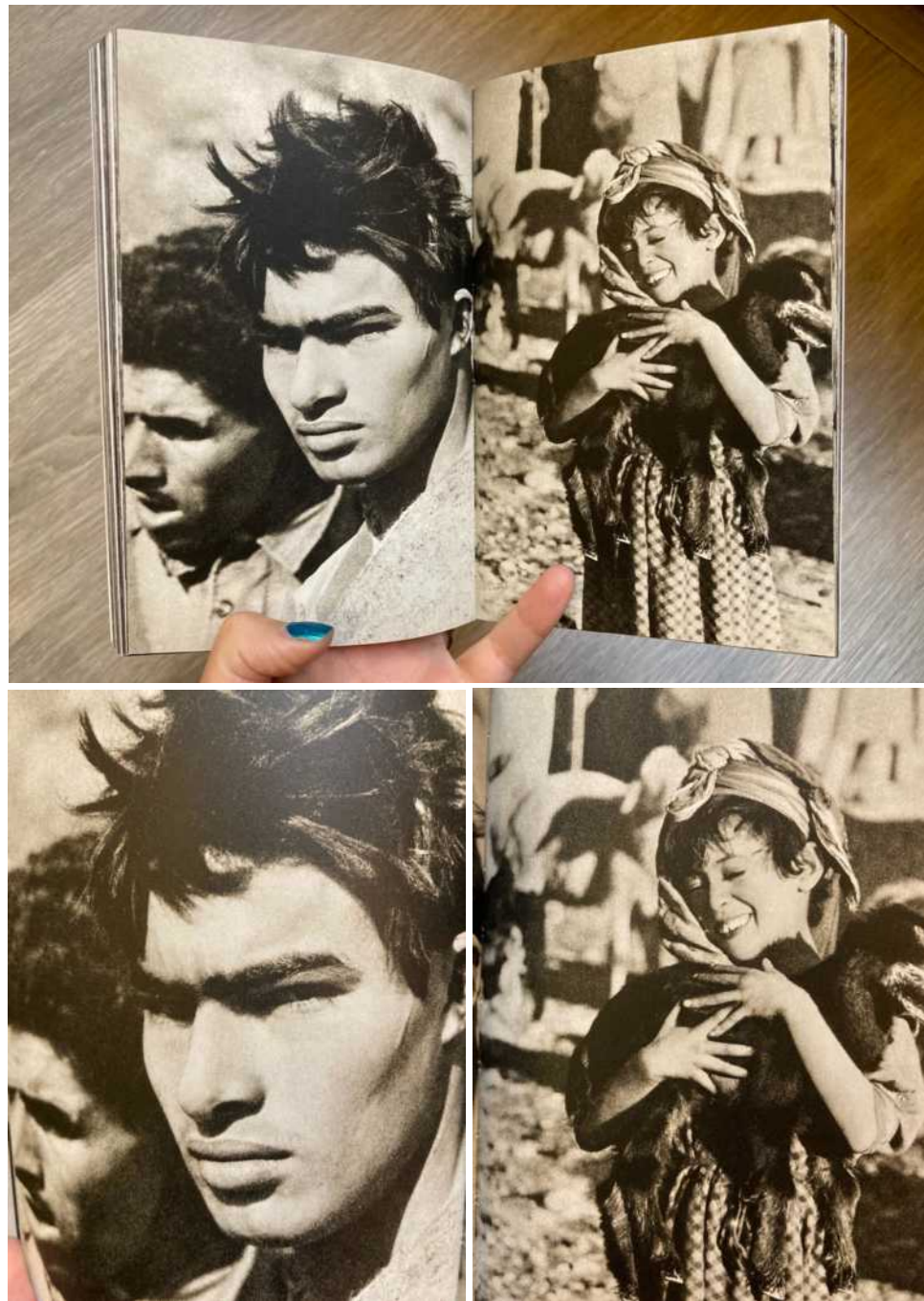


Figure 6.4. *Algerien: L'Algérie* (Dirk Alvermann, 1960). Photos by the author.

This is not the first time that Godard reappropriates a photograph of a face. In *Letter to Jane* (Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin, 1972), and made as a kind of postscript to *Tout va bien* (Godard and Gorin, 1972) starring Jane Fonda and Yves Montand, the authors deconstruct a single news photograph of Fonda in Vietnam. But while *Letter to Jane* is an essay film, spoken in



first person and meant to denounce the Vietnam War and criticize the hypocrisy of media imagery and the Hollywood star system in the face of war and violence, *Le livre d'image* is a collage-film with voices that are far from authoritative or even pedagogical. Furthermore, *Letter to Jane* centers its analysis on the contrast between the celebrity (Jane Fonda) in the foreground, and the anonymous Vietnamese man in the background (Figure 6.5). Godard and Gorin use appropriation to bring the face in the background to the foreground. In *Le livre d'image*, the Algerian freedom fighter is already in the foreground, while the foreign presence is behind the camera. He seems to be interested precisely in this relationship between the colonial power and the revolutionary colonial subject, which is also essential in his own appropriation of images from Egypt and Tunisia (as a Swiss-French filmmaker working with these images).

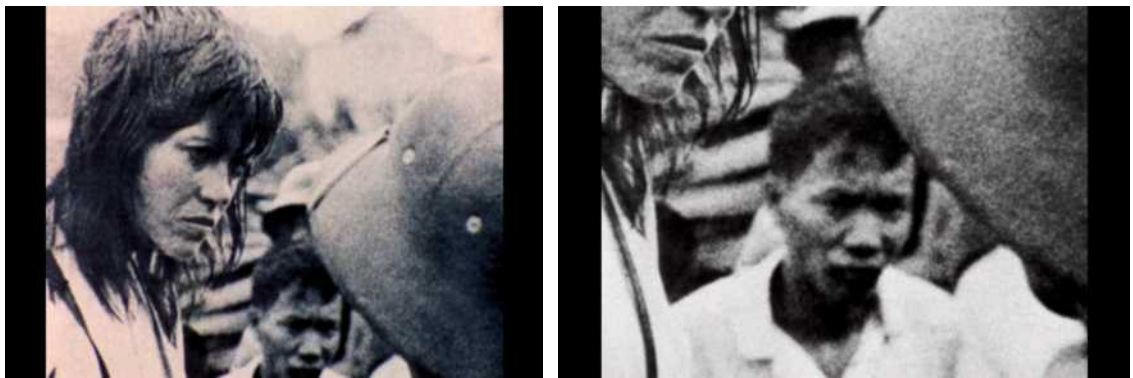


Figure 6.5. *Letter to Jane* (Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin, 1972)

We share the context behind the name, the text and the image recycled by Godard in *Le livre d'image*, despite the fact that, as in *Respite*, *strata of natural history*, *Reckless Eyeballing*, and many other films included in our study, they are not made explicit in the film. We believe that the film works with these layers or *strata* in the image and text, and even though the original sources are not easily identified, they work on the spectator's experience watching the film (as entanglements). As is true of all of the images reappropriated in the films analyzed in this dissertation, the image chosen by Godard is not just any image; it has a particular history, context, and time which makes up the face-image's "blood" or DNA. When it is "injected" into Godard's film, it now interacts with new context(s): not only with Cossery's text, but also with Godard's filmography, as well as with history, including the memory of the Algerian War and the relationship between France and Algeria ever since (in the mind of the spectator, similarly to how the spectator's memory or image-memory of the Shoah from other well-known archival images is a factor in the viewing of *Aufschub*, discussed in Chapter 1).

## Six Samantars in 18 Minutes

### SAMANTAR



Figure 6.6.

In total, the number of different versions of the face-image reproduced by Godard in this 18-minute sequence is six. Side-by-side, we are able to see them in relation and compare the framing, texture and color of the images (Figure 6.6). As we can see, the six images are all from the same –already mentioned– photograph, which has been modified from one image to the next using different kinds of analog and digital equipment. What changes in the transformation of the photograph to the moving image? What does Godard do to the image in this process of “re-inscription upon re-inscription” and how do these processes create a face-image?



Figure 6.7. Left: Cropped photograph by the author / Right: Still from *Image Book* (“Samantar” #1)

What must first be noted is how radically different the “original” image is from the one(s) seen in *Le livre d'image* (Figure 6.7)<sup>22</sup>. Our first guess was that the original black and white photograph was scanned by Godard, but upon further reading, it seemed more likely that it had been photocopied. Scholar Michael Witt writes about the significance of the introduction of a “good quality photocopier” to Godard’s work in the 1970s. It established a new way of working that allowed him to “think with his hands”<sup>23</sup>. It is possible that the image was photocopied from the book, and then cropped or reframed to emphasize the face, so that the hair, shirt and background are left out of the image. We can see a white border on the left side of the image, revealing what might possibly be the scanner itself or a page with signs of deterioration. From the first reproduction of the photograph to the second, we observe that the “original” image has been cropped even further to exclude the other man in the background and center the gaze upon the face in the foreground in a *close-up*. Of course, the other child in the photograph next to this one (a kind of counter-shot to this image) in the “original” publication is also left out, leaving the spectator exclusively with an individual face. This is important considering the origin of the image, taken in the collective context of political resistance, education and social organization. Arguably, this emphasis on the individual is already part of Alvermann’s book, which as we already said, includes many close-ups of individual faces.

What John Berger says about the painting is also true of the photograph: it is essentially still and essentially silent. As we have already seen in Chapter 3’s discussion on the work of Susana de Sousa Dias, cinema “adds” two principal elements to the photograph: movement and sound. In this case, Godard adds movement to the original still photograph in two ways. The first is by

<sup>22</sup> With my advisor, we have discussed the possibility that the image appropriated by Godard is not *exactly* the same as the one published in Alvermann’s book in 1960. Perhaps it is another photograph, taken moments before or after this one, and which formed part of the photographer’s contact sheets from that day. Considering that Alvermann was one of the nine signatories of the second Oberhausen Manifesto in 1965 with filmmakers Jean-Marie Straub and Peter Nestler, and considering that he made a documentary film titled *Algerian Partisans* (1962) based on the photographs published in the book, and that he worked with Peter Nestler as the cinematographer to his film *Menschen in Sheffield* (Peter Nestler, 1965), it seems likely that Alvermann and Godard may have known one another and that Godard may have had access to his photographic contact sheets (perhaps in preparation for his own film which takes place during the Algerian War, *Le petit soldat* from 1962, banned in France until 1963).

<sup>23</sup> Witt, Michael, “The Death(s) of Cinema according to Godard”, *Screen* 40(3) (Autumn 1999).

*filming the photograph in movement.* This occurs in the second and third reproductions of the face-image and works in the following way: in the second reproduction of the photograph, the image appears to have been filmed in the process of being printed (Figure 6.8). Its jerky tilt-up begins at the man's mouth and moves upwards towards his eyes. In this image, the background of the photograph has been darkened so that his face is all that we see, and the other face next to his (visible in the original photograph and in the first appropriation of the image) is no longer visible. The movement—as if the image were being printed on-screen and slowly revealed to the spectator—creates a certain narrative *suspense*, as a form of introduction of this heroic and very much mysterious individual. The third time the image appears, it is upside-down, and accompanied by the same “printing”/jerky movement as before (Figure 6.9). The image moves upward from the eyes to the mouth. This time the movement is a bit clumsier than before. It also must be said that when this movement the voice over narration (which we will get into shortly) speaks of movement: in the third reproduction of the image, the voice over says, “Pendant que nous vivons en paix le monde bouge” (“While in peace, the world is changing”). While in French the verb “bouger” also means “to move”, as in “the world moves”, the translation limits the word’s meaning: “the world is changing”. A French spectator will understand the play on words—between what is being said and what is happening to the image—that a non-French spectator will surely miss.

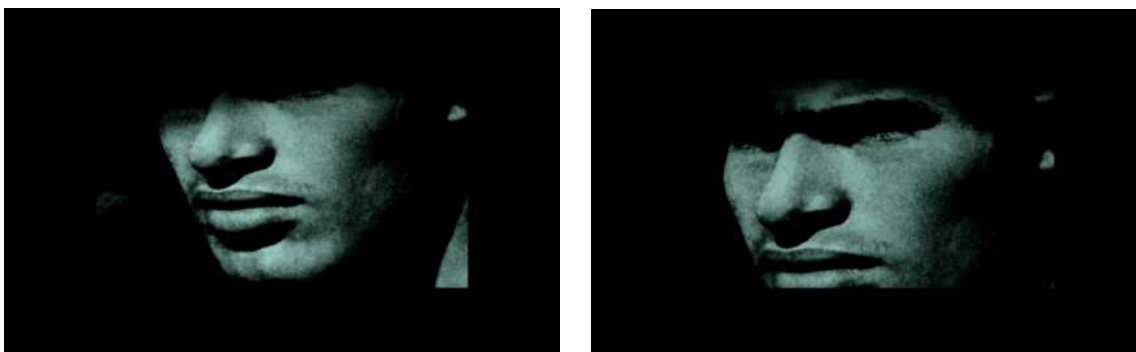


Figure 6.8. “Samantar” #2

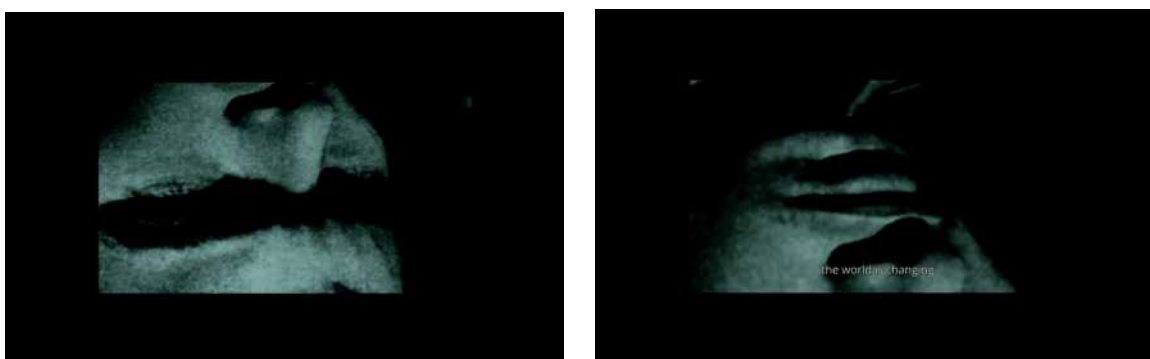


Figure 6.9. “Samantar” #3

The second way in which movement is added to the image is through the addition of texture created in the different processes –digital and analog– through which the image has passed, including photocopier, VHS, Television, Video, Computer screen, etc. If we compare images from the book and *Le livre d'image*, and even after cropping the image to about the same detail from the film, there is a considerable difference in the quality of the images (Figure 6.7). They might be of the same photograph, but they are completely different images in terms of color, texture, and “transparency”. The photocopy/scan and digital reinscription process have increased the image’s saturation and contrast –which has darkened the eyes, the ears, and the necks of the men<sup>24</sup>. The scan has also given the image a blueish/green tint. These processes modify the images color, grain, and aspect ratio, and within these subtle but noticeable changes, movement begins to appear to the eye “which on its own could not see”<sup>25</sup>. This movement, as in the films of the Portuguese Dictatorship Trilogy examined in Chapter 3, is created in the montage, which is not only the editing between images, but also about intra-image relations<sup>26</sup>. We “see” “Samantar” six times in total, and each time the image is altered somehow. This difference is not smooth nor clean, just the contrary; the image makes evident its own manipulation.



Figure 6.10. “Samantar” #4



Figure 6.11. “Samantar” #5

<sup>24</sup> As Witt remarks, “One of the effects of the photocopier, which he exploited extensively [...], was the reduction of grayscale photographs to high contrast, graphically striking black-and-white forms, which verge at times on pure abstraction”. Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, 2013: 4226.

<sup>25</sup> Epstein, Jean. *El cine del diablo*. Cactus: Buenos Aires, 2015: 25.

<sup>26</sup> What is achieved in the reworking of this photograph can be seen as a continuation of Godard’s exploration with still images which, although part of his work from early on, became central to his films in the latter half of the 1960s, in a series of proto-videographic collage film essays. Witt, 2013: 1291-1298.

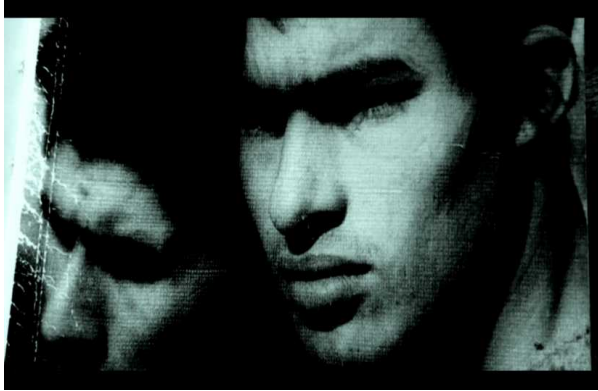


Figure 6.12. “Samantar” #1



Figure 6.13. “Samantar” #6

The fourth time we see the image (Figure 6.10), it has a different texture we have not seen in the prior reproductions. The pixels are more visible, and the image moves (ever so slightly) as the pixels readjust to the movement. This time, the image has been filmed with a low-quality digital camera and acquires a digital grain/pixel quality. It has also been flipped from the previous images (now he is looking right, not left). In the fifth reproduction (Figure 6.11), there is no such movement. Now it is a still image; perhaps a screenshot of the previously filmed image, as it has a similar digital grain to it. The sixth and final reproduction of the image (Figure 6.13) works as a kind of “memory image” of the first reproduction. It is similar in shot value and size, yet varies in color and texture. While the first image was a moving image (Figure 6.12), this one is still, as well as slightly out of focus. As a “memory image”, it appears several minutes after the fifth reproduction, and now in the final minutes of the film, in the form of a “summary without summation”.

### **Digital Reinscription: Botox vs. the Mark of Time and the Poor Image**

Fabrice Aragno, Godard’s collaborator, cinematographer, co-editor and co-producer of *Le livre d’image*, explains the process of digital reinscription in an interview:

You know how in postproduction you are supposed to color-correct the picture so everything is smooth and even? Jean-Luc wants the opposite. He wants the rupture. Color and then black and white, or different intensities of color. Or how in this film, sometimes you see the ratio of the frame change after the image begins. That happens when he records from his TV onto his old DVCAM analog machine, which is so old we can’t even find parts when it needs to be repaired. The TV takes time to recognize and adjust to the format on the DVD or the Blu-ray. Whether it’s 1:33 or 1:85. And one of the TVs he uses is slower than the other. He wants to keep all that. I could correct it, but he doesn’t want me to. See, here’s an image from *War and Peace*. He did the overlays of color—red, white, and blue—using an old analog video effects machine. That’s why you have the blur. When I tried to redo it in digital, I couldn’t. The edges were too sharp. And why the

image jitters—I don't know how he did that. Playing with the cable maybe. Handmade. He wants to see that. It's a gift from his old machine<sup>27</sup>.

Godard is interested in “the rupture”: the handmade quality of the image and the sound, which have been passed through old machines. As the image is passed through analog and digital re-inscription, the image “loses” quality each time. This degradation of the image contributes to the image's *illegibility*: the man's eyes, already darkened by the contrast of the original photograph, are made darker each time, impossible to look at directly. While *Reckless Eyeballing* offered an opportunity for the image to return-gaze, Godard's film has given up on this possibility. Unlike Harris, he chooses an image of a man whose gaze turns away from the camera –and away from the spectator. His eyes are obscured, difficult to see with clarity. They are darkened by the very materiality of the badly-scanned image. For *Le livre d'image*, the legibility of the face is as important as the image's materiality.

As a younger filmmaker who has been trained to make “smooth and even” images, Aragno finds himself conflicted with the lack of legibility that Godard looks for. He continues:

But sometimes, when I try to make things better, it's a mistake. There is a passage from a Dovzhenko film that moves me very much. It's in the section [of *Le livre d'image*] called “The Central Region,” where the voiceover is about time and the absence of time. I found what I thought was a “better” copy of the film, where you see more of his face, and more of her eyes, and his hand on her breast. All that moved me so much. But Jean-Luc said, “You don't understand me at all. This is what people do when they do restorations. They put Botox in the film.” *So yes, it's important to see the faces but it's just as important to see the snow in the image—all the deterioration.* And also to hear the noise in the sound. Jean-Luc records his voiceover with an old microphone, and we keep all the noise. It's the mark of time<sup>28</sup>.

This “mark of time” in the image is fundamental to understanding Godard's position on the digital image. Rather than removing time from the image through a practice of digital restoration (as a botox operation removes wrinkles from a face), digital re-inscription is used here *to visibilize time and deterioration in the image*. Instead of looking for the best version of a film, Godard prefers to find copies that show the film's deterioration.

Hito Steyerl proposes the term “poor image” to define precisely these kinds of materials:

The poor image is a copy in motion. Its quality is bad, its resolution substandard. As it accelerates, it deteriorates. It is a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, an itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed, as well as copied and pasted into other channels of distribution<sup>29</sup>.

Her essay “In Defense of the Poor Image” revindicates the low-quality, freely moving image, which has been “liberated from the vaults of cinemas and archives and thrust into digital

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<sup>27</sup> Taubin, “The Hand of Time: Interview with Fabrice Aragno on *Le livre d'image*”, 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Taubin, “The Hand of Time”, 2019. Italics added.

<sup>29</sup> Steyerl, Hito, “In Defense of the Poor Image”. *The Wretched of the Screen* (Sternberg Press, eflux journal reader 2009), 32.

uncertainty, at the expense of its own substance”<sup>30</sup>. In his practice, Godard prefers the “poor image” to the “better” copy of the film, which of course can be baffling for a film professional who has been hired to make the best film possible<sup>31</sup>. What occurs with the face-image in question is interesting because it is not “a poor image” in itself, at least not in the way that Steyerl defines it. However, it is *turned into a poor image* through digital reinscription. Although it might already be the case that the book shows some signs of deterioration, like the side of the page that we mentioned earlier, the processes by which Godard scans and films the image off of his television and perhaps with a low-cost digital camera arguably *adds* a time to the image (a time that was not necessarily visibly there). He passes this image (which was never an image of cinema) through cinematic processes, like digital cameras and television screens, *turning it into* an image of cinema and *making it* an image with marks of cinematic time<sup>32</sup>.

While Susana de Sousa Dias “added” time to the image through extreme slow motion and duration, in a process of *opening the image* through the technique of *defamiliarization* which impedes a fast reading of the image and allows for a more critical process of perception and impression, Godard “adds time” by passing the archives through different digital and analog processes. These processes resist archival restoration, resist the image’s “botox”, and make the images “come alive” through the visibility of layers of time (or *strata*, to recall our discussion on the co-existence of space and time in Chapter 2). However, this “life” does not “belong” to the original image; it is a life *acquired by* cinema and *related to cinematic time*. It could be said that Godard is “cloning” the photograph into a new context. While cloning may be a way to extend human lifespan, the cloned organism is not the same person as the one that has been cloned, for the only thing that they share is the same DNA. In a similar way, here the image shares DNA with the original photograph but in Godard’s appropriation (and in its combination with other DNA) another organism is *created*. It is also important to emphasize that like the blood sample/extraction analogy, the botox/restoration analogy is also directly related to work that is done to human bodies and, in the case of botox specifically, most often to the human face. A multi-species theoretical approach allows us to understand these clinical processes in relation to images, which for many, are not considered to be living organisms. As we are discovering in our dissertation, however, *recycled images*, as images that are reappropriated into new contexts through rephotography and montage, *are very much alive* (and dead, or somewhere in-between) and it is in the face-image where this *aliveness* is most evident.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> This way of working is anti-intuitive for the professional filmmaker. For more on the “poor image”, see Julio García Espinosa’s manifesto “Por un cine imperfecto” (“For an Imperfect Cinema”) from 1969 (which Steyerl also references in her essay). Godard did not always embrace the “aesthetic cost” of digital cinema; at first he quite regretted it. But it soon became inevitable for the kinds of films that he wanted to make, and the way that he wanted to make them. According to Witt, it is in the production of *Histoire(s) du Cinema(s)* that the regret transformed into something like an acceptance of a new way of working with images.

<sup>32</sup> Or a “televisual” image. “Godard's entire oeuvre is above all profoundly televisual (against television, marked by television, engaging with television).” Witt, “The Death(s) of Cinema according to Godard”, 1999: 333, 17. And: “Godard has simultaneously battled against and contributed to cinema's death by television, on the one hand positioning cinema and television as mutually exclusive and on the other hand incessantly searching for ever-new ways to challenge that opposition”, Niessen, “Access Denied”, 10.



It is interesting that we should speak of cinematic images as “alive” when considering the work of an author who has on many occasions proclaimed cinema’s death. Perhaps for Godard, the exhumation and resurrection of the image has something to do with the multiple death(s) of cinema. It is through reappropriation that cinema can live “a little bit” longer. But this “little bit longer” must visibilize the image’s history (let’s understand “the image” not as this particular photograph, but as “the image” in the most general sense). If Cinema is to keep living, it must do so in awareness of its past, which includes the awareness of where and when it has fallen short, specifically in how it has failed to document, record or testify to the crimes of our present-day world<sup>33</sup>. The creation of a new character, of a new being, named “Samantar” (who is not new of course, but a collage of old images and words), is both the expression of a necessity to tell new or other stories in cinema and the realization of the limitations of this exercise. It seems significant that this being is created from extracinematic materials.

What Godard does to the image, he also does to the sound, specifically in the treatment of the voice, and in the text, in his particular form of subtitling.

### **On Subtitling, Voices, and the Problem with Translation**

The first time the photograph appears in *Le livre d'image* is shortly after the first voice (Voice 1, left speaker) says, “Samantar était convaincu” (“Samantar was convinced”). The first time the name “Samantar” is pronounced it is almost inaudible as it has been cut/dirtied by the edit. Voice 1 continues over the image: “sa seule sauvegarde contre les rapaces” (not subtitled in film) – and it is interrupted by another voice (Voice 2, right speaker) reading the same line but more completely: “que la pauvreté d’un pays était sa seule sauvegarde contre les rapaces, armés ou non, qui n’attendaient qu’une promesse de profit pour partir à sa conquête, le dépecer et le pourrir” (“...that the poverty of a country was its only protection against raptors looking for only a promise of prosperity to conquer it, to destroy and to spoil it”), over Voice 1 which repeats, “n’attendaient qu’une promesse de profit pour partir à sa conquête, le dépecer et le pourrir” (“looking for only a promise of prosperity to conquer it, to destroy and to spoil it”). These passages belong to the book’s third page: “Samantar estaba convencido de que la pobreza era la única salvaguardia de un país contra los depredadores, armados o no, que no esperaban más que la promesa de beneficios para lanzarse a su conquista, descuartizarlo y dejarlo pudrirse. Y daba gracias al cielo por haber nacido en una tierra desértica, desprovista de cualquier clase de materias primas raras y lo bastante repelente para desalentar a los espíritus mercantiles”<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> According to Niessen, the question is: “Can cinema’s striking to fulfill its duty to testify to the crimes of our present-day world...” (“Access Denied”, 2013: 10). In conversation with Serge Daney, Godard says that it is not about being a witness. That cinema was the only instrument able to document what was going on. Godard, Jean-Luc, “Godard Makes (Hi)stories: Jean-Luc Godard in conversation with Serge Daney” (1988), *Diagonal Thoughts* (1992).

<sup>34</sup> Cossery, *Una ambición en el desierto*, 9. This book has not been translated to English so we will include the Spanish translation as reference.

Although both Voice 1 and Voice 2 belong to the same reader, namely, the Swiss actor Jean-Pierre Gos, who also appeared in two previous films made by Godard and Anne-Marie Méville (shot on video), *Liberté et Patrie* (2002) and the already mentioned, *Histoire(s) du Cinéma (un volet)*, and although the text that is read is quite similar, there is a considerable delay between the voices which makes them dissimilar. The text and the reader are the same; the reading, however, is not. Again, as with the image, something has been modified in its reinscription on the screen. For one thing, they are different recordings of Gos reading the text. Another difference is that one is left more “complete” and closer to the original, while the other is fragmented and/or abbreviated. These voices seem to want to try to *find* one another, and in moments seem to almost synchronize but they are never quite in unison. They seem to be chasing one another, in a cascade or looping effect, which *takes attention away from what is said* (which is difficult to apprehend considering the fragmentation, changing directions of the speakers, etc.) and places it on *the musicality or sound of the words being said*. In this way, the text (and not only the image) “comes alive” through appropriation.

The two voices continue, out-of-sync: “Samantar remerciait le ciel d’être né sur une terre désertique, démunie de toutes matières premières rarissimes et assez rebutante” (“Samantar thanked heaven for being born on this land thankless enough”); one voice stops there, and the other continues, “pour décourager les âmes mercantiles” (“...to discourage business”). It is significant to observe here that the original text has been fragmented and edited, so that the pauses in the reading provide an altered meaning to the text. In other words, as the narration continues, the previous text continues to be modified by what comes after.

In addition, many fragments of text are left untranslated. This is part of Godard’s ongoing experimentation with subtitling (since at least 1980) and which has already been commented upon by other researchers. Critic Samuel Bréan speculates that Godard was deeply affected by Henri Langlois’ habit of showing unsubtitled films at the Cinémathèque Française<sup>35</sup>. Langlois believed that projecting a film without subtitles would force the audience to look<sup>36</sup>. Or the influence may come from early cinema where, according to Bernard Eisenschitz, cited by Bréan, there were only one or three subtitles per scene<sup>37</sup>. In these films, subtitles functioned like intertitles, summing up the meaning of each scene and dialogue was left untranslated. Whether influenced by Langlois or early cinema prints or both, Godard rejects “the obligation to subtitle for the viewers”<sup>38</sup> but accepts to create subtitles (his way) as a form of compromise with the film’s producers and distributors. In some instances, like the ones mentioned earlier, the subtitles do not translate all of the text but only certain fragments. For example, if we return to the first mention of Samantar, the voices read:

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<sup>35</sup> Bréan, Samuel, “godard english cannes: The Reception of Film Socialism’s “Navajo English” Subtitles”, *Senses of Cinema*, Issue 60 (October 2011).

<sup>36</sup> “The Seventh Heaven: Henri Langlois Talks To Rui Nogueira and Nicoletta Zalaffi”, trans. Tom Milne, *Sight and Sound* 41(4) (Autumn 1972): 183. In: Bréan, Samuel. “godard english cannes: The Reception of Film Socialism’s “Navajo English” Subtitles”, *Senses of Cinema*, Issue 60 (October 2011).

<sup>37</sup> Eisenschitz, Bernard, “La parole écrite”, 37, In: Bréan, “godard english cannes”.

<sup>38</sup> Godard, Jean-Luc, “Jean-Luc Godard avec Jean Narboni”, part of the “Ensemble et séparés. Sept rendez-vous avec Jean-Luc Godard” series of extras on the *Morceaux de conversations avec Jean-Luc Godard* (Alain Fleischer, 2009) DVD boxset published by Éditions Montparnasse.

Voice 1: “Samantar était convaincu” / “sa seule sauvegarde contre les rapaces” (not subtitled in film) / interrupted by Voice 2: “que la pauvreté d’un pays était sa seule sauvegarde contre les rapaces, [armés ou non], qui n’attendaient qu’une promesse de profit pour partir à sa conquête, le dépecer et le pourrir”/ Voice 1 which repeats: “n’attendaient qu’une promesse de profit pour partir à sa conquête, le dépecer et le pourrir”. In this extract, “sa seule sauvegarde contre les rapaces” is left untranslated, and then when Voice 2 repeats the second phrase, “que la pauvreté d’un pays était sa seule sauvegarde contre les rapaces, [armés ou non], qui” is left out of the repetition. Godard uses subtitles as a kind of third voice; they offer the possibility to repeat, to exclude, to emphasize. While in commercial cinema subtitles only function to translate to viewers who speak another language, and are meant to translate the entire text and at the same time work invisibly in the viewing process (never calling attention to themselves), subtitles in this film are visible; they call attention to themselves, they reveal their own *incompleteness*. Like the image, they also tend to fall short.

Apart from the subtitling (and not subtitled) Cossery’s text (which itself has, perhaps significantly, never been translated to English), there is also the problem of translation of the few moments when Arabic is spoken in the film. When the Arabic language explodes into the film’s soundtrack, no subtitles are provided. For this, it might be useful to turn to what Godard said in a conversation with Jean Narboni regarding *Notre Musique* and a scene where two characters, one from Palestine and the other from Israel, converse:

It is a completely paradoxical situation: here are two individuals who don’t speak the same language, or who do speak the same language, or who understand each other, and who, in another way, *don’t* understand each other – since behind Darwish, we can see ‘Palestine’, and behind Sarah [Adler], we can see ‘Israel.’ (...) It’s a complete paradox for the viewers: they speak neither language, but because of the subtitles, they can follow the conversation and feel comfortable. After that sequence, they can talk about Israel and Palestine, whereas, had there not been any subtitles, they could only have said: ‘I don’t know what they said to each other.’ Now they don’t say that, but they can also say: ‘I know what they said to each other, and here’s what I think of it.’<sup>39</sup>

For Godard, the problem of subtitling is one of making the spectator too comfortable watching the film. To interrupt, cut down and outright eliminate subtitles communicates the impossibility of communication and impedes a quick interpretation of what is being said. Godard works to keep the contradiction alive in the subtitles, as he does with the image and the sound. He makes it more difficult for the supposed “universal” English speaker, creating obstacles for understanding in the viewing/listening/reading process.

What Godard has done to the face-image he also applies to the treatment of his own voice. It is not only about the reproduction of “poor images”, but also of poor sounds. Recorded with an old microphone, his voice shows signs of deterioration, age, and time. As with the subtitles, a contradiction is kept alive in the voice. What contradiction? The contradiction of representation itself. The fact that as soon as something is seen or heard clearly, it is forgotten. In fact, Godard

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<sup>39</sup> Godard, “Jean-Luc Godard avec Jean Narboni”, 2009.

has commented human memory as unpredictable and unreliable; it fails while cinema's memory remains intact<sup>40</sup>. Like de Sousa Dias, Godard is interested in using cinema to slow down the process by which we understand objects of knowledge. This is why at the end of the film there is a kind of "summary" of what has come before (part of that summary is the 6th reproduction of the face-image). The face-image is key here because it is an image which spectators tend to "know", immediately and without much thought. We think, "This is Samantar". Or we hear Godard speak and we think, "This is Godard". Both of these are correct or true only in their narrative function in the film. The movie ends and it feels like an autobiography, like an old man's final words. But Godard is also playing a character of himself, in the same way that "Samantar" is also a character.

The man in the photograph, if alive, would be a few years younger than Godard is today. That is of no importance to the film. Godard exists in the film as a voice, just like the young man exists as image, and both image and sound will live forever in a film. This immortality only means one thing: that there is a difference between a man in a film and a man in reality. A man in reality will die one day, whereas a man in a film will live forever (or will forever be not dead *yet*). This fact makes the question of what images and what sounds to use in films today even more urgent. To make this decision is a form of "playing God". While in previous films studied in our dissertation we have found instances that have appeared as uncontrolled, surprises, even "errors", in *Le livre d'image* there is no such thing. The "poor image" in Godard's film is placed there on purpose; it is created like an object in a factory, through a science known as montage. This is why the film is only perfectly imperfect; a premeditated contradiction. If there is a *punctum*, if there is a moment that escapes from his control, it might be Godard's cough which interrupts the soundtrack like a bomb. The grain of the voice, like the grain and pixel of the image, are the signs of a man who has lived through much of cinematic history. This is also why no matter what image he uses, the film will always be autobiographical and anthropocentric. If it is still the case that an image can speak "for itself", perhaps it will only be possible when Godard is silent.

### **On Voice: *Ici et ailleurs* (Godard, Gorin and Anne-Marie Miéville, 1975) to *Le livre d'image***

In Serge Daney's essay on voice from 1977<sup>41</sup>, he argues that voice is one element in a film's sonic hierarchy and therefore we need more words, and a wider vocabulary, to describe its different forms. In particular, he is interested in the use of voices where the mouth is not seen. That is, where we hear someone speak but we do not see them speaking. Daney argues that we must be weary of the vocabulary used to describe voices that depend too much on the visual and that value the image *over* the sound. He proposes we speak of voices "off" and "on" (*voix-off* and *voix-on*) to better

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<sup>40</sup> Witt, "The Death(s) of Cinema according to Godard", 625.

<sup>41</sup> I've consulted the original French essay and two English translations. The first is an abbreviated version and the second is more complete. See: Daney, Serge, "Back to Voice: on Voices *over*, in, out, through", *Cinema Comparat/ive Cinema* 1(3) (2013): 18-20; Daney, Serge, "The Organ and the Vacuum Cleaner (Bresson, the Devil, the voice-over and other things)", *Literary Debate: texts and contexts*, volume 2, ed. Dennis Hollier and Jeffrey Mehlman (The New Press, 1999), trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Original source: "L'orgue et l'aspirateur (Bresson, le diable, la voix off et quelques autres)", *Cahiers du cinéma*, issue 279-280 (August-September 1977): 19-27; Reprinted in *La Rampe: Cahiers critique 1970-82* (Paris : Cahiers du Cinema/Gallimard, 1983): 138-48.

describe the voice's effects "in or on the image"<sup>42</sup>. *Voix-on* is "a voice that participates in the image, merges with it, and has material impact on it by way of a visual stand-in", while *voice-off* is "an off-screen voice that always runs parallel to the sequence of images and never intersects with it"<sup>43</sup>. According to Daney, Godard practices "le degré zéro de la voix off" (*voice-off* degree zero): his voice never intersects the image. For Daney, this also is the voice utilized by propaganda in film: it is the "lieu d'un pouvoir illimité". The only way to get out of the tyranny of this extreme *voix-off* is to multiply it.

Speaking of *Ici et ailleurs* (*Here and Elsewhere*, Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Pierre Gorin and Anne-Marie Miéville, 1975), Daney writes: "...the voice plays the same role as quotation marks in a text: it highlights but also distances". In this earlier film, footage recorded by Godard and Gorin in Palestine (for a film that was supposed to be titled *Jusqu'à la victoire* in 1970, but was never completed) are re-examined by Godard and Miéville later in France. With this film and with Miéville as his collaborator, Godard begins the exercise of looking back at his own work, which now constitutes an *archive of images*<sup>44</sup>. In one scene, Godard and Miéville *look again* at an image of a Palestinian woman's face. We would like to turn our attention momentarily to this scene and through a comparison with sequence under analysis in *Le livre d'image*, attempt to understand what has changed between one film and the other.

In this scene, Godard's voice introduces the clip *before* we see it: "In Beirut, a pregnant woman is happy to give her child to the Revolution". The close-up of a young anonymous woman's face (Figure 6.14) is followed by a hesitant zoom out as Godard's voice continues over the image. His voice stops, and hers enters. Unlike his, however, *her words*, spoken in Arabic, are left untranslated. As she continues to speak, the sound is removed, even though we continue to look at her face. Over this image, Miéville's voice enters, commenting directly on the image: "That is not the most interesting part of this shot. It's this:". The image turns black. We hear Godard's voice, off-screen; this time it is not his voice-over but rather the direct sound of his voice as he directed

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<sup>42</sup> Daney, "L'orgue et l'aspirateur", 18.

<sup>43</sup> There are two other kinds of *in voice*, or of voices that are spoken "within the image" and these are *out voice*, the voice that emerges from the mouth, and *through voice*, "a voice that originates within the image but does not emanate from the mouth", Daney, "L'orgue et l'aspirateur", 19-29.

<sup>44</sup> We shall consider this image of the Palestinian woman an *archive-image*, because it belongs to the archive of images filmed by Godard only a few years earlier and which were supposed to be for another film. That is to say, the film image becomes an archive-image when it no longer belongs to the film that it was originally intended for; it is independent from this earlier project, freed from it and made *available* for a new use. In this sense, the archive-image is a fragmented image, even a stolen image; an image that can be made to signify an entirely different meaning from the one which was intended. (Herein lies the potential danger of the archive-image, as it is de-contextualized and re-contextualized according to the new film and new filmmaker's agenda). In this case, we are speaking about the same filmmaker, now accompanied by Melville, who was not *there*, in Palestine, when these images were taken and was not the person doing the shooting. Her position of distance vis-à-vis the material and the content makes for an interesting dynamic between the filmmakers as they look again and *look together* at the archive, geographically removed from the place where the images were filmed: hence the title, *Here and there*, which points to the geographic distance between Palestine and France, between the East and the West, and also becomes a structural and political *motif* throughout the entire film as it divides the image and *cinema* itself into dialectical agents (black and white, sound and color, here and there, one image and another, etc.).

this scene at the time. “Can you repeat it one more time?” he asks the woman, off-screen. We see the woman again, as before. “Put your head a bit more to the right. That’s it...”, his voice continues. The woman readjusts her head, following his direction, and begins to speak. We understand now that we have seen the same image twice, once as it appeared in the film, and then as it appears in the original footage. What was shown first was not the *complete* picture before because we could only *see* her image and we could not *hear* what was happening off-screen.



A face, interrupted

Figure 6.14. *Ici et ailleurs* (Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Pierre Gorin and Anne-Marie Miéville, 1975)

Miéville’s voice interrupts the woman’s voice again: “First thing to say: We always see the person who is directed and never the director”. The screen turns black again and Miéville’s voice continues, “We never see who commands and gives orders.” Godard’s voice comes back in, as he continues to direct over black screen, “One more time. Move a bit your...”. Image returns and we see the woman move her *hijab* a bit away from her face. “Voilà”, says Godard, off-screen. Miéville’s voice enters again over the woman’s silenced face-image, “Another thing that doesn’t work:”. The camera hesitantly zooms into the woman’s face. “You have chosen for this shot a young intellectual sympathizer of the Palestinian cause who is not pregnant but accepts to play this role”. The Palestinian woman continues speaking in the shot, and we continue unable to hear her. Miéville’s voice continues, “What’s more, she is young and beautiful. And you say nothing about that. But these kinds of secrets can turn quickly to fascism”.

There are various elements at work here: the archival image –with and without direct sound, with and without the sound of Godard’s off-screen direction; the newly added voices of Godard and Melville, looking again at this material a few years later; the fact that Godard and Melville remain off-screen and unseen, while we look at the face and expression of an anonymous Palestinian woman who, unlike Godard and Melville, remains untranslated. Another element is the black screen which works as an interrupter of the image, allowing the sound to take over at times and linger on the screen, independently of the image (something that will be repeated in *Le livre d’image*). By separating the image and sound, and creating various layers of sound and voice (the

direct sound of Godard's direction, the direct sound of the voice of the woman being directed, the removal of this sound –the silence–, and the voix-off of two voices, one masculine and one feminine), the film provides a *slow dissection* of the image and the sound, of what is there and what is not there, of what is seen and what is not heard, of what is heard and not seen, etc. The different voice-overs employed in the appropriation of this archival image, and the often contradictory and conflicting nature between them anticipate the layers of sound and voice used in *Le livre d'image*.

But can't it also be said that, once again, Godard has chosen a man to play a role? And that he, like the woman in *Ici et ailleurs*, is also young and beautiful?

In "Access Denied: Godard Palestine Representation", Niessen writes about the representation of Palestine beginning in Godard's early work, through his video period, up until *Film Socialisme* (2010). For Niessen, "*Film Socialisme* can [...] be said to carry into the digital age the crisis of representation" what Godard cinematographically theorized in his earlier films, much in the same way that *Ici et ailleurs* "carried this same crisis into the age of television and video". He asks what has changed from *Ici et ailleurs* to *Film Socialisme* in terms of the question of representation and concludes that despite the very different formats, "...not much has changed on a fundamental level"<sup>45</sup>.

As in these previous films shot on film, Godard once again runs up against his own self-imposed limits. It seems to matter little whether he is shooting on film or digital video because the questions, and the answers, are inevitably the same. What has changed between *Ici et ailleurs* and *Le livre d'image*? *Le livre d'image* poses the question of the crisis of representation within a formal exploration of an anonymous face through the reappropriation of analog materials, this time not only from Godard's own archive, but from a much larger archive of film history clips and extracinematic materials including YouTube videos, photographs, comics, as well as extracts from novels and poems, which have been reinscribed into digital formats and brought into the realm of cinema.

*Le livre d'image* will continue to put into question the authority of Godard's voice, but will do so more radically than before. While in *Ici et ailleurs* Miéville's voice criticizes Godard's (and Gorin's) errors (so to speak) –and talks *over* the Palestinian woman whose voice has been silenced and whose words are left untranslated– converting Miéville into the voice of authority (a "ventriloquizing" voice, in the same sense that Nora Alter criticized Farocki's female voice in *Bilder*, discussed in Chapter 1), in *Le livre d'image* there is no final "voice of wisdom". There is no singular voice. No final word. The film's soundtrack is composed of multiple, entangled, and contrasting voices, spoken by Gos, Méville and Godard, heard through different speakers, sometimes only the left, sometimes only the right, and sometimes both at the same time. The voices repeat, overlap, quiet down, and interrupt one another. They are only partially translated and subtitled, excluding non-French and/or non-Arab speakers from large quantities of speech.

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<sup>45</sup> Niessen, "Access Denied", 22.

When Godard's voice enters towards the end of the film, replacing Gos' voice, it is evidently the voice of a much older man. The voice is rough, unclean, it even breaks out into a nasty cough. When Godard's voice enters, Cossery's text begins to mix with his words, making them undistinguishable. His words come *out of the archival materials and extracts* and they rest on this history, but for a moment he is also on his own. He cannot speak *for* "Samantar", nor for "Arabia", nor Algeria, nor anyone else. But speech and voice *can* give the spectator an element that the face-image cannot, and this is probably best explained by Daney's observation that "the voice involves the whole body, including the heart and the lungs, which cannot be seen". By including his voice, a voice, or just voice—importantly not as a commentary nor as a voice-over, but as an auditory presence—Godard includes a body, *his body, his heart and lungs*, and this is something we did not see in quite the same way in *Ici et ailleurs*, where the time/moment in history still called for precise ideas. Cossery's novel is also a sonic hierarchy, even if it does not have sound, in that the novel is told from the perspectives of all of the characters involved in the story, and we understand that all of the characters, even Samantar, have an ambition or a desire which isolates them from the rest and tears them apart. More than a novel against war, which it is, it is a novel against ambition, described by the author as incompatible with a simplified life of love, indolence and leisure (embodied by Samantar's character). To be able to adapt this novel Godard himself has had to see his own ambition, perhaps, in a new light. When he finally speaks "his" words come from two different characters in Cossery's novel, neither of whom are protagonists: first from Hisham, an old man who sings revolutionary songs that everyone loves because they remind them of older times. He is an anti-imperialist, like Samantar, but he is too old to see that the bombs that fall on Dofa are no more than a simulacrum. This, more than his age, is what makes him *old*, because he is unable to understand the time in which he is living. It is interesting that Godard would choose to take Hisham's words as his own. Hisham knows that Samantar is right in his political analysis, but nevertheless cannot help but support the bombs. A second time Godard speaks, his words are taken from dialogues spoken by Tarek, a character who plays the part of a "crazy" man. He pretends to be crazy so that he can be free and express himself freely. He is like the King's buffoon or jester, who nobody pays attention to.

What Godard has not resolved since *Ici et ailleurs*, what he cannot resolve, is ultimately the question of who is speaking. The anonymous Algerian man in the photograph cannot speak for himself, we cannot hear his voice, and we will never hear it. There is an unrecoverable distance between the spectator and this man which the film cannot resolve. The film, in fact, shows this distance, makes it more palpable. Cossery's text enters as a way of giving this anonymous man a name, a voice, and a point of view of the world. But the text is read by a professional actor, and it is interrupted by Godard's voice, while the voices speaking in Arabic around him are left untranslated and therefore understood only by a part of the film's audience. In that sense, Niessen is right: fundamentally, things have not changed. The silent face-image becomes a mechanism for Godard to highlight this fact, even if it is also the way that he tries to combat it.

However, what the film can "resolve" is the plurality of the image and the plurality of voice. He uses many *voix-offs*, multiplying them in the different sound channels (left-right) and



overlapping them in the edit. He cuts up the text so that words and phrases are repeated and others are left out. He uses subtitling to add to this fragmentation and to the palimpsest of voices and text. As for the image, Godard takes a photograph that may be singular, but may not be (there is already a doubt about this being the “only” image or if there were more photographic contacts and this is another take, different from the one published in 1960), and turns it into many: multiple face-images, distorted and rephotographed, transformed in texture, color, and size. If the photograph has made a face singular; cinema, through movement and sound, can make a face multiple again. And it is through this *multiplicity* that cinema can represent different perspectives on the same subject. Even if, ultimately, it can never show a truly *complete* picture, or sound, of anything or anyone.

### **Cinema, Fiction and Artificial Myth**

For Roland Barthes the function of myth is “to distort”<sup>46</sup>. What is distorted by myth is deprived of its history, “changed into gestures”<sup>47</sup>. Orientalism is understood by Edward Said as a system for citing works and authors in which the idea of the Arab is constructed and then taught<sup>48</sup>. Perhaps we can understand these citations as “gestures”, and cinema itself as another system that constructs myths, reinforcing them into visual representations. Godard uses cinema to create a myth—or an antimyth—(Samantar), as a counter-myth of Orientalism. Orientalism is a process that has systematically depoliticized (and politicized) the subject, turning the subject into an object, and freezing the movement of history into a fixed time in which the subject/object has no agency. Godard’s montage, with voice, sound, image and text, creates a story/history for Samantar and therefore reverses the process by which Orientalism has kept him from it. “Samantar” is a character of Cossery’s fiction, which through Godard’s appropriation, becomes a character of cinema. Through fiction and through myth, Godard proposes not one but many potential images for the freedom fighter.

For Barthes, “the best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in its turn, and to produce an *artificial myth*”<sup>49</sup>. After all, he asks, “Since myth robs language of something, why not rob myth? All that is needed is to use it as the departure point for a third semiological chain, to take its signification as the first term of a second myth”<sup>50</sup>. Godard appropriates the character named “Samantar”, he *steals* “Samantar”, and uses it to produce a *second myth*, the “Samantar” that we see in the film, with the face of an anonymous Algerian Freedom Fighter taken by Alvermann. The name and character of a man who is radically critical of armed struggle is combined with the face of a man who would give his life to fight for the independence of his country. Anyone who reads *Une ambition dans le desert* knows that Samantar would not have been a freedom fighter, at least not the one photographed by Alvermann. He was a different kind of freedom fighter, one that

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<sup>46</sup> Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1972: 120.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

<sup>49</sup> Barthes, *Mythologies*, 134.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

fought by living in peace. This appropriation-construct of name, character, and face-image, and complemented by images from various films and formats which together help to create Samantar's story, constructs an *artificial myth*. Godard does not conceal the myth-making process; in fact, he draws attention to it through the use of distancing devices and editing techniques. He does this principally through the digital re-inscription of the photographic image, which reveals and highlights the "mistakes" and "errors" of the digital image, and secondly through his use of voice: through the unreliable narrator on one hand, and through his own voice, decrepit, subjective, and coughing over the image. Through digital re-inscription and voice Godard reveals just how artificial the combination between speech and image can be.

This is not necessarily new: back in 1962, he arguably was doing the same when he "badly" combined Anna Karina's body and Edgar Allen Poe's text in *Vivre Sa Vie*. In this scene ("Tableaux 12"), the young man, Nana's new lover, appears to read from a book by Poe. When we hear his voice, however, it belongs to Godard and it identifies as himself, speaking to Karina as her husband and director. For Farocki, this episode has many "poor combinations" between text and image. Karina does not always appear to be filmed in a way that we would be able to associate her with the words read aloud by Godard. This frustrates our attempts to create an analogy between Nana, the wife's artist, and Karina, on the one hand; and Raoul, the artist, and Godard, on the other"<sup>51</sup>. In Kaja Silverman's words, this is a "bad combination" between Karina's body and Poe's text<sup>52</sup>. While for Susan Sontag, this scene is the only "false step" in an otherwise "perfect film" because it ruptures the film's fiction<sup>53</sup>, for Farocki and Silverman, the fiction was already fractured from the beginning of the film<sup>54</sup>. More than 50 years later, Godard is repeating the gesture but he has more complex tools to play with. He can continue to "badly" combine images and speech now through a variety of analog and digital technological processes.

If *Film Socialisme* is not about Palestine but the *idea of Palestine*<sup>55</sup>, *Le livre d'image* is not about the Arab world but the idea of the Arab world. It is not about Image, but the idea of Image. Not about Cinema but the idea of Cinema. And it connects myth and cinema through its methodology: the appropriation and extraction of images and speech in order to create a new being. The problem is not myth itself, Godard seems to say. The problem is which myths we create. We need new myths. And we need these myths to show that they are in fact myths. We need these myths to reveal their quality as myths. The montage of contradictory and multiple voices is one way to do so. Another way is repetition with variation through digital re-inscription; by modifying the image in many different ways, and leaving the "errors" that occur in the process (aspect ratio shifts, pixel, lines, change in color, for example), Godard allows the spectator to see that he is working with materials that can be distorted in an infinite number of ways depending on the message. Instead of "reiterative readings" proposed by Farocki and analyzed in Chapter 1, now we can speak of reiterative seeing(s)/hearing(s). It is not then that "nothing has changed" – something

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<sup>51</sup> Farocki, Harun and Kaja Silverman, *A Propósito de Godard*. Buenos Aires: Caja Negra. 2016: 51.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid: 52.

<sup>53</sup> Sontag, Susan. "On Godard's *Vivre Sa Vie*", in *Jean-Luc Godard: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Mussam (1968), 99.

<sup>54</sup> Farocki and Silverman, *A Propósito de Godard*, 49.

<sup>55</sup> Niessen, "Access Denied".

has changed. The *question* has changed. It is no longer a question of the impossibility of representation. We can accept that representation *can* occur, as long as we accept that it is a fiction. What Godard wants us to discover is that the most direct way of creating an artificial representation is through the face-image. “Paintings are essentially still and silent”, Berger said. Faces in a photograph are, as well. Godard adds movement and sound, and in doing so, creates a man of History and a character of Cinema: Godard/Cossery/Alvermann’s “Samantar”. He is unreachable, unknowable, unrecognizable. The image is too dark and too grainy to make out. He is a man/an image “we” will never know. It is not about Samantar, it is about the idea of Samantar. But the idea of Samantar includes his negation. It is a *shot-reverse shot* where the reverse shot is his absence. Both shot and reverse-shot are contained by the face-image.

In Cossery’s novel, Samantar’s land is saved from war and exploitation because it is free of petroleum. No one is interested in that oil-less land. In Godard’s film, “Samantar” is free because he cannot be contained by a single image. Is it a “crisis of representation”? Not exactly. The crisis is not the impossibility of representation. The crisis is precisely the vastness of images that mean nothing. The task then is to make the spectator understand the little that “we” know and the fact that what we know has been constructed very simply, through different combinations of image, sound, and text. Through a new combination, Godard seems to suggest, perhaps we can “unlearn” the quick associations and interpretations we have been taught to make, and learn to see and hear and comprehend anew.



Figure 6.15. Cinema vs. cinema / Rich vs. poor image  
 Left: *Vivre Sa Vie* (Godard, 1962); Right: *Le livre d'image* (Godard, 2018)

In both images above (Figure 6.15), on the left a still from *Vivre Sa Vie* (1962) and on the right a still from *Le livre d'image* (2018), *we see faces*. The first of a woman (played by Anna Karina) filmed by Godard, the second of a photograph taken by Alvermann which has passed through a process of digital re-inscription. The woman is in profile, the light only touches her neck, hiding the rest of her face in the dark. The man is also difficult to see; the image has been heavily contrasted and we cannot see his eyes. Both are explorations or exercises in how to show a face and hide it at the same time. What is the difference between these images? The main difference is

in the conditions of production and the processes through which they have passed: one is filmed directly on 35mm (the dominant commercial format) with a “professional” actress and the other is an archival image passed through several digital and analog non-commercial processes (of inferior quality to 35mm film), like layers of a palimpsest. The first is a rich image; the second is poor. The first is made following certain commercial conditions of cinema, while the second is made on much freer terms, relatively outside the film industry. The first is filmed on the dominant format for the cinema of the past (35mm film); the second is an image that has traveled in time. Both essentially explore the same questions, but the answers they find are not the same because the formats have changed. The image “takes on” the agency, the life, the “aura” that once belonged only to the actor. But where is this “life” exactly, if it is not in the relationship between the person who is photographed and the person taking the portrait? It is in the image’s *materiality*: in what is done to the image and how the image resists, in how it has been reworked and manipulated and rephotographed and re-edited. It is not *one life*; it is many lives, in the plural form, and it is this plurality which gives it a certain “protection” from the colonial gaze (similarly to how Nana’s body resists the masculine gaze in *Vivre Sa Vie*). The image’s “life” lies in the different versions of that image, in the image’s variations. It is in-between images and in-between the images and the sounds.

The depth that Godard adds to the essentially still and silent photographic face-image is not only material, it is historical. Godard (re)creates a historical framework for the image, recontextualizing it in a historical process of change and transformation (symbolized by digital reinscription) which it has been systematically removed from. In this sense, the film expands upon the theme of contradiction presented in the previous chapter and evidenced in Christopher Harris’ *Reckless Eyeballing*. But here it goes further because the contradiction is in the image and the text, and the combination of the two. Like Harris, Godard breaks with cinematic convention while adhering to it; that is, he uses aesthetic conventions like associational editing, voice over commentary, and even subtitling, to create a critical possibility for these forms. The “visual shorthand” that Thomas Elsaesser criticized in his essay on television tropes, and which we mentioned in Chapter 1 in the discussion on *Settela: Face of the Past*, here becomes a mechanism for creating an alternative subject. One that we *think* we know. However, since this image is so far removed from the person it once represented, and since it has therefore lost its indexical force, the image can now be used in a very different way from Settela’s face-image in *Respite*. While in *Respite*, the face-image is still connected to the index, here, through digital re-inscription and re-appropriation with Cossery’s text, the image is no longer of an anonymous Algerian freedom fighter, but is now “the face of Samantar”, a fictional character invented by Cossery and now “imaged” by Godard. This image, purposefully Orientalist as it is an amalgam of “the Arab world”, including references from Algeria, Egypt, and Tunisia (without consideration for the differences between the different nations and cultures), does not obscure its own image-construction. Nor does it, however, participate in the commodification of the revolutionary. Because the appropriation of this image resists restoration and botox, thereby calling attention to its own form (across technology and across time), it does not represent a clean, readable and relatable image of a

revolutionary. The “revolutionary” quality of the figure (once represented in the image but now lost in the loss of indexicality) is transposed to the face-image; the image is revolutionary because it is historical. The history that it contains is not only the history of any particular region or country (the history of “the Arab world” is also the history of the non-Arab world), but also the history of the image itself.

Godard has said that film history is a history of the West. “It is not the history of the East”, he specifies, “nor that of Mexico and the Indians. That of black Africa, nobody knows what it is, and we’re not even close to knowing. It’s the history of the West, the history of a view of the world, of art coming to an end, and which can be seen today through cinema”<sup>56</sup>. At the same time, he has expressed his admiration for this history, exclaiming “The greatest history is the history of the cinema”<sup>57</sup>. We would like to incorporate a more critical perspective to this history –and one positioned outside the film industry and the history of film– in the following chapter. In Chapter 7, we will look at other ways of responding to gaps in the archive and of using reimagined archival material as a critical intervention. For this we will turn to the work of the artist Onyeka Igwe, who works with the colonial film archives made by the British Colonial Film Unit in Africa between 1933 and 1955, in order to initiate a corporal response to the images of her ancestors (in a wider sense, beyond direct family) from Nigeria by way of a performative reading of the face-image. While Godard inserts a digital reproduction of his voice, a “poor sound”, Igwe chooses to incorporate her body and gestures, including her own face, in her embodied response to the “impossible archive”. With this Chapter we will culminate our dissertation on the face-image in contemporary experimental archival cinema.

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<sup>56</sup> “Le briquet de Capitaine Cook: Interview with François Albéra and Mikhaïl Iampolski”, *Les Lettres Francaises*, (19 April 1992), 19. Cited in: Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, 735.

<sup>57</sup> Godard, Jean-Luc. “Godard Makes (Hi)stories: Jean-Luc Godard in conversation with Serge Daney”, *Diagonal Thoughts*. Originally published as ‘Godard fait des Histoires’, in *Libération* (December 26, 1988). Translation published in *Jean-Luc Godard son+image 1974-1991*, ed. Raymond Bellour and Mary Lea Bandy (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992).

## Chapter 7: Reading the Face-Image for Performance: Experimental Autoethnography, Sensory Reenactment and The Third Eye & Voice in Onyeka Igwe's *Aba Women's War Series*

What had to have happened for me to encounter this image?  
-Tina Campt<sup>1</sup>

In the conclusions to *The Third Eye* (1996), author Fatimah Tobing Rony begins by making reference to a conversation recorded between anthropologist Margaret Mead and novelist and cultural critic James Baldwin in 1971 at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. In the selected quote from the conversation, Baldwin says, "I had to accept that I was on a slave boat once", to which Mead responds that of course he was not, unless –she adds, amused– he believes in reincarnation. Baldwin insists: "But my whole life was defined by history... My life was defined by the time I was five by the history written on my brow". In her return to this conversation, Rony emphasizes Baldwin's particular concept of history –"I don't think history is the past. ... History is the present"– as one in direct opposition to the linear concept of history defended by Mead<sup>2</sup>. Contrary to Mead's linear understanding of history as the unfolding of events in time, Baldwin's concept of history is one that is "written on his skin" and therefore very much incarnated in the present.

In this Chapter, we will look at films which share Baldwin's concept of history. We believe that this is where some of the most interesting contemporary films working with the archive today can be found. These films are first and foremost the result of an *embodied practice*: a response to the history which has been left out of official records and archives, one that has not been written and which therefore exists outside of the word. As a "response", it is also a cinema which we can define as *auto-ethnography*, in the "oppositional" sense identified by Marie Louise Pratt: "If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, auto-ethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations."<sup>3</sup> In *Experimental Ethnography*, Catherine Russell identifies the difference between *autobiography* and *autoethnography* in the following way:

Autobiography becomes ethnographic at the point where the film –or videomaker understands his or her personal history to be implicated in larger social formations and historical processes. Identity is no longer a transcendental or essential self that is revealed, but a 'staging of subjectivity' – a representation of the self as a performance. In the politicization of the personal, identities are frequently played out among several cultural discourse, be they ethnic, national, sexual, racial, and/or class based. The subject 'in history' is rendered destabilized and incoherent, a site of discursive pressures and articulations. ...

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<sup>1</sup> Wallis, Brian, "The Sound of Defiance: Interview with Tina Campt", *aperture* (October 25, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Her vision of history, writes Rony, "as the unfolding of events, as a linear temporal process that could be captured by a film camera running without any human intervention, is a vision rooted in the nineteenth-century Rankean notion of History: *wie es eigentlich gewesen*". Rony, Fatimah Tobing, *The Third Eye* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996, Kindle Edition): 193.

<sup>3</sup> Pratt, Mary Louis, "Arts of the Contact Zone", in *Ways of Reading*, 5th edition, ed. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrofsky (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999).

Autoethnography is a vehicle and a strategy for challenging imposed forms of identity and exploring the discursive possibilities of inauthentic subjectivities<sup>4</sup>.

As a cinema of response and opposition to former media representations which have constructed notions of the “ethnographiable”<sup>5</sup> *other* based on a “displaced temporal realm”<sup>6</sup>, *autoethnography* is a cinema that implicates the filmmaker in a larger, often collective, context. While Russell focuses on the exploration of “inauthentic” subjectivities, which is certainly the case where fictional archives come into play, the very concept of what is “authentic” and not becomes invalidated by these new approaches to the archive. But we do not want to go into the discussion on authenticity, for which so much has already been said. Instead, we would like to explore the performative aspects of contemporary auto-ethnographic films and how this performance rotates, in many cases, specifically around gesture, the body, and the face.

When the face-image is read along the lines of performance, and when the face-image is understood as a “staged face”, what becomes possible in this image’s appropriation? We hope to discover that thinking about the face-image in this way, will permit us to thread much ground since Chapter 1 and Farocki’s exploration of the multiple readings that images can evoke depended on where this image is located within a sequence and the “information”, by way of images, gaps and text, surrounding the face-image. Now the question is no longer about the multiplicity of readings and interpretations, but rather, one that comes from a very personal approach to filmmaking and thinking about images, namely about the challenge of *how* to “build an identity from veiled selves” –as Rony has so eloquently said<sup>7</sup>–, which includes both the anger of being forced to do so and the potential joy of finding a way. In other words, while in Chapter 1, Farocki’s questions positioned us in the space of spectator/filmmaker, *autoethnography* and the films we will discuss here, will position us in the place of subject/filmmaker.

What possibilities for experimental filmmaking are opened up by the “third eye” when it comes to the appropriation of archival materials today? How are archival materials “looked at” by such an eye and what becomes possible for their appropriation? In this final Chapter, we will make the case that a “third eye” offers the contemporary experimental autoethnographic filmmakers working with archival materials an opportunity to “read performance” in the face-image of the colonial archive as a powerful strategy for decolonization. Through the process of “reading performance”, the filmmaker “opens” the image beyond its own elements (remember the “opening” that takes place, for example, in Susana de Sousa Dias’ trilogy discussed in Chapter 3) and into the imaginary or fictional archive. “Reading for performance”

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<sup>4</sup> Russell, Catherine, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), 276.

<sup>5</sup> “Nevertheless, the category of ‘ethnographic film’, at least in the popular imagination, is still by and large racially defined. The people depicted in an ‘ethnographic film’ are meant to be seen as exotic, as people who until only too recently were categorized by science as Savage and Primitive, of an earlier evolutionary stage in the overall history of humankind: people without history, without writing, without civilization, without technology, without archives. In other words, people considered ‘ethnographiable’, in the bipolar schema articulated by Claude Lévi-Strauss, as opposed to people classified as ‘historifiable’, the posited audience of the ethnographic film, those considered to have written archives and thus a history proper”. Rony, *The Third Eye*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> For Rony, ethnographic cinema describes “the broad and variegated field of cinema which situates indigenous peoples in a displaced temporal realm”, Rony, *The Third Eye*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*: 217.

means understanding that the archive is always a staged representation. The archive can be “read” in such a way that it becomes possible to dialogue directly with it: to ask the subjects represented in the archive questions, ask the images questions, and imagine what the subject felt, or thought, or experienced when she/he was in front of the camera. This becomes a strategy for resisting the face-image’s original context and colonial use, allowing the filmmaker to work with this image towards a decolonial and personal autoethnographical –but not necessarily “autobiographical”—purpose.

### **Aba Women’s War and the *No Dance, No Palavar* series (Onyeka Igwe, 2017-2018)**

In November to December 1929, thousands of Igbo women from the provinces of Calabar and Owerri in southeastern Nigeria organized a massive revolt against the policies imposed by British colonial administrators in southeastern Nigeria and which had altered the traditional position of Nigerian women in their societies<sup>8</sup>. The women came from six ethnic groups (Ibibio, Andoni, Ogoni, Bonny, Opobo, and Igbo). While the British continue to call these events “Aba Riots”, to diminish the complex organizational power of *the women* who led the protests and paint a picture of wild and violent public disturbance<sup>9</sup>, the revolt was named by locals *Ogu Umunwany* (in Igbo) and *Ekong Iban* (in Ibibio), which translates to “the Women’s War”<sup>10</sup>. The anti-colonial protest was in response to the increasingly oppressive actions of the “Warrant Chiefs”, non-elected local chiefs appointed by British administrators who replaced the locally elected chiefs, as well as the introduction of direct taxation. While prior to colonial rule, women had been allowed to participate in the governance of the local region and held an important role in the marketplace, the colonial authorities believed that patriarchal and masculine order would establish a “moral order” throughout the colony. The Warrant Chiefs were introduced in part to restrict the role of women in the government<sup>11</sup>.

At the center of the two-month women’s revolt was the traditional non-violent protest of “censoring men through all night song and dance ridicule”<sup>12</sup>, a tactic referred to as *sitting on a man* and commonly used when men mistreated their wives or violated women’s market rules. Through song and dance, as well as following the Warrants around until they were able to get their attention –i.e., “sitting on the Warrants”– thousands of women forced many warrant chiefs to resign their positions. Other forms of protest included looting European owned stores and Barclays Bank, breaking into prisons and releasing prisoners, and burning Native Courts run by colonial officials to the ground. When Colonial Police and troops were called in, they fired into the crowds and killed more than 50 women and wounded over 50 more. It took months for the British to be able to finally suppress the protest.

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<sup>8</sup> According to Lorna Leuker Zukas 15,000 women participated in these protests. Zukas, Lorna Lueker, “Women’s War 1929”, *Wiley Online Library* (April 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Judith Van Allen writes about this distinction in the language used by British power versus Nigerian locals to speak of the protests (between the words “war” and “riot”). Van Allen, Judith. “Aba Riots or the Igbo Women’s War? - Ideology, Stratification and the Invisibility of Women.” *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 6.1 (1975).

<sup>10</sup> Zukas, “Women’s War 1929”.

<sup>11</sup> Matera, Marc; Bastia, Misty; Kingsley Kent, Susan, *The Women's War of 1929: Gender and Violence in Colonial Nigeria* (Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): ix–x, 19–21, 45–46.

<sup>12</sup> Evans, Marissa, “ABA Women’s Riots (November - December 1929)”, *Blackpast.org* (March 27, 2009).



The Women's War, as the first major challenge to British authority in Nigeria and West Africa during the colonial period, was successful in what it set out to accomplish: as a direct result, colonial authorities dropped the tax they had hoped to impose on the market women and curbed the power of the warrant chiefs<sup>13</sup>. By 1930, the colonial government abolished the system of warrant chieftains –in some areas they were replaced by women– and appointed women to the Native Court System<sup>14</sup>. To this day it remains a historic example of feminist and anti-colonial protest<sup>15</sup> and has inspired many women's movements since, including the Tax Protests of 1938, the Oil Mill Protests of the 1940s, and the Tax Revolt in Aba and Onitsha in 1956. On December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1989, at Ikot Abasi, the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Women's War was celebrated with a re-enactment of the protest (Figure 7.1)<sup>16</sup>.



Figure 7.1. A re-enactment of the women's protest at the 60th Anniversary of the Women's War of 1929 at Ikot Abasi, December 16, 1989<sup>17</sup>

*No Dance, No Palaver* is a series of three works by artist, filmmaker and researcher Onyeka Igwe made between 2017 and 2018, including *Her Name in My Mouth* (2017), *Sitting on a Man* (2018) and *Specialised Technique* (2018). The series is made in response to the government-commissioned report from 1930 regarding the Women's War, created to establish who was at fault in the revolt and how to assign blame. "The written report", says Igwe, "is the way in which this event is studied today. It is symptomatic of the archive's functioning in the world that the women are trapped within written text<sup>18</sup>". On a quest to find "archival bodies" outside of the written word, Igwe turns to colonial film archives made by the British Colonial Film Unit in Africa between 1933 and 1955, in the period directly following the Women's War. This archive is made up of a variety of films, including "ethnographic films, films produced by

<sup>13</sup> Evans, "ABA Women's Riots".

<sup>14</sup> Zukas, "Women's War 1929".

<sup>15</sup> Evans, "ABA Women's Riots".

<sup>16</sup> Úkpúru, "Historical images of the Igbo" (October 21, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Igwe, Onyeka, "Being Close To, With or Amongst", *Feminist Review* 125 (2020): 46.

the British state, films produced by the industry and businesses as well as the amateur recordings produced by apparatchiks of the colonial machine: administrators, district officers, missionaries, and so on...”<sup>19</sup>. According to author Tom Rice on the Colonial Film Unit website<sup>20</sup>, these films were exhibited primarily to African audiences and they were used as a pedagogical device for colonial administration. As such, writes Igwe, “This is an archive that contains and promotes colonial fantasies of blackness that sustained and sustain racial regimes of power”<sup>21</sup>. A critical re-working of these images allows Igwe to get closer to the bodies of the women who may or may not have participated in the War and in doing so move –quite literally– *beyond the word*, and beyond the text, in an attempt to break through the colonial archive.

Igwe’s insistence with the archive recalls Susana de Sousa Dias’ return to the PIDE police archive and the anthropometric mug shots taken of Portuguese political prisoners for over a decade and across three films. But it can also be contextualized within a larger framework of contemporary cinema working with colonial film archives, including the Dutch documentary *Mother Dao, the Turtlelike* (Vincent Moonikendam, 1995), and film/video installation pieces made by Indonesian-Australian artist Fiona Tan: *Smoke Screen* (16mm film installation, 1997, loop) and *Facing Forward* (video projection, 1999, 11 min), all three made with colonial footage from the Dutch East-Indies produced between the 1910s and 1930s and kept in various audiovisual archives in the Netherlands, like the Royal Institute for the Tropics and the Filmmuseum in Amsterdam<sup>22</sup>; as well as the films of Angela Ricci-Luchi and Yervant Gianikian, including *Diario africano* (1994), *Visioni del deserto* (2000), *Images d’Orient - Turisme vandale* (2001), *Pays barbare* (2013) and many more, which examine the colonial gaze<sup>23</sup>.

The three films by Onyeka Igwe on which we have centered this Chapter, made with the British Colonial Film Unit archives and in response to the Aba Women’s War, each with a duration between 6 and 7 minutes, offer different methods for looking at and thinking about colonial film archives today. These films are also made in the context of academia, during Igwe’s Ph.D. studies. This academic-filmmaker profile is something that we will see throughout the filmmakers whose work we will discuss in this Chapter.

The first film of the series, *Her Name in My Mouth* (2017), is the only one in which Onyeka Igwe appears on camera. The film begins with touch; a hand, *her* hand, passes over Dutch wax prints, the colorful traditional clothing worn across West Africa. A few minutes later, her hands will open the Report of the ABA Commission of Inquiry and turn the pages. These images suggest that fabrics are another kind of archive, which can be turned like a page, and where the texture replaces text. These are curious hands, ones that are trying to *get closer*

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<sup>19</sup> Igwe, Onyeka and Stokely, JD, “Hiraeth, or Queering Time in Archives Otherwise”, *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media* 16 (2019): 13.

<sup>20</sup> Rice, “Colonial Film Unit”, *Colonial Film Unit Website*, 2010: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/production-company/colonial-film-unit>.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Author Julia Noordegraaf makes a case for the “displacement” of the colonial archives in these three works. Noordegraaf, Julia, “Facing Forward with Found Footage: Displacing Colonial Footage in *Mother Dao* and the Work of Fiona Tan”, in *Technologies of Memory in the Arts*, eds. Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 172-187.

<sup>23</sup> De Rosa, Miriam, “A Poetics of Care: Slowness, Ethics and Enchantment in Gianikian & Ricci Lucchi’s Oeuvre”, *Found Footage Magazine*, Issue 3 (March 2017): 32.

to the document, be it fabric or words. They are young hands, distant from the historical time represented in the archive but still implicated in the history. Igwe's finger follows a list of last names on the page and lingers on the name "Igwi", silently suggesting a possible family connection. The images of her touching the Aba Commission document are filmed *rostrum style*, "with the lens of the camera acting as my eye looking down at material"<sup>24</sup>, says Igwe<sup>25</sup>. While the first image of the hand touching the fabric is silent, sound soon enters the picture, first emphasizing the turning of the pages and the unfolding of the maps, and then accompanied by archival moving images from the Colonial Film Unit. The images are of people, groups of people, men and women, and their hand, body and facial gestures, and they are repeated and edited with the music into an inviting rhythmic montage. A voice enters the film singing songs in Igbo which are deliberately left untranslated, allowing gesture to be "the central mode of communication"<sup>26</sup>.

In one striking image (Figure 7.2), we see a young woman's face in an extreme close-up. She looks below the camera as she pulls her mouth piercing out with her tongue and puts it back in place. Her face remains serious throughout, and she appears to be looking at someone who is talking to her off-screen, perhaps telling her what to do. Towards the end of the clip, she breaks into laughter, and then raises her hands close to her face. Igwe freezes the frame here, allowing us to stay with this image longer. Next we are shown an archival image of a line of women looking away from the camera, off to the side. At the end of the shot, Igwe freezes on the image of the woman at the end of the line (Figure 7.3). Cut to a new reproduction of the image: the filmmaker has zoomed into the image and then rotated so that she is looking in the opposite direction. Another cut takes us to a close-up of the woman's face (taken from that zoom and rotation) printed on a white T-shirt (Figure 7.4). A following medium shot shows Igwe wearing a T-shirt and a wrap-around skirt made with the fabric from the beginning of the film. Her face is cut-out at the top of the frame, so that the face-image on the T-shirt has no competition, our eyes are guided towards it (Figure 7.5). Igwe begins to dance, moving her hands in a similar way to how we saw the previous young woman attempt to cover her face. This previously quite *small* gesture, almost invisible to the eye, found in a frozen image and made *larger* by the image's suspension, inspires a kind of imaginary protective dance, which allows Igwe to protectively cover the face of the second woman printed on her shirt.

In fact, she has "read" the face for performance and, in the process, discovered a way to respond to the image (and to the archive) with her body. Regarding this dance, she has said: "I wanted to use my body to convey something of the women's testimonies—to *turn it into an archive*. Using movements from both memory and Nollywood films, I created a series of movements for the final scene, to communicate a refusal that I read between the lines of the testimonies in the Commission of Enquiry report"<sup>27</sup>. Dance –as appropriation and citation and

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<sup>24</sup> Igwe, "Being Close To, With or Amongst", 47.

<sup>25</sup> This reminds me of how Jeannette Muñoz described her camera work in *Strata of Natural History* to me in an interview, when she said that she filmed the photographs "passing over them with the camera like her eye".

<sup>26</sup> "In making another work, *Her Name in My Mouth* (2017), I thought a lot about allowing the work to speak to different people: it was OK that some people were in the know and some people weren't. None of the Igbo words spoken in the film are translated and it is largely a film without dialogue, which allows gesture to be the central mode of communication. This was influenced by the notion that gesture is 'a point of transfer for the cultural exchange of knowledge' (Bradley 21)". Igwe and Stokely, 2019: 12.

<sup>27</sup> Igwe, "Being Close To, With or Amongst", 48.

grounded in the artist's research of Nollywood cinema and personal memory— becomes a way of coming to terms with what is *read between the lines*; the body is turned into an archive, or a counter-archive, which offers an alternative to the official written document.



Figure 7.2. *Her Name in My Mouth* (Onyeka Igwe, 2017)



Figure 7.3. *Her Name in My Mouth* (Onyeka Igwe, 2017)



Figure 7.4. *Her Name in My Mouth* (Onyeka Igwe, 2017)



Figure 7.5. *Her Name in My Mouth* (Onyeka Igwe, 2017)

In *Sitting on a Man* (2018), which takes its name from the traditional protest tactic used in the Women's War, Igwe continues to explore dance and movement. The film begins the same way as the previous one, with Igwe's hand passing over African fabrics (Figure 7.6), but this time the image is much smaller, as one of three images that will occupy the frame space, including archival images from a collection of ethnographic films made in the 1920s by missionary and anthropologist George Basden, and images –filmed by Igwe– of two dancers, one filmed in color and the other in black and white, performing an interpretation of the dances seen in the archives (Figure 7.7). Just as interesting is what is happening in the sound. A voice, which brings to mind traditional ethnographic films and the so-called “neutral” voice-overs used in National Geographic documentaries, describes in a scientific tone what the dances represent and how they are realized. The voice contrasts with the present-day image, which gives us a much more playful perspective on the material. A second voice enters the film, with a very different intonation, which is placed out of sync with the more scientific one, creating a dissonance of disjuncture through the sound, similarly to how Godard employs the voice-over in *The Image Book* (which we discussed in the previous Chapter). The disjuncture in the sound echoes a disjuncture between the archive and the interpretation, a desire to repeat the body movements and a simultaneous awareness that this repetition will never be exactly the same as the original. This film finds joy in knowing that performance is always an interpretation and that there is strength in this.



Figure 7.6. *Sitting on a Man* (Onyeka Igwe, 2018)



Figure 7.7. *Sitting on a Man* (Onyeka Igwe, 2018)

The last film in the series, *Specialised Technique* (2018), is a critical exploration of the “grammar” of the colonial archive itself and uses written text on the screen and the introduction of a “third voice” to interrupt the archive’s original structure. Of the three films, this is by far the most reflexive. Its title refers to the method “Specialized Film Technique” employed by Colonial Film Unit head William Sellers and based on racial and cultural assumptions about the cognitive capabilities of African audiences. His ideas on filming were published in 1941 in a paper titled “Films for Primitive People” and, according to Rice on the Colonial Film

Website, they set the standard for colonial filmmaking over the next twenty years<sup>28</sup>. An earlier text by Sellers from 1940 describes the production methods he used and which, according to him, “must be followed in making films with primitive populations”<sup>29</sup>. The “rules” established by Sellers included:

1. The general tempo must be slow, and the length of individual scenes must be twice, or three times as long as is usually considered necessary for English school audiences.
2. The content of any given scene must be very simple in its composition, because natives view all objects on the screen with equal interest, unless the important object is clearly emphasised. Close and mid shots are therefore preferable to long shots.
3. Strict accuracy is vital in portraying native habits and customs. Mistakes at once turn a serious film into a comedy.
4. No camera tricks of any sort. Continuity must be clearly maintained in all changes of scene, even if it means using three shots where one would normally do for audiences more used to film technique.
5. Films must be made as silents. A master commentary is then written, and is added by a native commentator, or by disc records, through a microphone during each performance. This system is vital, owing to the great variation in local dialects.

Igwe studied Seller’s filmmaking “rules” in the films themselves and also his speeches in order to better understand how these images were filmed and why. *Specialised Technique* is made with the idea to break these rules<sup>30</sup>, including “the ubiquity of dance in colonial moving images”. She means “to shake the associations between black people and dance through experimentations with the images themselves”<sup>31</sup>. In attempting to “shake the stereotype out of the colonial footage”, Igwe also tries to change how the people on camera are *imaged*<sup>32</sup>.

One of the “rules” that is broken is that of time, specifically concerning the *ethnographic present* has been essential for ethnographic cinema. As the established *grammar* of anthropology, the ethnographic present

Another “rule” broken by Igwe is the recommendation for a “master commentary”. According to Elizabeth Edwards, in the anthropological context, “it is often through text that an image is finally legitimated within the scientific and disciplinary domain”<sup>33</sup>. As we can see in Sellers’ instructions, the written commentary –which is read by a “native commentator” during each screening– is “vital”. After all, the meaning of the images can be guided, suggested, and determined by text. As we will see, Igwe’s employment of a “third voice” through on-

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<sup>28</sup> Rice, “Colonial Film Unit”, *Colonial Film Unit Website*, 2010.

<sup>29</sup> Sellers, William, “Films for Primitive Peoples: A New Technique”, *Documentary Newsletter* (March 1940): 10.

<sup>30</sup> “Seeing it so explicitly [stated] encouraged me to structure the work thinking around those rules. Like breaking them!”: Igwe, Onyeka, “A Q&A with... Onyeka Igwe, artist filmmaker exploring resistance to colonialism”, *a-n The Artists Information Company* (September 10, 2018): 3.

<sup>31</sup> Igwe, “Being Close To, With or Amongst”, 49.

<sup>32</sup> Igwe, Onyeka, “Specialised Technique”, *entanglements*, 4(1) (2021):10-12.

<sup>33</sup> Edwards, Elizabeth, “Introduction”, in *Anthropology and Photography: 1860-1920*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992): 11.

screen text challenges Sellers' instructions and the colonial/anthropological use of text to give images meaning.

In *Specialised Technique* the voice used in the text alternates between “I” and “you”, where the “I” suddenly replaces the “you”, putting the filmmaker –Igwe– in the place of the person on the screen. White letters on the black screen communicate the filmmaker’s voice: “Did *you* want your whole body in the shot?”, then “Is that why *you* never open your eyes?” followed by, “Is it why *I* look down?” and “Or away?”<sup>34</sup>. Her freedom to alternate between “I” and “you” recalls Zora Neale Hurston’s experimentation with voice –from “they” to “we”– in her ethnographic films of the late 1920s. In Hurston’s ethnographic work she dramatically shifts between “the voice of the anthropologist speaking to a white Western audience to the voice of her African American cultural identity”<sup>35</sup>. The alternation between insider and outsider, subject and object, viewer and viewed, is what makes this work an example of what Rony has called “the third eye”. Rony argues that it was her “third eye” which allowed Hurston to refuse to “confine herself to the dry observational mode that Malinowski and Boas espoused” and use her academic training for “novel and experimental ends”. In her time, this meant a form of “observing participation”<sup>36</sup> and it gave her the opportunity to understand, for example, the spiritual possibilities in the hoodoo experience that had previously only been studied from an academic distance. A key aspect in Hurston’s writing is the interruption of a separation between “us” and “them”, and between the ethnographer who looks and the subject who is seen, represented perhaps most succinctly in the addition of a –fragile, questionable, critical– “WE”. Rony recovers Hurston’s work on the grounds that she radically challenged the established anthropological discourse of the “ethnographic present”, “describing the people studied in third person, present tense”<sup>37</sup>, which is quite extraordinary since at the time her contemporaries, including her professor the cultural anthropologist Franz Boas, continued to rely on the ethnographic present in their anthropological work.

In her unedited films, Hurston includes anthropometric images (Figure 7.8), very much in line with the photographic images that we have looked at of the Kawéskar from the late 1800s in Chapter 2, of Portuguese political prisoners in Chapter 3, of Apolonia Flores in Chapter 4, and of Angela Davis in Chapter 5. Unlike *those* mug shots, however, the one in Hurston’s film is first of all, *on film*, and therefore contains movement (the subject’s movement) between the poses (frontal/profile), and includes the subject stepping out of her home and walking towards the camera to smile. That is to say, we can see the subject before, between, and after the anthropometric poses, which gives us additional information or knowledge that the other anthropometric images do not have. Additionally, it is important to mention that the subject who is posing anthropometrically for Hurston is not a prisoner and has not been forcibly taken from her home; however, these images replicate the belief that anthropometry –based on the measurement of different body parts, particularly elements of the

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<sup>34</sup> Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>35</sup> Rony, *The Third Eye*, 210.

<sup>36</sup> “Instead of participant observation, Hurston’s methods may be characterized as observing participation”.

Rony, *The Third Eye*, 206.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*: 209.



face— can give the ethnographer scientifically-based information about the subject.<sup>38</sup> About these images, Rony writes:

Much of her footage seems to have been conceived as scientific samplings for Boas. Boas’s interests in “isolable actions” are reflected, for example, in Hurston’s footage of children playing: they are made into “types,” holding up pieces of paper with their ages, filing past the camera frontally and then in profile. Yet at one point there is a marked disruption from the normal iconography of Ethnographic inscription, a certain knowing playfulness. A young, barefoot African American woman emerges from a house onto the front porch and walks toward the camera. She smiles at the camera as she turns her head left, and then right. It is clear here that, despite the bit of play betrayed by the woman’s smile, the woman is meant to be portrayed as a type: Hurston uses the poses typical of anthropometry. But then the next shots take on an experimental quality, the camera cutting from a shot of two women on the porch, to an extreme long shot of the garden with the houses in the background, followed by a shot of the young woman lying odalisque-style facing the camera on the porch, concluding with a low-angle shot of a woman’s feet rocking on the porch next to the paws of a cat<sup>39</sup>.



Figure 7.8. Unedited film footage by Zora Neale Hurston from 1928-29.

The *experimental quality* that Rony finds in Hurston’s images is also reflected in her use of voice in text. Rony writes, “Hurston begins the following excerpt from her study of southern African American folklore *Mules and Men* in the “ethnographic present,” present tense, but

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<sup>38</sup> It is unclear to what extent Hurston actually believed in these conventions of anthropology or if she was creating an imitation that would please her academic audience of colleagues and peers.

<sup>39</sup> Rony, *The Third Eye*, 205.

then shifts and subverts the external vantage point by using the pronoun “we” and she cites Hurston’s text:

Folk-lore is not as easy to collect as it sounds. The best source is where there are the least outside influences and these people, being usually underprivileged are the shyest. They are most reluctant at times to reveal that which the soul lives by. And the Negro, in spite of his open-faced laughter, his seeming acquiescence, is particularly evasive. You see we are a polite people and we do not say to our questioner, “Get out of here!” We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies the white person, because, knowing so little about us, he doesn’t know what he is missing<sup>40</sup>.

In *Specialised Technique*, says Igwe, “...the ‘I’ and the ‘you’ swap around because I am also aware that the colonial gaze is in me. I have been brought up in London and have been taught in a society still very much ‘in the wake’<sup>41</sup> of colonialism”. However, while Hurston’s “we” (critically or not) includes the author in the collective through an identification with the subject (as black, as “American”, as “Negro”), Igwe’s text fluctuates between the two voices and adds a *third voice*, a reflexive one, commenting on *how to film these images*. The difference between Hurston and Igwe in relation to the subjects is specific: Hurston is writing about the contemporary “Negro” as a Black woman, anthropologist and writer living in the United States, while Igwe is “writing” (and speaking) from the position of a woman and filmmaker living in the United Kingdom in a very different period in history. Her text reads, “What do I want to focus on?” “Your ankles as you jump?” “What you have in your hand?” “The shape you make with your arms?” (Figure 7.9). These questions are about how Igwe –*re-imagined as filmmaker of the original images*– would have shot these images and where she wants *us* –the spectator– to look. These questions *read* the images for *performance*. Text is located directly on the archival images, located in such a way that our eye is drawn to shapes, rather than to the words (Figure 7.9). The text also suggests that the bodies, in their movement, *already indicate to the viewer how they want to be photographed*. The arms and the legs work to frame the body in ways that challenge the Western square and rectangular screen. The shape of the text and the body work in opposition to the perfectly cut rectangle that surrounds it, creating an important disjuncture between subject and frame.

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<sup>40</sup> Hurston, Zora Neale, *Mules and Men* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1978), 2.

<sup>41</sup> In reference to: Sharpe, Christina, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016).

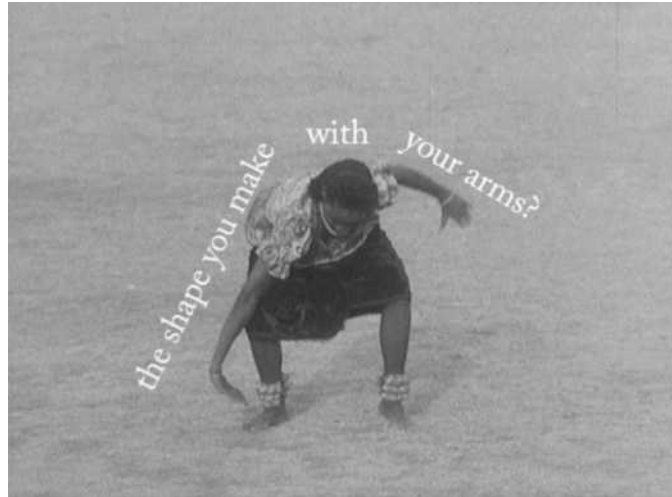


Figure 7.9. *Specialised Technique* (Onyeka Igwe, 2018)

At the 1983 meeting of the Gerontological Society of America, filmmaker-anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff participated in a panel discussion on “Storytelling, Cultural Transmission, and Symbolic Immortality”, in which she asked herself a fundamental question for her ethnographic writing and editing practice: “How does the ethnographer edit the informant’s utterances?” In her response, she introduced a term which, in retrospect, writes Marc Kaminsky, is one of the key formulations of her final years, and yet which appears nowhere in her published writings<sup>42</sup>. This term is “third voice” and refers to the voice which is neither the ethnographer-interviewer’s nor the informant’s, but a third path which comes from the meeting of the two. In the words of anthropologist Jay Ruby, “...Myerhoff proposed that the researcher-filmmaker seek to locate a third voice –an amalgam of the maker’s voice and the voice of the subject, blended in such a manner as to make it impossible to discern which voice dominates the work. In other words, films where outsider and insider visions coalesce into a new perspective”<sup>43</sup>. He cites Jean Rouch’s *Jaguar* (1954-1967) as a rare example of this. In essence, what this term describes is very similar to what Hurston was practicing several decades earlier in her own fiction writing which, although she too was an anthropologist, did not at that time carry over to a rethinking of anthropological writing and ethnographic text production. It was only in the mid-1980s (after Myerhoff’s death, and certainly after Hurston’s), with the appearance of *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer, 1986) and *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (eds. James Clifford and George E. Marcus, 1986) that a textualist movement began for anthropology<sup>44</sup>. Both Myerhoff and Hurston preceded this movement, the former in her own writing struggles and exploration of a “third voice” outside of discourse theory, and the latter in her alternating use of “them” and “we” in her 1920s unedited ethnographic films and the very experimental

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<sup>42</sup> Kaminsky, Marc, “Myerhoff’s ‘Third Voice’: Ideology and Genre in Ethnographic Narrative”, *Social Text* 33 (1992): 125.

<sup>43</sup> Ruby, Jay, “Speaking For, Speaking About, Speaking With, or Speaking Alongside –An Anthropological and Documentary Dilemma”, *Visual Anthropology Review* 7(2) (1991): 62.

<sup>44</sup> Kaminsky, “Myerhoff’s ‘Third Voice’”, 125.

and radical uses of both the Black vernacular and an academic writing voice in her fiction books in the 1940s.

In “Films for Primitive Peoples” from 1941, Sellers includes a telling paragraph about how he thought the African audiences perceived close-ups. He writes:

The question of changes in camera angles is another important point. Experience has shown that reverse shots and other violent changes in camera angle are very confusing to the minds of illiterate people. Close-ups are essential as they assist the eye by making things appear large on the screen, but they cannot be pitchforked into a film every few seconds as is normally done for the purpose of avoiding monotony in shots of fair length. There should always be a definite reason for changing to close-up, and when doing so it is preferable to retain the same camera angle. This is probably the most difficult of camera changes to make as cutting must be perfectly matched on some definite action such as picking up an object or someone taking a seat.<sup>45</sup>

While Sellers is concerned with how African audiences “understand” cinematic language, for example, the changes in camera angles or the introduction of a *close-up*, it appears he never actually had a conversation with them about the subject. His ideas on how African audiences perceive images came from a combination of his preconceived notions met by his observation of the public (which often left him confused, as his writings suggest) of how African audiences responded to the films that he showed them.

Igwe’s text, on the other hand, asks questions regarding how the subjects *feel* about being filmed. She enters in an imagined dialogue with the subjects on the screen. She asks them *how they would like the images to be filmed*, creating a reflexive conversation between filmmaker and subject where we are made to imagine the subject’s response (Figure 7.10). A tension inevitably forms between what the filmmaker wants and what the subject wants. But how can the subjects respond? And what would a response look or sound like? The viewer is made to participate in “reading for performance”, looking more closely at the images to see if they can offer glimpses of what may be a response from the subjects. It requires a *listening of images* to take place, first by the filmmaker, then by the spectator. Since the subjects cannot speak, since they were never asked directly by Sellers nor were their thoughts or ideas ever part of the conversation, we are not able to *hear* their words. But we can *listen* to the images, try to hear and imagine the subject’s voice speaking through in them.

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<sup>45</sup> Sellers, William. “Films for Primitive Peoples”, *Documentary Newsletter* 2:9, September 1941, 173-174. <https://films-for-the-colonies.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/files/2019/03/Sellers-Films-for-Primitive-Peoples.pdf>.



Figure 7.10. *Specialised Technique* (Onyeka Igwe, 2018)

As similar as they may be, there is also an important difference between the “third voice” proposed by Myerhoff and the uses of voice in Hurston and Igwe’s writing/filmmaking. While Myerhoff’s notion tried to describe a collaborative relationship and dialogue between interviewer and informant, Hurston and –more recently– Igwe’s “third voice” is distinct in that it is also intersected by a “third eye”, or by the fact that the filmmakers/writers are both inside and outside the text. The dialogue here is not limited to interviewer and informant, or in this case, between filmmaker and subject (alive or dead, as is the case with archival materials), but also takes place between *the different selves* within the filmmaker, the alternating parts that make her both insider and outsider, subject and object, viewer and viewed. Igwe’s final question –“Am I OK?”–is ambiguous: is this the subject speaking or the filmmaker? The third voice is “impossible to discern” writes Ruby, difficult to say *who* exactly is speaking. The question indicates a state of fragility and vulnerability shared between Igwe and the subject vis-à-vis the camera apparatus. Empathy is established between the two: in the subject’s inadequacy in front of the camera, Igwe discovers her own vulnerability in working with these images.

In the following section, we will explore the place that the face-image occupies in Igwe’s reworking of these materials and we will trace a history of “protecting the face” to which these films belong and with which her films also break.

### Staying with the (Trouble of the) Face-Image

The gesture of “protecting the face” that we see both in *Her Name in My Mouth* and to a lesser degree in *Specialised Technique* is part of a larger counter-ethnographic tradition of which we would like to entangle with other contemporary cinematographic expressions. For Rony,

*ethnographic cinema* describes the “broad and variegated field of cinema which situates indigenous peoples in a displaced temporal realm”<sup>46</sup>. At the center of the ethnographic story, she emphasizes, “is the *body* of the Native, the essential index of authenticity, and thus visual media, capable of capturing the body and holding it for the viewer, have long played a lead role in transmitting the narrative of race and evolution”<sup>47</sup>. Of all of the different parts of the body, however, the face in particular stands out as a specific territory of conflict. According to Rony, the face is “that which is seen as the most individual aspect of the body yet is precisely what is vulnerable to the kind of pillaging of the spirit that many cultures have found objectionable in photography”<sup>48</sup>.

A shift to a more participatory cinema began to take place in the 1950s, in the reflexive work of French filmmaker Jean Rouch. She identifies another major point of inflection in the 1970s with the “crisis” in anthropology, but makes sure to make clear that this “crisis” did not “simply reflect changes in anthropological thought, but also resulted from post-World War II decolonization, a movement marked by independence struggles and demands for self-determination”<sup>49</sup>. The shift in ethnographic cinema echoed what was already happening around the world: “Anthropology’s temporal suppositions could no longer be sustained: indigenous peoples and other marginalized peoples of color were criticizing the history of their representation by Euro-Americans, and were attempting to counteract Western media exploitation by obtaining greater access to television and film production”<sup>50</sup>. One of the responses which have come out of the work of many indigenous filmmakers is the importance of *not* photographing certain subjects<sup>51</sup>. She cites *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* (1985), by Hopi filmmaker Victor Masayesva, as a key example. In this film, “the expected full-body shot never materializes. [...] a reticence which denies the audience the sense of visual power inherent in seeing and consuming everything”<sup>52</sup>. Another example cited by Rony is the case of Maryjane Tsosie, a Navajo youth who participated in an anthropological filmmaking workshop by Sol Worth and John Adair in the 1960s and whose filming style irritated her teachers because while filming her grandfather, she had chosen to abstain from close-ups. Sol Worth ends up taking the camera away from her. These examples, which should be added to and expanded upon if we are to consider them something like a counter-ethnographic tradition, indicate that there is an underlying tension between how ethnographers film indigenous people and how indigenous people film themselves and that one of the most important differences lies precisely in how to film the body and of particular importance, *the face*.

Conceived as a video installation for museum galleries, *Facing Forward* (Fiona Tan, 1999) brings the question of faces –and of the gaze– to the forefront. Tan recycles ethnographic footage from the collection of the Netherlands Filmmuseum, choosing images where groups of non-Western men and women are photographed posing, directed to look at the camera (Figure 7.11). The film is accompanied by a voice-over reading a passage from Italo Calvino’s *Le città*

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<sup>46</sup> Rony, *The Third Eye*, 8.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid: 195.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid: 215.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid: 197.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid: 212.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid: 213.

*invisibili* (*Invisible Cities*, 1972). Tan reads these photographs “for performance”, understanding the body language of the people in the images as refusing the camera –and the colonial– gaze. *Mother Dao, the Turtlelike* (Vincent Moonikendam, 1995), also made with colonial footage from the Dutch East-Indies produced between the 1910s and 1930s, uses reappropriation to deconstruct the romantic and nostalgic view of the colonial presence in Indonesia. Scholar Julia Noordegraaf writes that this original colonial discourse is replaced with “a critical discourse”, “a new, coherent perspective on the Dutch presence in Indonesia”<sup>53</sup>. For Noordegraaf, *Facing Forward*, unlike *Mother Dao*, offers no such “coherent” perspective or discourse, choosing instead the more reflexive exercise of drawing attention to how film and photography creates specific relationships between the viewer and image, where the viewer’s own gaze towards the people portrayed is also part of the examination. In *Facing Forward* the gaze is something that must be mediated by the film itself. It becomes a reflexive process in which the viewer is also implicated.



Figure 7.11. *Facing Forward* (Fiona Tan, 1999)

Let us recall the sequence in *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* (*Images of the World and Inscription of War*, 1988), discussed in Chapter 1, when Farocki looks through a book of photographs taken by Marc Garanger of (forcibly) unveiled Algerian women, who as Nora Alter clarifies were actually suspected “criminals” and “terrorists” (suspected to be carrying bombs) photographed by the military police<sup>54</sup>. The photographs, acting in compliance with the imperial power of the military, are in many ways similar to “mug shots”, taken perhaps as a punishment and as a violation of their choice to remain covered<sup>55</sup>. Farocki *covers the faces* of the women, in what Thomas Elsaesser has called “instances of self-implication and

<sup>53</sup> Noordegraaf, “Facing Forward with Found Footage”, 14.

<sup>54</sup> Alter, Nora M., “The Political Im/Perceptible in the Essay Film: Farocki’s ‘Images of the World and the Inscription of War’”, *New German Critique*, no. 68 (New German Critique, Duke University Press, 1996): 165–92.

<sup>55</sup> For Alter, these women’s expressions are “unhorrified”, suggesting that they could care less about being uncovered for the camera and that this assumption is designed to make them appear as “victims” when they are in fact powerful, militarized women.

solidarity”<sup>56</sup>.

Recently, this image has been examined again in a postcolonial context by media scholar Kevin B. Lee for the Berlinale Forum at Arsenal in 2021. During a video conference, Lee returned to this image, sharing with the audience how his way of seeing the image had changed over time:

When I saw this image, I was struck by the brilliance of this gesture as a mode of radical film studies performed by the body. It was the simple move of one’s hand that one cannot only study an image but transform its meaning. It is a perfect example of Farockian concept of the *counter-image* (German), an image that opposes another image, in order to create a state of critical awareness and awakening. And in this case, one could also attribute this gesture with qualities of empathy and solidarity with the condition of the women in these photos. But *now when I consider this gesture*, I see something else at work.

The hand of a male, functioning within the context and the role of a Western researcher, performing a gesture of privilege and power over an image and the human being represented within in. In this respect, the gesture re-performs the violence over her who is captured by the image<sup>57</sup>.

Instead of showing the image from Farocki’s film, Lee chooses to re-enact the gesture, putting himself in the double role of the woman whose face is covered *and* the hand doing the covering (Figure 7.12). Lee decides *not to show* the face-image as a way of not repeating what might be perceived as a colonialist gesture on Farocki’s part.



Figure 7.12. Left: “Double Agency: Fraught positions in postcolonial film analysis” (Kevin B. Lee, 2021)  
Right: *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* (Harun Farocki, 1988)

If the absence of faces in ethnographic films from the 1960s-1980s indicated a desire to find alternative and less intrusive ways of filming the subject, Farocki’s hand indicates the protection of the filmmaker who works with archival materials where the subject can no longer protect him or herself and where it is up to the filmmaker to provide this protection. While this gesture may very easily cross over to the realm of paternalistic or colonial, I believe that something else is at work here. As spectators we see *Farocki’s hand*, making the gesture an embodied one. The filmmaker is now *in front* of the camera, and no longer safely behind it; he is filming himself and his own body *near*, over and next to the archival materials. The *movement of his hand*, the possibility of seeing and not seeing, the possibility of doing both

<sup>56</sup> Elsaesser, Thomas, “The Future of Art and Work in the Age of Vision Machines: Harun Farocki,” in *After the Avantgarde: Contemporary German and Austrian Experimental Film*, ed. Randall Halle and Reinhild Steingröver (Rochester 2008), 47f.

<sup>57</sup> Lee, Kevin B., “Double Agency: Fraught Positions in Postcolonial Film Analysis”, Arsenal/Berlinale Forum (online conference, June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021).



and directing the viewer's gaze with the hands, is what gives this hand gesture even more meaning. Farocki's hand is protective of the image, but it is doing more than that: it is showing that the image and the hand co-exist, that man and archive co-exist, they are both material things and they can work together.

Igwe's use of her own hands in *Her Name in My Mouth* can be seen as a continuation of this essayistic and personal filmmaking practice (Figure 7.13), which as we will discuss in a moment, becomes a strategy for looking for "archival bodies". Her own body becomes a part of the archive, or an impossible archive, in the lieu of its physical absence in the British colonial archive<sup>58</sup>. Similarly, it is only after putting himself in the woman's position, and referring to a conversation that we shared about this image, that Lee finally feels comfortable enough to show Farocki's image. Once again, Lee's body (like Igwe's) substitutes or replaces the archive (Farocki's film, or the colonial film archive) which is too problematic or incomplete to show on its own. What is interesting is how the essay form (in film or as a virtual conference, which takes place on screens) allows contemporary filmmakers to think through the face-image in multiple forms.



Figure 7.13. Left: *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* (Harun Farocki, 1988)  
Right: *Her Name in My Mouth* (Onyeka Igwe, 2017)

The recent film *Unearthing. In Conversation* (Belinda Kazeem-Kaminski, 2017) offers an insightful example of how the protective gesture towards the subject's face and body continues on in contemporary film practice in interesting and thought-provoking ways. As is the case for Igwe's series, this film is also developed within the artist's PhD research project. *Unearthing. In Conversation* explores the performativity of Blackness in relation to Austrian coloniality, taking as a starting point the research conducted and photographs taken by Paul Schebesta, Austro-Czech missionary and ethnologist (1887-1967) in the former Belgian Congo (today's Democratic Republic of the Congo) in the beginning of the twentieth century. In this film, the faces and bodies of the African people photographed by Schebesta are removed from

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<sup>58</sup> This is also the subject of another of Igwe's films, *a so-called archive* (2020), in which she imagines the "lost" films from the former Nigerian Film Unit (one of the first self-directed outposts of the British Colonial Film Unit in Lagos, 1932-1955) and Bristol Temple Meads, the former British Empire and Commonwealth Museum (2002-2009). At the end of the film, which is absent of bodies (save for a few glimpses of her hands), Igwe occupies the archival/museum space with dance, as the credits roll.

the photographs (in different ways) by the filmmaker in an effort to protect them; however, this is done in a reflexive and pedagogical way so that the viewer is invited into the discussion of how to think about these images and how to think about the absence of the subjects in the image. Once again, the filmmaker is a kind of mediator between the images and the spectator; but this time, the politics of the gaze are treated as an unlearning process.

The 12 and a half-minute film begins with a small empty theater and a spotlight illuminating straight into the camera. Filmmaker Belinda Kazeem-Kaminski enters the frame, sits silently at a table in front of the empty seats, with her back to the camera. Then we see her from the other side, as the audience would see her in the seats. She is dressed all in black, with red fingernails and red lipstick, with three boxes on the table beside her and addresses the camera. As she speaks, she does so to the people in the photographs taken by Schebesta: “My eyes are meeting yours. I wish that you would open and tell me what you are thinking while standing there. I wish that your thoughts of the past could channel through the materiality of the representation. That they would creep right into my presence. Be transferred to me... Whenever we lock eyes. I want to know what you were thinking”. Each box contains a strategy for looking at the photographs. In the first, she covers the subjects with the colors of the Congo flag, leaving only the colonialists in the images. “I was aiming at protecting you,” she says, “shielding you in images from looks that have preserved themselves since the first colonial encounter”. Then she adds, “But by doing so, I have covered you up, making it impossible for you to address the spectators, to look back”. In the second strategy, she cuts the subject out of the photograph, leaving only the colonialist in the picture. “My aim is to focus on Paul Schebesta and other colonial agents, but the effect is that I’m taking part in your erasure, I’m literally cutting you out of the frame”. She places a mirror in the empty space, “I want the viewers to confront their own presence”. At about 9 minutes into the film, we see a close-up of Kazeem-Kaminski looking directly into the camera (Figure 7.14). “I cut you out of the photographs because I cannot let your images stay in the pictured positions”, and then: “I collect your images, keep them together, waiting for the day when I will be able to arrange a different context for you. A place that could be less violent, a surrounding that could become home”. She opens a third box, a third strategy, and says: “I call on you. you guide me while trying to find oppositional ways of looking, of transmitting your oppositional gaze”.





Figure 7.14. *Unearthing. In Conversation* (Belinda Kazeem-Kaminski, 2017)

In an article written by the filmmaker which accompanies her film, Kazeem-Kaminski describes the process of working with the photographs:

I finally start to work with Schebesta's photographs. I cannot recall how I came up with the idea, but I start by covering all the people except Schebesta. First I use random colors, and in the end, I use the colors of the current Democratic Republic of the Congo: red, blue, and yellow. Some months later, I start cutting the people out of the photographs, leaving no one but Paul Schebesta in the photograph. I experiment with mirrors, additional layers of paper, transparent paper, colored paper . . . I am driven by the desire to find the *one* solution that will result in images that challenge colonial violence. Every time I finish a collage, however, I am immediately aware of its limits. Neither covering the photographed people nor cutting them out of the photographs can make the haunting go away. In fact, "it refuses to stop."<sup>59</sup>

The "haunting" that Kazeem-Kaminski describes, will not go away simply by cutting the faces out. Covering or hiding the faces of the photographed or filmed subjects does not erase the problem (of the archive and of faces) and make it go away. Because in the end, she keeps returning to images taken by people, ethnographers, missionaries, etc., people who keep "getting in the way" of her trying to establish "a conversation" with the people in the photographs. After many attempts of trying out different ways of "cutting the people out", she finally turns to *performative writing*<sup>60</sup> as a way of responding to the question that suddenly appears to be the most urgent: "How can I talk to you –the people in the photographs?" *Performative writing* offers her a method for thinking about what she would like to say to the photographed people, it allows her to "speak" to them, to connect. "Finally, I am able to be *in conversation* and to listen to what they want (me) to say"<sup>61</sup>. The texts in *Specialised Technique* can also be considered examples of "performative writing", coming from the filmmaker's desire to "speak with" the people in the photographs. What is interesting about *Unearthing* is that this performative writing extends itself into the mise-en-scene in the form of a class or

<sup>59</sup> Kazeem-Kaminski, Belinda, "Unearthing: In Conversation. On Listening and Caring", *Journal for Critical Ethnic Studies* 4(2) (2018): 89-90.

<sup>60</sup> In the words of Della Pollock, performative writing "evokes worlds that are otherwise intangible, unlocatable: worlds of memory, pleasure, sensation, imagination, affect, and in-sight": Pollock, Della, "Performative Writing", in *The Ends of Performance*, eds. Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 80.

<sup>61</sup> Kazeem-Kaminski, "Unearthing: In Conversation", 90.

conference that will be performed in front of a theater full of empty chairs. As she “speaks to” the people in the photographs, she also speaks to the spectator, engaging him/her in the once-private conversation.

In Igwe’s series, *keeping the faces* becomes a way of “Staying with the Trouble” of faces and of the colonial archive. In *Her Name in My Mouth* (2017), the “protection” that the filmmaker provides occurs by way of deframing, de-centering, fragmented editing, and most importantly performance, imitating traditional local dance, but entirely invented by the filmmaker. The face is not hidden from our view, as in *Unearthing. In Conversation*, quite the contrary. She *enlarges* these images instead of making them smaller or simply go away, slows them down instead of passing them quickly, and reformats images of women “who were sometimes hidden at the edge of the frame, in order for them to be more prominently seen”<sup>62</sup>. Igwe writes, “In attempting to shake the stereotype out of the colonial footage, I tried in as many ways as possible to change how the audience saw various people on camera. Converting the film to individual frames and then reanimating them, or digitally drawing on them, slowing them down or tripling them and re-projecting, were all techniques utilised in order to create a pensive spectator [...]”<sup>63</sup> and “I wanted to see how the women’s testimonies bound in the archive could be communicated in other ways—if it was possible for the testimonial to exist outside of the written text”. In the ultimate strategy, she magnifies the face-image, prints it onto a T-shirt and wears it for the performance. About this she says,

Inspired by the ways in which I have experienced memorialisation in Nigerian diaspora communities, I attempted to design *Her Name in My Mouth* (2017) as a memorial to the women of the Aba Women’s War. In many different forms of celebration, be it weddings, births, deaths, birthdays or anniversaries, a variety of souvenirs are made to mark the occasion. So, in the film I wear a T-shirt with the face of one of the women who appears in the archive (Figure 3), as if I am celebrating the lives of those unnamed in the archive.”<sup>64</sup>

The T-shirt becomes an object of memorialization, borrowed from Nigerian diaspora communities. As an homage to the unnamed woman in the archive, Igwe celebrates the image of a woman whose name we will never know and whose story has been silenced in history. The only thing that remains of her is her face-image. By putting the face-image on a T-shirt, Igwe *takes the image with her*, on a T-shirt later to be folded and placed with the rest of her belongings. The face-image becomes a thing, an object which can be taken, kept, and altered over time. No longer an image simply of identification and presence, this image is treated by Igwe as an image and as an object, with an intrinsic plastic value of its own.

Finally, it is important to stress that this face-image that has been printed on the T-shirt interacts with the filmmaker’s own face as she performs. How is her own face filmed in comparison to the face-image in the archive? How does her face interact (or not) with the camera (her camera)? First, Igwe frames the shot so that her own face is cut at the top of the frame. We see it both in front and profile shots (like anthropometric photography) but in both images her hands are protectively in front of her face (and the woman’s face on her T-shirt).

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<sup>62</sup> Igwe, “Being Close To, With or Amongst”, 51.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 47-48.

Using the image space, she connects her face with the face in the archive and extends her hand to protect both. Reframing the shot so that her face is cut out at the top allows her to film her own face on her own terms. She never looks directly at the camera. Every frame is a negotiation between subject and filmmaker; in this case, Igwe occupies the place of both and is able to participate in her own self-representation.

### **Reading Performance in the Face-Image**

Re-enactment, performance, and dance become ways to activate identification between the filmmaker and the archive even when this identification is problematic or impossible. *Avo (Muidumbe)/Avo (Granny)* (Raquel Schefer, 2009) is a film made with a recycled home movie from 1960 filmed by the director's grandfather, a Portuguese colonial administrator in Mozambique. Schefer responds to the archive by performing her grandmother's role, getting into "costume" and playfully imitating her gestures (Figure 7.15). At the end of the film, Schefer reads a text which reveals that the archive belongs to her family and that they were taken in Muidumbe in 1960, only 30 kilometers from Mueda, where a massacre occurred in June of that same year, and which was neither filmed nor photographed. "According to the Portuguese official report", says Schefer, "14 people were murdered. As maintained by the FRELIMO (Liberation Front of Mozambique) the dead were 600".

Jamie Baron, author of *The Archive Effect*, writes:

A clear temporal disparity is produced between the archival film footage of Schefer's grandmother in 1960 and the video footage of Schefer herself at the tailor's being measured for her outfit. Through much of the film, the archival footage and its dated quality have the potential to generate a sense of nostalgia for a colonial lifestyle that has since disappeared. However, the final sentence of the voiceover undermines such nostalgia, pointing toward the crimes of the past rather than its luxuries<sup>65</sup>.

Performance and re-enactment are used by the filmmaker in contradicting ways. On the one hand, as Baron says, there is a potential nostalgia for a colonial past, but in the end, this nostalgia has been turned on its head. The image and the sound (in the voiceover) work in counterpoint and as Baron observes, there is no comfortable place for the viewer.

...[T]he comfortable temporal disparity marking off 'us' from 'them' and 'then' from 'now' is disturbed as Schefer appears on film replicating her grandmother's gestures. The experience of temporal disparity does not disappear, but in reenacting the archival footage, Schefer's film seems to bring these very different historical moments into proximity to one another, owning a connection between generations that includes colonial crimes against the colonized. Indeed, by dressing up just like her grandmother and restaging the home movie footage with herself in her grandmother's role, Schefer points to the ways in which descendants of colonizers must still come to grips with the colonial legacy on a personal as well as political level<sup>66</sup>.

The separation of "us" and "them" has traditionally worked not only to place the "other" in a temporal past, therefore negating their co-evalness and contemporaneity, but it has also worked

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<sup>65</sup> Baron, Jamie, *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 118.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

to protect the “us” from any kind of responsibility with the colonial past. Re-enactment here becomes a powerful method for questioning the assumed innocence of the colonizer and the urgent task of colonizer’s descendants of “coming to grips” with the colonial legacy.

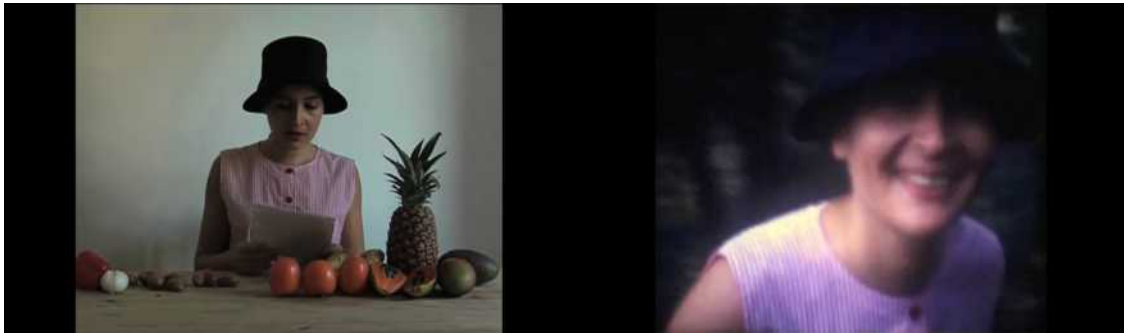


Figure 7.15. (*Muidumbe/Avo (Granny)*) (Raquel Schefer, 2009)

In “The representation of ritual and cinema as a ritual in revolutionary Mozambique” (2020), Schefer proposes the term “sensory reenactment” rather than “historical reenactment” to describe the strategies of representation of ritual and ritualization of filmmaking towards the reactivation of the sensory memory for the spectator. In her article on *Mueda, Memória e Massacre* (*Mueda, Memory and Massacre*, Ruy Guerra, 1979/1980), considered to be the first Mozambican feature fiction film, she links this practice to the cultural forms of the Makonde Plateau and establishes a relationship between the regime of visibility of cinema and *uwavi* sorcery<sup>67</sup>. In Schefer’s words, the film “documents a collective and carnivalesque reenactment, independent from the film, of the Mueda Massacre”, which occurred in 1960, four years before the beginning of the War of Liberation in the Mozambican territory, and which was brutally repressed by the colonial authorities<sup>68</sup>. Since 1976, this massacre has been staged annually in memory of the event by the Muedans. Although the film documents this collective reenactment, Schefer argues that the reenactment “cannot be reduced to a unique system of representation, nor can it be considered as a historical reenactment of the event”<sup>69</sup>. Much more than a film “about the memory of the massacre”, the film responds to “the historical experience of colonialism, and in this sense, with a counter-memory, the memory of the colonial politics of emotions, affections, and sensations”<sup>70</sup>. These memories, writes Schefer, are contained *in the body* and crystallize through *pathos* and gesture, “within a system of exchange and interaction with the filmmaker/camera operators”<sup>71</sup>. Although she is writing about a film from 1979/1980, her words apply to her own filmmaking practice as well. In *Avo*, she explores an embodied “counter-memory” to the memory of colonialism, grounded in affections and sensations, through the sensory or sensible reenactment of her grandmother’s gestures, and through which Schefer is able to activate a sensory memory for the spectator of the (unfilmed/unphotographed) massacre in Mueda.

<sup>67</sup> Schefer, Raquel, “The representation of ritual and cinema as a ritual in revolutionary Mozambique: Ruy Guerra’s *Mueda, Memória e Massacre*”, *Contemporary Lusophone African Film* (Routledge: London, 2020).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid: 148.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid: 149.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid: 151.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

In the case of the *Aba Women's War* series, body movement and dance become very physical opportunities for identification between Igwe and the women in the archives to take place, but as in Schefer's film, this is not always a comfortable place. Igwe goes "looking for herself" in the archive<sup>72</sup> and finds moments of recognition in the image of a woman dancing, reminding Igwe of her grandmother, mother and herself, and whose movements awaken an affective response to the material. She describes one of these moments:

The voiceover in the newsreel introduces a group of women dancing and then the frame closes in on this one woman. She never looks up, so the camera lens doesn't capture her face, only her dancing body.

I found myself in her stoop, bended knee and rounded arms. She beckoned me to memories of my grandmother, my mother and myself. I was startled into this connection and frozen in the moment of recognition—*there was a line that joined her to me*. What if life was infinite and 'grandparents never die, nor do great-grandparents, great-aunts and great-uncles, great great-aunts, and so on, back through the generations, all alive?' (Lightman, 1993, p. 138). Watching this woman dance on my screen put me in my place in the line of others dancing stooped, eyes averted, to a silent but deeply known rhythm. I was awakened to my 'blood memory' in watching this woman dance<sup>73</sup>.

The "line that joined her to me" beautifully described by Igwe here occurred between bodies, between the body of the woman on the screen and the body of Igwe as spectator of these images. Her concept of embodied memory indeed recalls Baldwin's notion of history written on his skin. Igwe describes the "embodied memory" that is awakened in the archive and which is not easily located in any particular place because it is diasporic. Despite the moments of recognition that Igwe experiences, she acknowledges that total recognition—just like the idea of home—is "out of reach". She turns to the Welsh word *Hiraeth* which "speaks of a longing or nostalgia for a home that you cannot return to because it no longer exists or never existed"<sup>74</sup> as a way to put into words her experience in the archive:

Memory of a movement that exists in "the black before and before" (Harney and Moten 17). I can't locate that in a place, because I didn't grow up in Nigeria. I don't know it, the place it exists in is inside of me. The embodied memory that is awakened in that newsreel makes me feel like the archive can connect me to something that I don't have direct experience of, that isn't landed, that exists somewhere in the space between. So, in that way the archive becomes the home that *hiraeth* (on which more below) is speaking of<sup>75</sup>.

Home is a centre, is the groundwork and foundation from which context and identity flow. But for me, home is on the tip of the tongue, perpetually just out of reach. Home will not be, it will not settle into a tangible form.

Our blackness is scored by a loss, a loss of home ancestrally realised and presently felt, doubly in its absence in the historical record and the institutional archive<sup>76</sup>.

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<sup>72</sup> Igwe and Stokely, "Hiraeth, or Queering Time in Archives Otherwise", 12.

<sup>73</sup> Igwe, "Being Close To, With or Amongst", 44. Italics added.

<sup>74</sup> Igwe and Stokely, "Hiraeth, or Queering Time in Archives Otherwise", 14.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid: 12.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid: 14.

Unlike Russell's definition of "autoethnography" (as "a vehicle and a strategy for challenging imposed forms of identity and exploring the discursive possibilities of inauthentic subjectivities"), Igwe explores a concept of autoethnography that has to do with *blood memory* (taken from Martha Graham's autobiography titled *Blood Memory* from 1991) with the embodied memory, with an awakening of a memory that has not been lived directly, and where the archive becomes the home, the *hiraeth*. It is also a haunting, as Igwe describes:

hiraeth can also be described as a haunting. In *A Glossary of Haunting*, Eve Tuck and C. Ree describe haunting as "the relentless remembering and reminding that will not be appeased by settler society's assurances of innocence and reconciliation" (642). This understanding of hiraeth allowed us to think of the persistent presence of our black ancestors in the archive as a form of haunting. Haunting presupposes that the past and present are not sequential, instead the past bleeds and stains the present. This relationship to time was one that we sought to reaffirm in our use of archival material<sup>77</sup>.

This "haunting" is further punctuated by the incompleteness of the archive, which is also what gives the filmmaker the opportunity to be creative in their appropriation of the material. Kazeem-Kaminski writes: "I have come to terms with the fragmentation of the archive and not being able to know the whole story. What remains is the feeling of being haunted by this material, and this is what I work with"<sup>78</sup>. Similarly, Igwe writes, "...you go to the archive and you're like, ugh, what is this? This is incomplete. This is not the solution. And then the attempt to address that incompleteness allows for creativity, allows for creation".

The problem remains one of language: of what images these filmmakers can work with and the injustice of "having to use your language to tell you how I feel". This sentiment is present throughout the film *It Is A Crime* (Meena Nanji, 1996), which uses footage from mainstream British and Hollywood films to explore clichéd tropes about India as a place of mystique, violence and exoticism. Text, coming from Shani Mootoo's poem "It Is a Crime", interrupts the images: "It is a crime that I should have to use your language to tell you how I feel that you have taken mine from me. Something brews inside me. No language can describe it but when I find my voice I must take great care not to shout so loudly in your direction so that I do not do to you what you have done to me."

*A counter-face* (Figure 7.16), filmed by Nanji<sup>79</sup> (and therefore, significantly *not* found footage) "responds" with a silent scream<sup>80</sup>, which is extended, repeated and broken down into multiple screens so that it occupies the space of the entire film, cutting across the clichéd

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<sup>77</sup> Igwe and Stokely, "Hiraeth, or Queering Time in Archives Otherwise", 15.

<sup>78</sup> Kazeem-Kaminski, "Unearthing: In Conversation", 86.

<sup>79</sup> Nanji, Meena. Personal Exchange. January-February, 2022.

<sup>80</sup> We have seen a similar silent scream before, in Chapter 4, in our discussion on Merilee Bennett's *A Song of Air* (1987). As they are contemporary films, we might be able to assume that they were made in similar ways. In the case of *It is a Crime*, it is a film made "in the days of 3/4-inch tape, and basically I would edit on one tape, and then take that tape with the edited images, and overlay another set of images: I think we had an 'effects machine' that would make different wipes, etc., and so I would use that pretty organically, cutting to the music, and layering the images that way.... I had an idea of how I wanted the images to look in my head, and then to realize it on the edit equipment we had added another layer of spontaneity and surprise in how the images revealed themselves....For the scream segment - I think the 'wipe' machine would let me do one row of faces, so then I just ran the tape in a few times to add the 2nd and 3rd row": Nanji, Meena. Personal Exchange. January-February, 2022.



images from mainstream media. The film expresses the anger of being an Indian filmmaker forced to use not only the imposed English language, as a colonial language, but also the language of images that are filled with stereotypes, racism, and violence, in order to create an alternative. This is the problem, of course, with found footage and archival cinema, which artists have had to confront from the beginning. How to do it is the question of many contemporary films. That artists *should have to* is this film's particular question/provocation. Followed by a warning: "When I find my voice, I must take great care not to shout so loudly in your direction, so that I do not do to you what you have done to me." When artists do find their own images, they must be careful not to do violence towards those who have done violence to the subjects represented in the images.

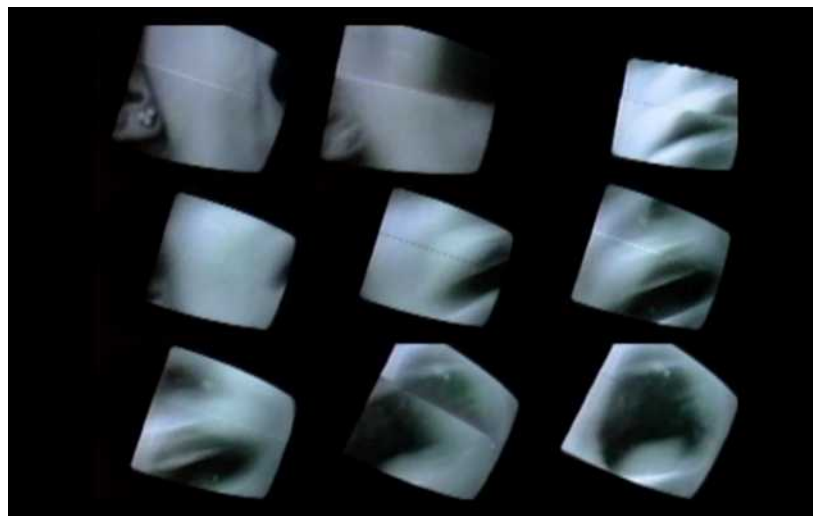


Figure 7.16. *It Is a Crime* (Meena Nanji, 1996)

The face shouting in silence, an image that does not come from another film but that has been made by the artist in response, is the image that the filmmaker finds to best speak about this injustice captured in the line "No language can describe...". The problem is what to do with language when language seems to have been created for the repression of those who exist outside of it? How to enter language, while inevitably maintaining an outside position? How to create language –or something like language– from a *third eye* position? And what does the face-image have to do with this? Why does Nanji film *a face* (perhaps *her* face) as a way of responding to the injustice of mass media representation? The face here becomes the outlet for the anger, for the feeling that these massively consumed images provoke. The image is multiplied and fragmented, the mouth occupies space, occupies time in the film, the scream extends across the other images, over the other images, making them obsolete. This scream, this face screaming, is the image that will end all clichéd images, a scream that will end all stereotypes, and finally say: "Enough".

After speaking with Nanji, I confirm that it is in fact *her face*, and this is the first and only time that she films herself in her work.

For me, I think the reason I chose to fragment and repeat, as you say, was really about trying to present, visually, the reaction to words, images, constructed damaging and negative stereotypes, that affect and

impact the colonial subject—the fact that these attacks are constant and relentless, in all media that centers the colonial gaze, i.e. films, tv, texts, newspaper, etc. These all use the lens of the colonial master as the norm, and so we scream again and again and again against these representations – to try and purge them from our bodies and protect ourselves, and keep resisting, too...<sup>81</sup>.

In her description, we can understand the screaming face as a performative ritual, necessary for “purging” damaging representations of the colonial subject from the body as a form of protection.

While the first film in Igwe’s series displays an effort to “hide” or protect the face, similar to *Unearthing. In Conversation* (Belinda Kazeem-Kaminski, 2017), by the end of the series, the approach has changed. Igwe does not exclude faces from the problem, but rather confronts them head-on and face-forward. She pauses over these images, *thinks* about them/with them. While Nanji’s film flat out rejects media representations of Indians, in doing so it also rejects any possibility that *those* images may have to offer the filmmaker and the spectator critical contemplation (instead she creates her own: the screaming face). In Igwe’s series, the face-image, the found face, becomes part of the “solution”. She works with the images filmed by the Colonial Film Unit; she finds affection and comfort in these images that were once shot with the intention of serving the interest of the colonial administrators. She does this by *asking questions* about the face. She “returns” to the face, propelled by a desire (her desire) to see it. Is this a voyeuristic desire, an extension of the colonial gaze? Is it possible to return to the face-image without reproducing colonial ways of looking? The film seems to suggest that this might be possible, with a third eye. This last film in Igwe’s series does not repudiate the face, it enters in dialogue with the image, asking it what *it wants*. There is no longer an objection to the face, but rather the opportunity for the face-image to become an autonomous image, separated from its original colonial context, now an image of reflection and critical contemplation. An image that *desires*, an image that *wants*, that wants to do *other things* to the spectator who looks at it. With Igwe’s *Specialised Technique*, it becomes possible to take a critical stance through an affective appropriation of the face-image itself. We are shown a way.

In these films by Igwe, Kazeem-Kaminski, and Schefer, the face-image is read for performance. For Rony, “Reading performance is [...] one important space of resistance brought into view by the third eye in images from early ethnographic cinema”<sup>82</sup>. The idea of “reading performance” brings us back to the first Chapter and Farocki’s practice of “reiterative reading” as an experimental film method in *Respite*. Unlike the readings proposed by Farocki, however, which have to do with information and knowledge expressed in montage, text, and gaps between images and words, reading for performance is *reading the image as a staged one*, in which the subject filmed (or photographed) can find ways of resistance or refusal. As Rony writes, “Whether throwing stones at the photographer, recontextualizing early footage, winking at the camera, refraining from representing certain subjects, subjects, or taking up the camera, the third eye is also us, the Others, the native informants who question, mock, disquiet, and inform, descendants of ethnographic spectacle, forced to build an identity from veiled

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<sup>81</sup> Nanji, Meena. Personal Exchange. January-February, 2022.

<sup>82</sup> Rony, *The Third Eye*, 217.

selves”<sup>83</sup>. More recently, these ideas have been repeated by Tina Campt in her work with photographs: “What is the sitter trying to tell us about himself or herself? ... Even in the most constrained formats of photography—like the mugshot, the ethnographic image, the passport photograph—there is some enactment of a persona. The state would like that persona to be something that can be measured or classified. But every person within that encounter is trying to portray something to the state and to themselves, even if it’s simply a performance of indifference”<sup>84</sup>. She continues, speaking about the photograph, but the same can be said of moving images: “...The camera is the point of contact, and the photograph is the object that allows us to look into that encounter”. Today reading for performance has become a powerful aesthetic form in experimental filmmaking to which the filmmaker can respond through his/her own performative gesture. For Schefer, “Approaching cinema from the perspective of ritual implies thinking moving images as points of fixation of reality that aim to transform it and not just to reproduce it”<sup>85</sup>. Thinking about appropriation in this way allows us to see the face-images as *living faces*, faces that are calling to be looked at again and transformed in their new contextualization.

While Hurston practiced what Rony has called “observing participation” (instead of participant observation)<sup>86</sup>, Igwe’s chosen methodological approach is one of “critical proximity”, a term borrowed from Bruno Latour in an imagined conversation with Donna Haraway<sup>87</sup>. For Igwe:

The term nods to *critical distance*, the way of knowing championed by Western positivist empiricism. The critical in critical proximity attempts to place historically illegitimatised ways of knowing alongside hegemonic knowledge frameworks in the same value chain. I explore these othered kinds of knowing [...] to see if they can stain the archive and enable it to articulate something other than the racial ideologies and colonial imagination that produced it<sup>88</sup>.

This *critical proximity*, also described as a “being close to, with or amongst, the visual trauma of the colonial archive to transform the way in which we know the people it contains”, recalls Trinh Min-Ha’s “speaking nearby” and John Akromfrah’s “affective proximity”. *Critical proximity* dialogues with these other methodological approaches. What is striking in Igwe’s films is that the recognition of impossibility of identification is acknowledged just as the filmmaker continues to search in the face-image for the answers to her (image) questions.

Let us remember for a moment the dissonance between image and sound, and between the two voices, present in *Sitting on a Man*. The disjuncture in the sound makes the idea of total identification a fragile one; just as the union of image and sound is far from perfect, the idea that the spectator and/or filmmaker may entirely identify with the subject’s face-image is false. Through film form we understand that the idea that something like total identification can exist is flawed from the beginning. This, however, by no means negates that there can be

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<sup>83</sup> Rony, *The Third Eye*, 217-218.

<sup>84</sup> Wallis, “The Sound of Defiance”, 2017.

<sup>85</sup> Schefer, “The representation of ritual and cinema”, 146.

<sup>86</sup> Rony, *The Third Eye*, 206.

<sup>87</sup> Latour, Bruno, “Critical Distance or Critical Proximity?”, ed. Sharon Ghamari (Unpublished, 2005): 8.

<sup>88</sup> Igwe, “Being Close To, With or Amongst”, 45.

an affectionate relation between the two: between the filmmaker and the face-image, for instance, as between the spectator and the subject thereby represented.

Working with colonial film archives today, with a third eye and decolonizing motivation, is not dissimilar to Hurston's desire to make ethnographic films that would make Black people beautiful at a time when the genre was specifically created for the opposite purpose. Igwe's alternation between "I" and "you", but also her alternation between archival material and images filmed by her, of herself and other young Black women, is a form of resistance to the "ethnographic present" of the archive. The archive can be at once the problem and the solution<sup>89</sup>, uncomfortable and at the same a source of comfort for diasporic communities. It is always incomplete (be it for lack of sound, lack of perspectives, lack of context, etc.) and it is in the awareness of this incompleteness that the filmmaker discovers experimental methods in appropriation.

### **Touching *and* Taking**

*The autoethnographic found footage film* must be redefined for the contemporary moment. Today we can see that the experimental autoethnographic found footage film has taken new—often hybrid—forms which cross freely between forms often associated with documentary, essay, experimental film and fiction. The main difference with the definition of autoethnography provided by Russell in the late 1990s, however, might be a question of voice. The films that Russell includes in her corpus, while inserted into a "larger context", generally include the voice of the filmmaker speaking in the first person. These films share many qualities with *the autobiographic film* and continue to place the individual filmmaker at the center of the film's narration. What we see today, however, are films which are "autoethnographic" but are often not autobiographical at all, unless we consider a collective autobiography; more than just a "larger context", the archive provides a *hiraeth*, to use Igwe's chosen word, for the diasporic filmmakers who feel otherwise out-of-place. The experimental filmmaker Jonas Mekas who often spoke in his films about his experience as an exile, often said that cinema was his home<sup>90</sup>. Filmmakers today find their (fragile) home(s) in the archive, in the faded memory of their ancestral past, and in the lingering ghosts of their blood relatives. The face-image, once perceived as an object vulnerable to the "pillaging of the spirit"<sup>91</sup> can also be a redemptive image for artists today, offering possibilities of critical proximity and affective distance. If Hurston remembered and learned the songs of the people who she studied in order to be able to "take the songs with her", Igwe and other filmmakers working with archives today can do the same with the archival images: they can "learn" them, imitate them through appropriation, and "take them with them" in their films.

In 2016, Christopher Harris (director of *Reckless Eyeballing*, discussed in Chapter 5) made a film in homage to Zora Neale Hurston titled *Halimuhfack*, the name of one of the African American folk songs that Hurston learned in her ethnographic work in Florida. In this film, a performer dressed as an older lady from the 1920s (Hurston) lip-syncs to archival audio

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<sup>89</sup> "In this way, the archive became both the problem and the solution". Igwe and Stokely, "Hiraeth, or Queering Time in Archives Otherwise", 15.

<sup>90</sup> From: *A Walk* (Jonas Mekas, 1990).

<sup>91</sup> Rony, *The Third Eye*, 215.

featuring Hurston’s voice as she describes her method of documenting this song. Behind her, rear-projected, we see images from an archive of Masai tribesmen and women recycled from a 16mm education film (Figure 7.17). At one point, the performer –playing a Hurston imitator– turns around to look at the projection behind her. At this moment, the projection begins to break down. The face-images of two women speed up, reverse, deconstruct, repeat, and superimpose, while the audio also is abstracted into a new track. Afterwards, the performer playing Hurston looks back at the camera and smiles. In an interview Harris has said that the film is about “being aligned and not aligned at the same time”<sup>92</sup>. He explains, “In the actual text of the interview, Zora Neale Hurston speaks on how she learned African American folk songs from people and carried it wherever she went, bringing to mind the Middle Passage and how Africans weren’t able to bring their material culture with them but brought other cultural forms: music, dance, language, and oratory”<sup>93</sup>. We find this film appropriate to end on not only because it unites contemporary archival filmmakers with the anthropologist, novelist and filmmaker Zora Neale Hurston, but also because the film suggests that “the archive” –understood in a very wide sense, including images and sounds, as a kind of footprint of the immaterial in material form– is ours for the taking. In a world of forced migration and constant transformation, where so many people lose their material belongings along the way, the archive (no matter how problematic, incomplete, or biased) becomes a very real place for communities to begin piecing together fragmented images of their collective past.



Figure 7.17. *Halimuhfack* (Christopher Harris, 2016)

<sup>92</sup> Berry, Dorothy. “Interview with Christopher Harris”, *The Third Rail*, Issue 12, 2021: 39.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*: 40.

Appropriation today becomes a way for filmmakers to take images and sounds with them. If for White Europeans working with colonial archives today there is an attempt to, as Miriam de Rosa has put it, “touch without taking”<sup>94</sup>, for filmmakers who share *blood memory* with the subjects in the archive, taking becomes a very legitimate way of thinking about appropriation.

Today the face-image is an image that can be taken out of the archive and printed on a T-shirt, worn by a young filmmaker as she dances gesturing protectively towards the face. Isn't there a contradiction here? Between the appropriation and the protection? And isn't this contradiction precisely what motivates these filmmakers to continue? We do not expect to resolve this contradiction here and why would we want to? It is in this contradiction that the face-image today can regain the “aura” that it has lost. It is not a religious aura, whose loss Benjamin also celebrated, rather a critical one, which contains both its exhibition value and its profanation and which, in keeping, makes the filmmaker continue to reflect on the function that images have and may continue to occupy in our lives.

We have come full circle in the afterlife of the face-image, from its ruins we have seen how face-images have been shown to be problematic images, sites of colonial pillaging and plunder. And now, finally there is a return to the face-image, a desire to take them with us, in our bodies and (next to) our faces, as we move backwards and forwards and sometimes simply stand still, wrestling with images, wrestling with our images, wrestling with the images taken by our ancestors, wrestling with the images of our ancestors. We struggle with and against these images, in a continuous movement between these two poles, and in the unstoppable creation of new images on top of old images, images that are in dialogue with one another, images that redeem one another, and it is in our appropriation of these images that we become free. We appropriate without making these images “ours”, we simply borrow them for a while. Jena-Paul Sartre once wrote that it is not what they have done to us that's important, but rather what we do with what has been done to us. I now read this all-too-often-quoted line as an invitation for appropriation, for recycling and re-using and re-shaping and re-thinking what has been done to us. Images are part of this doing and re-doing and it is through images that we will continue to write and re-write our history and our image history.

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<sup>94</sup> This is from her essay on the work of Italian filmmakers Yervant Gianikian & Angela Ricci Lucchi who have made reappropriation films using colonial film archives since 1975. See: De Rosa, Miriam, “A Poetics of Care: Slowness, Ethics and Enchantment in Gianikian & Ricci Lucchi's Oeuvre”, *Found Footage Magazine*, Issue 3, (March 2017).

## Conclusions

Some say images have no feeling, I think there's a deeper meaning.  
-Lou Reed and John Cale<sup>1</sup>

We began this investigation with an intuition that the face-image had a power that made it unlike other archival images. As we conclude our investigation, we understand that the face-image's power is particular because it is two-fold: not only does it contain the same power that belongs to all images, but it also includes *the power of the face*—as a site of many unfolding connections with the artist who works with these images, regarding index, glamour, identification, recognition, presence, empathy, a certain knowing, and an inevitable mystery. We have confirmed that the face-image acts, that it performs, that it cannot only be seen, but also read and heard, and so, the question that is left to pose—as a question that will include and conclude all of the Chapters of this dissertation—is: what does the face-image *do*?

The face-image, as it is recycled and reworked in experimental archival cinema, serves to deconstruct the machinery of the image and of the face itself. Each chapter began with the study of the origins of the face-image (the image's past “lives”) in order to understand what has been reverted by each experimental film analyzed. In the first Chapter, we observed that the face in archives is an image that can be claimed and used for different purposes: from a symbol for a collective (European) tragedy to an icon of Jewish suffering, to its revindication by Romi artists as a representation of their less visible and systematically ignored history of deportation and extermination. In Chapter 2, we studied the face as a territory that has been observed, compared, measured, and photographed by a classification system that in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century became a mechanism for the imperial expansion of a White supremacy ideology. In Chapter 3, we studied the face in anthropometric photography (the mugshot) as an object that intended to improve systems of police control, surveillance, and to quicken the process of detainment and incarceration. The “arrested” image as a still image, absent of movement and sound, and in which the time continuum between past and present and future is broken. In Chapter 4, we analyzed the ideological function of the home movie and the function that faces, especially of the wife/mother and children, play in these films. We explored the silence and voicelessness present in many of these original films as an element that reinforced this ideology based in nostalgia and happy family life. In Chapter 5, through the writings and experience of Frederick Douglass, we understood the face and its photographic representation as extremely important in his quest to be seen as a free man in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. At the same time, we observe how with cinema the face becomes a site for narrative continuity (shot-reverse-shot, eyeline matching, etc.) and the fabrication of glamor in a system of commodification. In Chapter 6, we study the face as a construction, which is often not only an image, but also includes a name and story, and the fabrication of a character. We

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<sup>1</sup> Cale, John, and Lou Reed, “Images”, *Songs for Drella* (Sire Records, 1990).

understood that the face is constructed not only by what is seen and what is hidden in the shot (on-screen and off-screen space) but also what and who is heard and who is not. In Chapter 7, we confront the face (filmed by the British Colonial Film Unit in Nigeria) as an image that cannot respond in words and which is therefore quite vulnerable, as a territory that might be covered or undisclosed as a way of “protecting” the soul of the person that it represents.

In each chapter, we analyzed how experimental films and artists responded to these “problems” of the face by deconstructing the face’s machinery and pre-established expectations. Many of these operations are preceded by the prefixes de-, re-, and un-. In Chapter 1, Harun Farocki responds by un-learning the face-image of Settela Steinbach and re-ordering the archival material, re-winding and creating respites in the montage for the spectator. In Chapter 2, Jeannette Muñoz re-photographs the images taken of the Kawéskar in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, re-instating the imperial technology through the image’s double exposure while at the same time allowing the images to co-exist in present-day Germany. In Chapter 3, Susana de Sousa Dias re-frames, re-photographs, creates micro-movements and adds sound to the mugshots of Portuguese political prisoners in ways that call attention to the micro-movements invisible to the still photographic image but which can be “heard” in the images through a haptic practice of “listening to images”. In Chapter 4, after decades of filmmakers adding voice to voiceless images, we understand the negation of voice as a powerful response to the silencing of women and children in home movies, and the *glitch* as a feminist practice of celebrating digital imperfection and failure. Instead of making these images comprehensible and graspable, analogue intervention and digital distortion in films by Los Ingrávidos, Annalisa D. Quagliata and Paz Encina can complicate these images further, elongating the distance between the spectator and the person, by calling attention to the materiality of the image itself. In Chapter 5, we see how cinema as a structure of domination can be turned against itself and with it, the whole system of White Supremacy sustained by cinema can be reversed. Instead of white or black, we can have both. Christopher Harris’ *Reckless Eyeballing* demonstrates that images can contain contradiction. In Chapter 6, in *Le livre d’image* we see how the same image (and voice) can be re-produced, multiplied, made plural through repetition and variation, and in this plurality, more than one way of knowing can surface, allowing for a polyphony of ideas and expressions. In Chapter 7, in Onyeka Igwe’s work, the face becomes a stage, a platform for a performance that must be read, touched, and transformed. We see that official archives are limited, and that the body itself is an alternative archive that can be opened and studied through performance and dance, and through experimental film and video. The face here is no longer an image that *belongs to* the person who filmed it or the archive in which it has been kept, but it can also be an object that *we take with us*, if we need it and it serves us, and that can coexist with our bodies and our faces, juxtaposed or in union, in real time.

In all, the face-image is treated both as a transportable object, a fragment, a citation, a DNA extract, which can be easily removed, twisted, turned around, *and* at the same time, all of these films offer a re-contextualization for the image which visibilizes the image’s status as a reappropriated object. The films do not treat the image the same as any other image that can be replaced or substituted just as quickly with any other: it responds to the place from which the image



came, even if this archive is not always directly mentioned in the appropriation. The migration of that image becomes part of the story, part of what is working in the new montage and which is not necessarily stated. In all, *the face-image carries this story of migration with it*, and yet it expresses itself as a fugitive image, a free image, unbounded by its new appropriation, always ready to continue to travel and move into new appropriations. From fixed images, essential to classification and police control systems, the face-image becomes unfixed; the gaze interacts with our own but also looks forward and past, looks beyond us, into what is still unknown. Face-images call forward counter-images, oppositional gazes, and memory images, and therefore interact with image history across times and in interlinear ways. Between stillness and movement, with voice and without, face-images exist in the in-between spaces of *and* and *with*. They are slippery objects and because of this slippery quality, face-images allow for other ways of thinking, modes of thought that are less contained and more unbounded, less fixed and more in movement. This is why this investigation has been so rich, so expansive, including many different types of images and archives and across different periods in history and around the world, even if we have been looking at something so small and specific (in appearance) as the face-image.

Our first hypothesis was that this might be a new time for the face in film, following the 1920s and 1960-80s periods identified by Thomas Elsaesser, and that we are now in *the time of the face-image*. Of course, anywhere else we look, we will see that the face continues to be used to classify and to control, to identify and to mark, to signal, to separate, and possibly to destroy. Instead of looking at the face, we chose to study the *face-image*, which we defined as a transportable image that establishes a critical distance with the face and with the archive to which it originally belonged. We chose to look at its uses in experimental archival works because we believed that this is where these images are treated as material objects and as images and not just as faces to be felt (through identification processes, for example) and/or as pieces of information to be interpreted. Through the process of this investigation, we understand now that the history of cinema cannot be understood linearly without leaving out important works, movements and discoveries. All the same, we would like to propose a “new time” for the face in film, understood within a context of reappropriation of the face-image which coexists with other, more dominant and classical forms of using faces from archives in films. By placing our lens on the study of these experimental and political films, and not on more conventional appropriations, we have given attention and importance to these works, emphasizing their forms of reappropriation and what happens to the face and to the image in the process. Through our investigation we have understood that many of these processes are not necessarily “new”, they have their roots in films made prior, albeit with other materials and, in some cases, with other technologies: we draw connections with works made in earlier decades by filmmakers including Narcisa Hirsch, Kurt Kren, Mieko Shiomi (FluxFilm), Leslie Thornton, Mona Hatoum, Santiago Álvarez, Aldo Tambellini, Fiona Tan and Meena Nanji (we could have also mentioned Tony Cokes, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Hollis Frampton, and many, many more). In the contemporary experimental archival filmscape, however, we can observe *the new object status* of the image, for which the face is particularly significant. In this

sense, we now see our third hypothesis –that the re-appropriation of the face-image in contemporary experimental film might reveal a resurrection of film form and that the study of this re-appropriation could teach us something about how cinema has been transforming over time– as a continuation of the first.

Throughout our research we have discovered that the face-image appears throughout film and art history, and that reappropriation is not new, even if it is more prevalent today than perhaps at any other moment in time, and certainly more accepted in parallel ecosystems of film distribution and exhibition. In the context of the Anthropocene and ecological discussions on the responsibility of human beings to their environments and the coexistence of living and nonliving forms, reappropriation takes on a new significance. We now understand that experimental reappropriations of the face-image allow for new questions to be posed concerning the relationship between images and society, the roles that face-images play in our history-making, history-telling and history-remembering, and the weight that face-images carry and how they “act” on us, just as much as “we” act on “them” through the exercise of reappropriation. We can now view the face-image as a portal to rethink these essential questions for the future of our lives in coexistence with sounds and images. Experimental reappropriations of the face-image allow us to understand *what the face is* and *what the face does*, as well as what the image is and what the image does, creating a more critical spectatorship in the process. Face-images deconstruct the “power” of the face *and* the power of the image, in order to create a critical spectator, conscientious of their coexistence with images and faces, and of what we can and cannot know of/in/through the face-image. It is a *double movement* of going inside and at the same time acquiring distance. A double movement of proximity and distance, of care and criticality. At the same time, these practices allow us to see new possibilities for the face-image and for the archive, as political and public spheres which can be reused and recycled in ways that serve *us*, in our communities, as a strategy for rethinking our relationship to images in the retelling of our collective histories from a point of view that looks towards reparations.

Our second hypothesis was that reappropriation today cannot be neatly divided into the classifications of documentary or experimental film, nor can the objectives of these films be understood solely in terms of nostalgia versus apocalypse, nor can the spectator be defined as either possessive or pensive. The face-image, as it is being reappropriated into experimental archival cinema today, becomes the space for another kind of exploration that is both possessive (in the sense of *a commons*, rather than private property) *and* pensive and that traverses both the affective and the critical distance necessary towards a critical healing. What we have discovered is that experimental archival cinema creates the space for the face-image to be explored as an *in-between image*, a connector between different times, and as a *problematic image* insofar as it embodies commodification while at the same time presents a possibility to be unattainable, ungraspable, unfixed, etc. The face-image as an image that carries with it its own objectification and commodification, as it is used in experimental archival cinema, can also show us a way out of capitalism’s methods for appropriating bodies, faces, and expressions, as it allows us to see how these images can be made slippery through reappropriation.

In her prologue to *Archiveology*, Catherine Russell reflects on what has changed in found-footage filmmaking since the publication of her previous book *Experimental Ethnography*. She shares that when writing about found-footage filmmaking then, she did so in terms of “apocalypse culture” and the preoccupation in cinema—in 1999—with “the end of history”. Two decades later, she writes, “as archival film practices have become more prevalent in mainstream culture and in experimental media, I am more optimistic about the role of audiovisual appropriation. One key change has been a shift in theory and practice to the recognition of the research function implicit in archival film practices. [...] Recognition of the search function highlights the role of the moving image archive and its transformation in digital culture”<sup>2</sup>. In all of the experimental archival films included in our dissertation, research is at the core of the filmmaking practice. As our dissertation shows, this research takes many forms and consists not only in the attention to the origins of the images, to the conditions of their production and circulation, to their migration across media, as well as the technical particularities of the image (related to photography, film, anthropology, criminology, digital reinscription, etc.), but also to a practice that involves a “listening” to the images which traverses the filmmaker-spectator-person engaged with the archive, be it an official police archive or the unofficial “archive” of cinema. In that sense, our research enters into dialogue with archival film studies of the past two decades, incorporating “smaller” films that remain outside of this academic conversation, as well as “larger” works that have not been studied through this particular framework and in relation to the other films. In today’s experimental archival film practice, we see that many found footage and reappropriation films that many are being made politically and from different parts of the world, in different languages and different forms, and in response to a variety of archival materials, not only cinema (Hollywood, or other cinemas) but also photographic archives, colonial archives, police archives, as well as home movies and amateur films. These films are far from the “apocalypse culture” observed by Russell at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. They are films about the future even if they choose to return to images of the past. These films call forward a future that the people in the archives did not get to experience, a future that today seems more possible in film than in reality. But films act on reality; in fact, they transform our very way of thinking.

We hope that our work regarding *face-images* will contribute to a political way of thinking of the possibilities for experimental cinema and cinema in general and the archival film practice in particular, where filmmaking and montage become tools for not only *freeing* archival images and sounds, but by extension, freeing human experience, history, and storytelling so that we can all as spectators-turned-producers become active participants in our history and film history-making. As our investigation unfolded, we became critical of the often anthropocentric film theory which has accompanied discussions on the face in film; in opposition to a “humanitarian” approach rooted in a call for a specific “Universality”, we began to develop a counter-anthropocentric methodology grounded in the “material thinking” made possible by film analysis. We have not only considered ways in which the images are “alive” (in relation to what we understand as such

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<sup>2</sup> Russell, Catherine, *Archiveology: Walter Benjamin and Archival Film Practices* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 7.

based on human experience) but also in which ways our human experience may be activated by images and sounds. We understand this relationship to be one of co-existence between images, sounds, and filmmaker-spectators, in which we act upon images and sounds just as much as they do on us.

To understand this is to understand that we too are like images. We coexist with images, they give us company, they haunt us, they leave us, they stay with us, they are part of us, they help us to remember and to forget, they act on us just as we act on them. Face-images have a particular importance in our lives because of the subjects/the people in the images, but also because they speak *about us* (about a possible “us”, whether it be by inclusion or exclusion), about what images of our own faces may one day also produce. To think about reappropriation is also to think about how images are produced, the conditions of this production, so that we may be more conscious of the images that we continue to make. Face-images are free images, even when faces and people are not. As they move and migrate, as they find new forms and new configurations, they might be able to teach or remind us of what freedom can look (and sound) like.

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### **Lectures, Presentations, Conferences, Colloquiums**

- Campt, Tina. "John Akomfrah in conversation with Tina Campt, Ekow Eshun, Saidiya Hartman". Lisson Gallery (virtual talk, June 18, 2020).
- De Sousa Dias, Susana. "Presenta 48". *Photoespaña* Matadero Madrid (May 31st, 2011).  
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- Doane, Mary-Ann. "The Close-Up: Cinematic Scale and the Negotiation of Space". Lecture at the American Academy in Berlin (October 2013).  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnRBC-FG62k>
- Gary, Ja'Tovia. "The Giverny Document Screening and Q&A". The Hammer Museum (virtual screening and talk, April 22, 2020).
- Gary, Ja'Tovia, Renata Cherlise and Rikki Wright. "Working with the Archive". *New Negress*

- Film Society Presents Black Women Film Conference* (virtual talk, September 24, 2020).
- Gary, Ja'Tovia and Frank B. Wilderson. "Screening and Discussion". (Im)possibility: Harvard Film & Visual Studies Graduate Conference (virtual talk, October 8, 2020).
- Grant, Catherine. "O ensaio audiovisual na era digital: investigação, pedagogia e ativismo". Universidade Nova de Lisboa (September 26, 2019).
- . "Screen studies as device? Working through the video essay". David Vilaseca Memorial Lecture, University of London (November 19, 2018).
- Haraway, Donna J. "Storytelling for Multispecies Justice and Care". El Premio Nuevo León Alfonso Reyes (online conference, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021).
- Harris, Christopher, Pooja Rangan, Alex Rivera and Brett Story. "Practicing Abolition Futures". *UnionDocs* (online conference, April 27, 2021).
- Lee, Kevin B. "Double Agency: Fraught Positions in Postcolonial Film Analysis", Arsenal/Berlinale Forum (online conference, June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021).
- Montañez Ortiz, Rafael. "Virtual Book Launch". Museo del Barrio (July 30, 2020).  
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- Vaz, Ana and Raquel Schefer. "La mirada de las imágenes: crítica de la modernidad, inter-visualidad e inter-epistemología en el cine de Ana Vaz". *Ecologías de la imagen en movimiento: Seminario de estudios de cine*. Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana - Lerma (May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

### **Complete Filmography**

- Álvarez, Santiago. (director) (1968) *LBJ*, 18 min. Cuba.
- Azoulay, Ariella. (director) (2002) *Khaira's Smile*, 2 min. Israel.
- Bennett, Merilee. (director) (1987). *A Song of Air*, 24 min. 16mm. Australia.

Brakhage, Stan. (director) (1955). *Reflections on Black*, 12 min. United States.

Braunberger, Myriam and Pierre. (directors) (1951). *La course de Taureux*, 75 mins. France.

Botero, Camilo. (director) (2008). *16 Memorias*, 53 min. Colombia.

Chaplin, Charlie. (director) (1928). *The Circus*, 72 min. United States.

Cuevas, Ximena. (director) (2019). *Fantasma del Adiós*, 5 min. Mexico.

De Sousa Dias, Susana. (director) (2005). *Natureza Morta*, 72 min. Portugal.

---. (director) (2010). *48*, 93 min. Portugal.

---. (director) (2016). *Luz Obscura*, 76 min. Portugal.

Dreyer, Carl. (director) (1928). *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, 114 min. France.

Duyns, Cherry. (director) (1994). *Settela, gezicht van het verleden*, 55 min. Netherlands.

Edison, Thomas. (director) (1901). *Esquimaux Village*, 1 min. United States.

Edison, Thomas. (director) (1903). *Electrocution of an Elephant*, 1 min. United States.

Encina, Paz. (director) (2014). *Arribo*, 10:27 min. Paraguay.

---. (director) (2015). *Familiar*, 9 min. Paraguay.

---. (director) (2016). *Tristezas de la guerra*, 7:12 min. Paraguay.

Erice, Victor. (director) (2012). *Vidrios partidos. Testes para um filme em Portugal (Vidrios rotos. Pruebas para una película en Portugal)*, 37 min. Spain.

Farocki, Harun. (director) (1988). *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges*, 75 min. Germany.

---. (director) (1995). *Interface*, 24 min. Germany.

---. (director) (1995). *Peter Lorre – Das Doppelte Gesicht*, 59 min. Germany.

---. (director) (2007). *Aufschub (Respite)*, 40 min. Germany.

Frampton, Hollis. (director) (1971). *(nostalgia)*, 36 min. United States.

Harris, Christopher. (director) (2004). *Reckless Eyeballing*, 13 min. United States.

---. (director) (2014). *A Willing Suspension of Disbelief + Photography and Fetish*, 16 min. United States.

---. (director) (2016). *Halimuhfack*, 4 min. United States.

Hersonski, Yael. (director) (2010) *A Film Unfinished*, 89 min. Germany/Israel.

Hill, Jack. (director) (1974). *Foxy Brown*, 92 min. United States.

Hurston, Zora Neale. (director) (1928-29). *Unedited film footage*. United States.

Gary, Ja'Tovia. (director) (2015) *An Ecstatic Experience*, 6 min. United States.

Gills, Libertad. (director) (2013) *Cine Foro: Comuna Engabao*, 38 min. Ecuador.

Giménez Lorang, Nuria. (director) (2019). *My Mexican Bretzel*, 73 min. Spain.

Godard, Jean-Luc. (director) (1962). *Vivre sa vie*, 85 min. France.

---. (director) (2018). *Le livre d'image (The Image Book)*, 85 min. Switzerland/France.

Godard, Jean-Luc and Jean-Pierre Gorin. (directors) (1972). *Letter to Jane*, 52 min. France.

Godard, Jean-Luc and Anne-Marie Miéville. (director) (1975). *Número Deux*, 88 min. France.

Godard, Jean-Luc, Anne-Marie Miéville and Jean-Pierre Gorin. (directors) (1975). *Ici et ailleurs*, 50 min. France.

Grant, Catherine. (director) (2011). *Touching the Film Object?*, 5 min. England.

Griffith, D.W. (director) (1911). *The Lonedale Operator*, 17 min. United States.

Griffith, D.W. (director) (1912). *Friends*, 17 min. United States.

Griffith, D.W. (director) (1912). *The Birth of a Nation*, 195 min. United States.

Hatoum, Mona. (director) (1983). *So Much I Want to Say*, 4 min. UK.

Hirsch, Narcisa. (director) (1972-1973). *Diarios patagónicos 1*. 10 min. Argentina.

Hurston, Zora Neale. (director) (1928-29). *Unedited film footage*. United States.

Igwe, Onyeka. (director) (2017). *Her Name in My Mouth*, 6 min. UK.

---. (director) (2018). *Sitting on a Man*, 7 min. UK.

---. (director) (2018). *Specialised Technique*, 7 min. UK.

---. (director) (2020). *a so-called archive*, 19 min. UK.

Kazeem-Kaminski, Belinda. (director) (2017). *Unearthing. In Conversation*, 13 min. Austria.

Kren, Kurt. (director) (1960). *48 Köpfe Aus Dem Szondi Test (48 Heads From the Szondi-Test)*, 4.5 min. 16mm, Austria.

Lang, Fritz. (director) (1931). *M*, 117 min. Germany.

Los Ingrávidos. (director) (2015). *Santa Juana de los Mataderos*, 48 seconds. Mexico.

---. (director) (2016). *Valeria*, 9 min. Mexico.

Marker, Chris & Leo Hurwitz. (directors) (2008). *Henchman Glance*, 32 min. France.

Martel, Lucrecia. (director) (2019). *AI*, 2 min. Argentina/Austria.

Méliès, Georges. (director) (1901) *Dislocations Mysterieuses (The Clown with the Portable Body)*, 2 min. France.

---. (director) (1901) *L'homme à la tête de caoutchouc (The Man with the Rubber Head)*, 3 min. France.

Monnikendam, Vincent. (director) (1995). *Mother Dao, the Turtlelike*, 90 min. Netherlands.

Mülchi, Hans. (director) (2010) *Calafate, zoológicos humanos*, 93 min. Chile.

Muñoz, Jeannette. (director) (2012) *strata of natural history*, 11 min. Switzerland/Chile.

Nanji, Meena. (director) (1996). *It Is a Crime*, 5 min. United States.

Quagliata, Annalisa D. (director) (2016). *Se busca (un mar de ausencia)*, 2 min. Mexico.

---. (director) (2016). *Ñores (sin señalar)*, 3 min. Mexico.

Rahmani, Hesami. (director) (2019). *Faces Without Visage*, 8 min. Iran.

Resnais, Alain. (director) (1956). *Nuit et brouillard*, 31 min. France.

Ricci-Luchi, Angela and Yervant Gianikian. (directors) (1994) *Diario africano*, 16 min. Italy.

---. (directors) (2000) *Visioni del deserto*, 16 min. Italy.

---. (directors) (2001) *Images d'Orient - Turisme vandale*, 62 min. Italy.

Schefer, Raquel. (director) (2009). *Avo (Muidumbe) (Granny)*, 11 min. Portugal.

Shiomi, Mieko (Chieko). (director) (1966). *Disappearing Music for Face (Fluxfilm No.4)*, 11 min. United States.

Shub, Esfir. (director) (1927). *Padeniye dinastij Romanovjkh (The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty)*, 90 min. Soviet Union.

Sivan, Eyal. (director) (1999). *The Specialist. Portrait of a Modern Criminal*, 128 min. Israel.

Stephens, Courtney. (director) (2020). *Terra Femme: A Performance Lecture About Women and the Travelogue Archives*, 60 min. United States.

Tan, Fiona. (director) (1999). *Facing Forward*, 11 min. Netherlands.

Tambellini, Aldo. (director) (1966). *BLACK PLUS X*, 9 min. United States.

---. (director) (1968). *BLACK TV*, 10 min. United States.

Thornton, Leslie. (director) (1981). *Jennifer, Where Are You?*, 11 min. United States.

Tornatore, Giuseppe. (director) (1988). *Cinema Paradiso*, 155 min. Italy.

University of California. (producers) (1961). *Psychiatric interview series, patient no. 18: evaluation for diagnosis*, 10 min. United States.

Warhol, Andy. (director) (1964). *Thirteen Most Beautiful Boys*, 55 min. United States.

Wilkerson, Travis. (director) (2017). *Did You Wonder Who Fired the Gun?*, 90 min. United States.

Williamson, James. (director) (1901) *The Big Swallow*, 1 min. UK.

### **Installations**

Tan, Fiona. (artist) (1997). *Smoke Screen*, video installation (loop). Netherlands.

de Sousa Dias, Susana. (artist) (2010-2011). *Natureza Morta/Stilleben/Still Life*, Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporaneo do Chiado in Portugal.

Warhol, Andy. (artist) (1964). *Thirteen Most Wanted Men*, mural. New York World's Fair, United States.

### **Interviews and Personal Exchanges**

de Sousa Dias, Susana. Personal Interview. May 10th, 2017.

---. Personal Interview. April 17th, 2020.

Gary, Ja'Tovia. Personal Interview. May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

Harris, Christopher. Personal Interview. April 28th, 2019.

---. Personal Interview. May 6th, 2019.

---. Personal Interview. May 21st, 2019.

Muñoz, Jeannette. Personal Interview. September 7th, 2018.

---. Personal Interview. March 25th, 2021.

---. Personal Interview. April 3rd, 2021.

Nanji, Meena. Personal Exchange. January-February, 2022.

Quagliata, Annalisa D. Personal Interview. September 9th, 2019.

---. Personal Interview. October 19th, 2021.

Varillas, Davani (Los Ingrávidos). Personal Interview. October 15th, 2021.