



SHOOTING THE FAMILY

TRANSNATIONAL MEDIA AND
INTERCULTURAL VALUES

Edited by Patricia Pisters and Wim Staat

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and Intercultural Values*

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Contents

Introduction 7

Patricia Pisters and Wim Staat

Part 1: The Family and the Media

1. Capturing the Family: Home Video in the Age of Digital Reproduction 25
José van Dijck
2. Migrant Children Mediating Family Relations 41
Sonja de Leeuw
3. The Shooting Family: Gender and Ethnicity in the New Dutch Police Series 57
Joke Hermes and Joost de Bruin

Part 2: Private Matters, Public Families

4. Family Portrait: Queering the Nuclear Family in François Ozon's SITCOM 73
Jaap Kooijman
5. Radicalism Begins at Home: Fundamentalism and the Family in MY SON THE FANATIC 89
Laura Copier
6. Family Matters in EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN: Food Envy, Family Longing, or Intercultural Knowledge through the Senses? 103
Tarja Laine

Part 3: Translating Family Values

7. Saved by Betrayal? Ang Lee's Translations of "Chinese" Family Ideology 117
Jeroen de Kloet
8. Eurydice's Diasporic Voice: Marcel Camus's BLACK ORPHEUS and the Family in Poet's Hell 133
Catherine M. Lord
9. Archiving the (Secret) Family in Egoyan's FAMILY VIEWING 147
Marie-Aude Baronian

Part 4: Loving Families

10. Suspending the Body: Biopower and the Contradictions of Family Values 165
Sudeep Dasgupta
11. Unfamiliar Film: Sisters Unsettling Family Habits 181
Wim Staat
12. Micropolitics of the Migrant Family in Accented Cinema: Love and Creativity in Empire 197
Patricia Pisters

List of Contributors 213

Index 217

Introduction

Patricia Pisters and Wim Staat

Do contemporary movements of migration and the ever-increasing abundance of audiovisual media correspond to or even cause shifts in the definition of both the bourgeois nuclear family and the tribal extended family? In this book we will investigate the transfigured role of the family both as the mediator and as the mediated in a transnational world in which intercultural values are negotiated through mass media like film and television, as well as through particularistic media like home movies and videos. "Shooting the family" has a double meaning. On the one hand, we claim that the family is under pressure and being altered by the forces of globalization and migration (the family that is "shot to pieces"). On the other hand, family matters of all kinds, pertaining both to reinforcements and radical reconfigurations of traditional family values, are increasingly constructed and refigured in a mediated form: the "reel family" (as in the "visual family shot") has become an important medium for intercultural affairs.

This book originated in the Department of Media and Culture of the University of Amsterdam. As a group of media scholars with a special interest in intercultural exchanges related to transnational media culture, we discovered that the concept of the family had not been very elaborately analyzed in this respect. Although both the Western nuclear family and the non-Western extended family is under pressure (from internal struggles and divorces and from external causes like migration that tear families apart), no extended study has related the concept of the family in an intercultural perspective to media use and media theory. This striking absence in intercultural media theory led to the idea of writing this book.

From the beginning, we also had the idea of relating these theoretical notions to certain media practices. We were therefore very happy that the center for migration and image culture, *Imagine IC* (Imagine Identity and Culture) in Amster-

dam was immediately interested in collaborating with us on this theme. *Imagine IC* has programmed a set of screenings, talks, audiovisual assignments, etc., to complement the “Shooting the Family” project. The book and the events present a dialogue between media theory and practice that discusses intercultural values related to family matters.¹

The Family, Interculturality, and the Media

In contrast to media studies, in sociology, the family has been studied extensively in relation to interculturality and multiculturalism. For instance, in their book *Families in Multicultural Perspectives*, Bron Ingoldsby and Suzanna Smith, give an overview of the different ways in which the family can be understood in all its cultural diversity.² They discuss and compare familial issues like marital structure, kinship rules, family members’ functional roles, parenting and “family life cycles” (from marriage to families with young children and aging families) in all their cultural diversities. In this way they demonstrate that although the traditional family of (white) heterosexual parents and their children is often taken as the normative definition of the family, from a multicultural perspective this definition can be extended in many ways as long as it is considered as a group of people that care for each other and provide children a safe place to grow up. Of course, families can be dysfunctional as well, and these unsuccessful families have also been studied extensively from a sociological perspective.³ In these cases, the family is researched with respect to its function in demographical descriptions of social organizations.

When we address the family in this book, we do not so much refer to the extensive sociological studies on the family. Our references will be taken from studies in the humanities, especially philosophy and esthetics. Questions of identity, particular esthetic traditions, and ethical concerns will therefore inform our analyses. Moreover, all of the chapters in this book analyze particular media texts (fiction films, documentaries, television series, and home videos) and look at how in these particular texts the family is (re)presented. The underlying questions are always related to the double meaning of the title of the book: how is the family redefined or even undermined by the forces of globalization, migration and intercultural encounters, and what is the function of media in this redefinition of the family?

¹ See www.imagineic.nl.

² Bron Ingoldsby and Suzanna Smith (eds.), *Families in Multicultural Perspective* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995).

³ See, for example, Richard Kagan and Shirley Schlosberg, *Families in Perpetual Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989).

In film and television studies, the family has always been discussed in relation to particular genres, especially the filmed melodrama and the televisual soap. Melodramas and soap operas are often compared as “women’s genres” in their emphasis on family relations. In her anthology *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, Christine Gledhill has collected important studies on the melodramatic field in media studies.⁴ The title of Gledhill’s anthology basically refers to the emotional ties and tears (the heart), related to the domain of the home and the family, that are connoted as feminine.

Theoretically, the family in film and television studies has often been related to the Freudian notion of the Oedipal family.⁵ Numerous important studies have emphasized the Oedipal plot of all classical films, and as such the psychoanalytical family can be considered as an important paradigm to interpret the world of cinema. Psychoanalysis even featured as a double bill, so to speak, both in the family melodrama of the 1940s and ‘50s, and in the work of film scholars in the late 1970s interested in these films. More specifically, in “Tales of Sound and Fury”, also in Gledhill’s collection, Thomas Elsaesser psychoanalytically case read the esthetics of symbolic excess in the films of Douglas Sirk and Vincente Minelli, but not without acknowledging the irony of jested folk versions of Freudian theory appearing in the diegetic world of the very same family melodramas.⁶

The study of the cinematic family melodrama has been related to its predecessor, the music theatre of the nineteenth-century, particularly to highlight the continuity of popular culture’s interest in the bourgeois nuclear family. In a humanities tradition, this connection to the nineteenth-century is particularly relevant, because the bourgeois family is not only represented in popular culture for the first time, it is also theorized for the first time by philosophers who were thinking about the ways in which the nineteenth-century household (*oikos*) had changed significantly in the modern economy. Modern economies no longer identify the family home as a workplace, and thus the “private” family was born. The gen-

⁴ See, e.g., Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman’s Film* (London: BFI, 1987). And for television: Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, “Psychoanalysis, Film and Television” (In *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled* edited by Richard Allen. London: Routledge, 1992, pp. 203-246), and Laura Stempel Mumford, “Feminist Theory and Television Studies” (In *The Television Studies Book* edited by Christine Geraghty and David Lusted. London: Arnold Publishers, 1998, pp. 114-130).

⁵ See, for instance, Raymond Bellour, Philip Rosen, Jean-Louis Baudry, and feminist interpretations of this paradigm such as Mulvey, Delauretis, Doane (In *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, edited by Philip Rosen. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). With the Oedipal family, Freud (and later Lacan) emphasized the initial symbiotic bond between mother and child and the importance of the father in breaking this bond. Although the (male) child first refuses the father (the Oedipus complex), he will eventually identify with the father in order to be able to take his normative place in society as an adult.

⁶ Thomas Elsaesser, “Tales of Sound and Fury”. In Gledhill. pp. 43-69.

dered role of “home maker” that appeared prominently in the family melodrama is preconditioned by economical, industrial change, which have moved “work” from home-based industries into the factories.

Hence, nineteenth-century cultural history is rightly identified as an important resource for contemporary media studies dealing with the family. However, tempting as it may seem to originate our own, mediated family culture in a seemingly straightforward genealogy of capitalist economy, we should better understand the early nineteenth-century nuclear family as a representation of a cultural crisis. Indeed, the early twenty-first-century changes in the significance of family life, expressed by the ambiguity of mediated shootings of the family, are prefigured by early nineteenth-century ambiguities in the signification of the “natural” family. But before we go into detail on the ambiguities of the family as a resource of intercultural values, let us first consider the changes in the family household.

From Households to Homelands

In the classic genres of the melodrama and soap opera, “home” is a very important concept in relation to the family. The *homeland* is almost never an issue. The home as “household” is automatically in the homeland. However, with increased migration, home is no longer automatically connected to the homeland, and the family is often torn between the place where the family members live (home) and the place where they were born (homeland). In his collection of essays about migration, *The Freedom of the Migrant*, Vilem Flusser argues that homeland, or *heimat* as he calls it, is nothing but home encased in the mystification of customs and habits.⁷ However, the people of the *heimat* remain important. Flusser recognizes the mysterious bond that connects people to their home, *heimat*, and families. After the suffering of being separated from these bonds, the migrant is free from family ties. But Flusser transforms the question “free from what?” into “free for what?” He argues that the migrant is “more free” to choose the people he is responsible for.⁸ This conception of the freedom of the migrant has a strong ethical dimension. For the moment, however, it is important to notice that with migration the terms in the traditional conception of “home is where the heart is” have shifted: the home is no longer the place of the heart (melodramatic emotions within the feminine space of the family household), but the heart (responsibility for others) has become the homeland.

⁷ Flusser writes: “for me *heimat* consists of people I choose to be responsible for” (Vilem Flusser, *The Freedom of the Migrant: Objections to Nationalism*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003, p. 11).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Transnational Media: Functions of the Imagination

The migration of people appears to be profoundly connected to the transnational and global exchange of images and information. The fact that films, television images, and digital information are distributed globally within seconds is related to the fact that we – both settlers and migrants – are “losing our houses”:

Viewed externally, walls are collapsing because they are being perforated by cables, but this expresses something internal as well.... Both objects and subjects are disintegrating into calculated grains of sand, but the relational network, a *mathesis universalis*, is becoming visible behind this desert. That is where experience lies. We are becoming nomads.⁹

In this crisis of culture, in this loss of the materiality of our homes, in this desert of unconnected grains of sand, Flusser invokes a new unified science, undoubtedly transmitted by the new media of our times. Unlike the new media of Benedict Anderson’s nineteenth-century *Imagined Communities*, the new media of our times will continuously transgress the borders of the nation-state.¹⁰ Indeed, the nation was imagined in and through the print media of the nineteenth-century, effectively preconditioning the nation-state, i.e., the successful synthesis of the Enlightenment’s call for rational procedures and Romanticism’s call for natural ground by taking the patriarchal family as a model for the organization of the nation-state. Yet, today’s new media such as transnational cinema and global television, and particularist media such as home videos distributed on television and the Internet, establish themselves across the borders of the nation-state, not losing anything of their imaginative power to forge ethnic, exilic, and diasporic (not national) communities of “nomads” around the globe. The ever-growing group of transnational films are described by Hamid Naficy as “accented cinema”, the “accent” referring to the modes of production, style, and themes that deviate both from traditional national and especially from dominant Hollywood cinema.¹¹ The ways in which the family is imagined in this accented type of cinema and other transnational media will return as regular points of reference throughout this book.

⁹ Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

¹¹ Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

Intercultural Values: Questions of Ethics

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the enlightened perspective on procedural order in society, i.e., the state, was criticized for its lack of human proportions, for its inherent violence against whatever would escape its rational control. The nineteenth-century natural family of bloodlines, therefore, was invested with political significance. In contradistinction to the modern, procedural state, the family's "natural hierarchies" were presented as a model for societal coherence, i.e., the nation.¹² The natural family of the nineteenth-century can be considered, therefore, as both a remedy against and a symptom of modernity. Similarly, twenty-first-century renewed investments in the values supposedly inherent in the nuclear family increase the pressure on the concept of family. In both the nineteenth and the twenty-first centuries, the pairing of both sexes as the basis of bloodlines for determining personal identity has been presented as nature's own, authentic opposition to modernity's hold on everyday life.¹³ In the twenty-first century, this expression of the desire for stability projects the family as the answer to a cultural crisis caused by the contradictions of globalization, of technologically advanced mobilities on the one hand, and the confinement of migrant bodies on the other. Investing the family with "natural" significance can be considered as an expression of, again, anti-modern sentiment. But it runs a risk. If indeed the family is overcharged, "gets shot", so to speak, the remedy will have been counterproductive. That is why contemporary negotiations of the significance of the family in and through the media should always be considered as potentially ambiguous: mediated families are both a symptom of and a remedy to cultural crisis.

The family, then, is again featuring prominently as a resistant resource of values and norms. To understand the resourcefulness of the family in this respect, we should first particularize the cultural crisis of the twenty-first century. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri diagnose the upheaval caused by globalization as a crisis of the nation-state. According to them, this crisis has led us towards the net-

¹² See, for example, Isaiah Berlin who characterizes Johann Gottfried Herder's (1744-1803) anti-Enlightenment convictions: "Nature creates nations, not States.... Why should hundreds suffer hunger and cold to satisfy... the dreams bred by the fancy of a *philosophe*? This may be directed specifically at Frederick the Great and his French advisers, but the import of it is universal. All rule of men over fellow men is unnatural. True human relations are those of father and son, husband and wife, sons, brothers, friends, men; these terms express natural relations which make people happy" (Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*, edited by Henry Hardy. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000, pp. 181-2).

¹³ In his book *De Romantische orde* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2004), Maarten Doorman, inspired by Isaiah Berlin's *The Roots of Romanticism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1999), gives an elaborate analysis of the connections between nineteenth-century Romanticism and contemporary culture.

work society of *Empire*. It is within *Empire*, or shall we say in the transition towards *Empire*, that the natural family again is called upon in anti-modern strategies.¹⁴ This time round, however, the natural family is chided for being a backlash resource. Indeed, contemporary invocations of the natural family are criticized harshly by Hardt and Negri, as well as many others familiar with late nineteenth-century analyses of the ideology of “private” Western families founding bourgeois societies and capitalist economies. The critique of the ideology of capitalist distinctions between private and public realms, that coincides with the defining separation of the family from the work place, still has valuable currency in the age of *Empire*. But then again, whatever became of the natural family (i.e., the modern outcome of capitalist economy: the success of the private family) should not be mistaken for what the natural family was supposed to do.

To wit, the resources the natural family was supposed to provide in the nineteenth-century were gathered to be particularly viable rather than universally proclaimed, virtuously concrete rather than ethically abstract, and historically divergent rather than globally the same. The natural family, therefore, is seldom appropriately characterized when it is called a mere conservative projection; instead, the natural family of the nineteenth-century was supposed to provide a home for the particularity of values, and can as such be understood as a radical expression of the counter-Enlightenment. Remarkably, when today’s migrant families provide a home for intercultural values in the twenty-first century, they may very well oppose the determination of family values by the private household, just like the natural family of the early nineteenth-century articulated itself in opposition to the procedural security of the state. In this sense, the intercultural values of migrant families are as particular and contrary to universalist values as natural family values were in the counter-Enlightenment. And again, albeit less “natural” and more negotiated by institutions and political contrivances and especially by the images that mediate and present family matters across the borders of the nation-state, contemporary families may very well survive, not in spite of their historical contingency, but *because* of it. Many of today’s real families – sometimes referred to as the “reel families” of accented media – are not identical to the private families of capitalist households. Instead, migrant families re-negotiate the distinction between private and public realms, notably because in transgressing the borders of the nation-state these families make clear that the public realm of nation-state institutions cannot contain the contemporary significance of real families.

¹⁴ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). The chapters of *Shooting the Family*, including this Introduction, were written before Hardt and Negri’s *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004) was published.

Shooting the Family in Four Parts

Transnational media determine the first perspective through which this book will address contemporary families. It does so by subdividing transnational media into two parts, together harboring the first six chapters of the book. In *Part 1: The Family and the Media*, three chapters will address the media specificity of our understanding of the family. In *Part 2: Private Matters, Public Families*, the remarkable paradox of increased globalization shaped and accommodated by transnational media is the focus of the next three chapters. They all deal with the fact that the ever-widening range of contextualizations incurred by transnational media has implied a reconsideration of what seems closest to us, the private family.

The second theme of this book, intercultural values, is subdivided into two more parts. In *Part 3: Translating Family Values*, it will become clear that the perspective of interculturality in family ethics implies a specific reconsideration of values and norms, which are best addressed in terms of the theory of translation. The last part of the book deals with the question: what remains of family values after processes of globalization have resulted in the spread of moral crisis? *Part 4: Loving Families* is an attempt to substantiate a non-relativistic claim about intercultural values.

Part 1: The Family and the Media

The first part of this book, *The Family and the Media*, explores the ways in which the family is connected to different types of media representations and media uses. In Chapter 1, “Capturing the Family: Home Video in the Age of Digital Production”, José van Dijck provides a historical analysis of the ways in which the family is connected to audiovisual technologies ranging from home movies to home videos and webcams as “active modes of media production representing everyday life”. Van Dijck argues that these “home modes” of particularist media are never uniquely related to technological developments such as the movie camera, the video, and the digital camcorder. Sociocultural developments and developments in the public media, such as the representation of the family in sitcoms and reality soaps are equally important. In two case studies, analyses of *AN AMERICAN FAMILY* (PBS, 1973) and *CAPTURING THE FRIEDMANS* (Andrew Jarecki, 2003), Van Dijck demonstrates that both particularist and public media construct and reflect family life in a dialogue with each other. Moreover, although the “home modes” connote “privateness” in contrast to the “publicness” of television and documentary modes, she shows that this distinction becomes increasingly blurred in the age of digital reproduction where the technological means of the amateuristic home mode become more professional, and the professional

standards of public media allow more “raw” realism ranging from funny home movies to reality soaps. More importantly, it becomes increasingly apparent that this technological-ontological distinction has already collapsed in the face of shaping family ideals through media use.

The next two chapters explore more specifically how, within a Dutch multicultural media setting, both the “home mode” of particular and public media use and the public media themselves are related to transnational imaginations of the family. Although these chapters each focus on a very different aspect of contemporary media use, they should be read as a dialogue. In Chapter 2, Sonja de Leeuw describes the particular uses of media by children of refugees and migrants in the Netherlands. In Chapter 3, Joke Hermes and Joost de Bruin analyze the changes in the representation of the family in Dutch police series on public television. Although they do not refer directly to each other, both media uses are happening simultaneously and point towards new conceptions of family matters. In “Migrant Children Mediating Family Relations”, Sonja de Leeuw discusses the outcomes of the European research project *Children in Communication about Migration* (CHICAM). By analyzing various media products of migrant children in a school in Roosendaal (the Netherlands), De Leeuw shows how photographs, home videos, animation, and other media strategies are important in migrant children’s negotiations of competing claims with respect to self-representation and identity construction. Although migrant children certainly mediate between “old” and “new” worlds, between their country of origin and the host country, they do not necessarily hybridize their loyalties. By using media concretely in a media lab, they effectively make media their own. The children create artifacts that help to construct old (but often lost) family stories and develop future scenarios in which seemingly essentialist (non-hybrid) and more dynamic conceptions of family and identity (this is their so-called “dual discursive competence”) are not in opposition to each other.

In “The Shooting Family: Gender and Ethnicity in the New Dutch Police Series”, Joke Hermes and Joost de Bruin look at the more public side of contemporary media culture and analyze the ways in which a traditional television genre like the police series is slowly but nevertheless surely influenced by changes in society. If the televisual police team can be considered as a “shooting family”, its new members are women and ethnic “others”. Hermes and De Bruin look at two successful Dutch police series, *BAANTJER* and *SPANGEN*, and argue that both police families make room for their new members precisely by changing the ideological status of hegemonic white masculinity. *SPANGEN* presents a less traditional family, having two women at its head, and ascribes agency to the Surinamese member. Here white masculinity is rendered less hegemonic in the relationships with the female police inspectors. Perhaps more remarkable, however, is *BAANTJER*, because

even though it presents a traditional nuclear family with Inspector De Cock as its *paterfamilias*, which allows only minor agency for both the female and Indonesian member of his team, white masculinity is rendered suspicious in the crime cases.

Part 2: Private Matters, Public Families

One of the points that is evident from the first part of the book is that together with the reel family – both in the home mode and in public media – the relationship between private and public changes. Part two of this book, *Private Matters, Public Families*, develops this relationship further. In Chapter 4, “Family Portrait: Queering the Nuclear Family in François Ozon’s *SITCOM*”, Jaap Kooijman demonstrates that the work of French filmmaker Ozon is obsessed with literal shootings of the bourgeois family and the staging of alternative family portraits. After the death of the hegemonic white bourgeois family, however, there is an afterlife for the family. In *SITCOM*, the father is quite literally killed, but the Spanish maid, her African husband, and the gay son are now, quite literally once more, in the picture. They have “queered” the nuclear family by outing the hidden (and forbidden) desires that have always been part of the private and intimate sphere of the family but now are out in the open and have become public. The queering of the family demonstrates that the private family has always been a public affair, a façade and a way of presenting oneself to the outside world. Moreover, by expressing these hidden desires, *SITCOM*, like several other contemporary movies but more explicitly than the televisual police series, addresses the changed position of the hegemonic white father figure.

Laura Copier, on the other hand, claims a more favorable and hopeful position for the father figure (albeit not the white father) in Chapter 5: “Radicalism Begins at Home: Fundamentalism and the Family in *MY SON THE FANATIC*”. In *MY SON THE FANATIC* (Udayan Prasad, 1997), the father of a Pakistani migrant family in England struggles with the Islamic radicalism of his son. Through a detailed analysis of the mise-en-scène of this film, Copier demonstrates that radicalism and fundamentalism, as a way of claiming a space of one’s own, is not purely a religious matter; she finds its seeds in the family home itself. Copier reads the spatial distributions of the characters in the film in terms of several oppositional pairs: British vs. Pakistani, older generation vs. younger generation, and most importantly, private vs. public. During the family conflict, the private home of the Pakistani family loses its privacy and becomes a public space. After the climax in the conflict, it is the father who finally opens up a new (albeit quite uncertain) space for new negotiations between father and son, Pakistani and British, and private and public spheres.

In Chapter 6, “Family Matters in *EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN*: Food Envy, Family

Longing or Intercultural Knowledge through the Senses?” Tarja Laine presents another, remarkably direct approach to private family matters. The film *EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN* (Ang Lee, 1994) presents family matters through the senses, especially related to food. The father figure in this film, a widowed master chef, cooks elaborate dinners for his three daughters, who visit him but barely touch the food. After his wife died, the father lost his sense of smell and taste. When at the end of the film he recovers these senses, family relations have changed as well, and a new balance between Eastern and Western identity is found. In the second part of her chapter, Laine criticizes the way in which she herself as a Western spectator has used her private knowledge and especially the private faculties of the senses to understand this type of intercultural cinema. Is such an understanding just a “projection” of food envy and family longing, or is it possible to develop intercultural knowledge through the senses?

Part 3: Translating Family Values

Laine’s analysis touches upon the question of translation between different cultures. Although family matters seem to have certain universal values, family values nevertheless differ considerably from culture to culture. In the third part of the book, *Translating Family Values*, the problems connected to translations of intercultural family values are discussed in three different ways. In Chapter 7, “Saved by Betrayal? Ang Lee’s Translations of ‘Chinese’ Family Ideology”, Jeroen de Kloet reads Ang Lee’s work as a continuous reworking of Chinese family ideology. Lee’s diasporic biography between Asia and America informs his films with both Chinese Confucian and Western family ideologies. Inspired by Walter Benjamin’s and Rey Chow’s conceptions of the impurity of translations, De Kloet analyzes *THE WEDDING BANQUET* (1993), *THE ICE STORM* (1997), *CROUCHING TIGER HIDDEN DRAGON* (2000), and *HULK* (2003) as developing stages in Lee’s critique of the four elements of Confucian family ideology: harmony, hierarchy, patriarchy, and piety towards the parents. With each film, Lee translates these values differently, thereby betraying the original values and turning them impure. With the last film, *HULK*, Lee really stirs the concept of the family, of any family, which is an ambiguous experience, a mixture of pleasure and pain. However, the question of whether life beyond the family is much better, remains to be answered.

In Chapter 8, “Eurydice’s Diasporic Voice: Marcel Camus’s *BLACK ORPHEUS* and the Family in Poet’s Hell,” Catherine Lord literally gives a voice to family members previously unheard. Lord connects Julia Kristeva’s psychoanalytic ideas about (idiosyncratic) poetry and Benedict Anderson’s theory about the formation of imagined communities in order to discover how in Marcel Camus’s film *BLACK ORPHEUS* (1959) the myth of Orpheus is translated in a new way. She

takes Gayatri Spivak's concept of reading-as-translation (RAT) to "mis-translate" this film, allowing the voice of the diasporic wife/mother to be heard. In a poem and a piece of prose, Lord performs this voice, indicating that it is only after the familiar family grounds of Oedipal fathers and sons are left that other voices and hidden stories can be heard.

In Chapter 9, "Archiving the (Secret) Family in Egoyan's *FAMILY VIEWING*", Marie-Aude Baronian looks at other kinds of hidden family stories, as well as the larger history connected to these hidden stories as they are translated into audiovisual images. By looking at the connection between the explicit use of media and the implicit questions of Armenian diasporic identity in Atom Egoyan's *FAMILY VIEWING* (1987), Baronian argues that video has an archival dimension. In her analysis of the ways in which the medium both erases and inscribes the forgotten history of the Armenian genocide at the beginning of the twentieth century, she shows that shooting the family means archiving the family. It exemplifies the desire to remember it, but it also means exposing the family to its original potential of future destruction.

Part 4: Loving Families

Baronian's analysis points towards dimensions of responsibility in audiovisual media and its relation to constructing and preserving, manipulating, and remembering not only family histories but also histories of larger communities. The last part of this book, *Loving Families*, tries to responsibly deal with the question of whether there are any family values left now that we know about the unavoidable uncertainties invoked by intercultural translations. In Chapter 10, "Suspending the Body: Biopower and the Contradictions of Family Values", Sudeep Dasgupta returns to the value theory of Marx, which according to him is a fruitful theory to help unpack the numerous contradictions and inequalities involved in the different ways that the body of the migrant moves (or is obstructed from moving) in discourses of race, nation, economics and family. By analyzing some of these contradictions in the way the body of a young *beur* (second-generation immigrant of North African origin) in *LES TERRES FROIDES* (Sebastian Lifshitz, 1998) is coded as worker, as lover, as racial other, and as the son of a French father, Dasgupta criticizes the concept of biopower. Presented by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their book *Empire*, biopower suggests that direct resistance to global capitalist culture is possible through the (uncoded) body of the migrant. Dasgupta examines whether in *LES TERRES FROIDES* it is biopower that drives the protagonist in his search for his French father. *LES TERRES FROIDES* lets the French antagonist reject his son, but not without, in a sense, establishing a negative bond between them. In the end, the *beur* son enters the family home by literally penetrating his

half-brother. Notably, the bourgeois family presented in *LES TERRES FROIDES* is not at all the perfect bourgeois family that stands for the French nation-to-be-resisted. Family values are established by the *beur* son and the French father, both coded by an intercultural and interracial dialectic between desire and disgust.

While in *LES TERRES FROIDES* the *beur* son makes visible the intercultural contradictions within the construction of the hegemonic bourgeois family, in Chapter 11 “Unfamiliar Film: Sisters Unsettling Family Habits”, Wim Staat emphasizes the responsibilities of the older sister in Diaspora cinema. The older sister makes visible what is habitually concealed in the family. By using Claude Lefort’s distinction between politics and the political, Staat demonstrates in which ways Naficy’s transnational “accented” films of diasporic filmmakers can be seen as political. He analyzes three films by three diasporic filmmakers, *L’AUTRE CÔTÉ DE LA MER* (Dominique Cabrera, 1997), *FLOATING LIFE* (Clara Law, 1996), and *THE ADJUSTER* (Atom Egoyan, 1991) and distinguishes several sisterly roles. The sister appears to embody both private and public responsibilities, among them the responsibility to unsettle family habits. Remarkably, it is only after these family habits are interrupted that the responsibilities of the sister can be acknowledged.

In the final chapter, “Micropolitics of the Migrant Family in Accented Cinema: Love and Creativity in Empire”, Patricia Pisters argues against the Utopian investment in the “creativity of the multitude” that Hardt and Negri attribute to migrants, whom they call “new barbarians” because these migrants can escape all normative powers of Empire, including those institutionalized by the family. Pisters looks at three films that deal with migration: *BOUJAD, A NEST IN THE HEAT* (Bellabes, 1992-1995), *DES VACANCES MALGRÉ TOUT* (Malek Bensmail, 2000), and *MILLE ET UN JOURS* (Mieke Bal et al., 2003). Pisters argues that these films demonstrate that the “new barbarians” of today are not simply escaping all constraint, and certainly not the family’s. By specifically filming the family, the “new barbarians” are creating fabulations and performative “speech acts” that “may help, very modestly and almost imperceptibly, to creatively renew both migrants and settlers”. Whereas Hardt and Negri seem to proclaim the revolution of the new barbarian, these films call for a revolutionary becoming of all kinds of subjects, marked and enriched by intercultural encounters.

After 12 chapters, then, there is no doubt that families have changed. They are mediated by film, television, home video, documentaries, and the like; moreover, they are mediators of changing cultural values themselves. The family embodies and negotiates values. We have traveled together with the family, and we have crossed many borders underway to new values in a globalized world. It has been a family trip with many stopovers that began with a historical, phenomenological inquiry into the nature of mediated families. Young children, queer family mem-

bers, diasporic mothers and postcolonial fathers, responsible sisters and *beur* sons, they have all been on the move, and they have all been caught on camera. Together they form a migrant family that has renegotiated the demarcations of private space with consequences for the historiography of future generations. Despite the pressures put on this family, it has survived and become stronger, because beyond the nuclear family lie extended families in which hegemonic white masculinity is shot, in which previously unheard voices sound, and in which the old family values of love and responsibility for others resist postcolonial relativism.

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Part 1
The Family and the Media

Capturing the Family: Home Video in the Age of Digital Reproduction

José van Dijck

Upon returning home from work, a colleague of mine was buoyantly greeted by his ten-year-old daughter. She begged him to fetch his camcorder and come to her room, where she was playing with two other girls – a karaoke of sorts in which they combined song and dance with typical kid’s fits of laughter and fun. “You need to tape us because when we’re famous they’ll show this on TV,” his daughter explained, with a sense of urgency. The two girls’ motivation for being filmed betrayed a sophisticated reflexivity of the camcorder as a tool for producing future memories. This awareness was most likely triggered by contemporary television programs – anything from so-called reality TV and lost-relative shows to dating shows and celebrity interviews – that deploy home video footage to represent a person’s past life. The girls not only grasped the significance of moving images as a memory tool, but they also showed a complex understanding of the nature of mediation: whereas the camcorder registers their private lives, in the context of television these images may also help shape their public identity. Even at this young age, children apprehend the constructedness of mediated experience: the camcorder and television camera construct family life simultaneously and by the same means as they construct our memory of it.

In his excellent study of the home video, James Moran has theorized the historical and cultural specificity of the “home mode” – the place of home movies/videos in a gradually changing media landscape.¹ Rather than identifying the home movie or home video according to its ontological purity or as a technical apparatus, Moran rethinks the “home mode” as a historically changing effect of technological, social, and cultural determinations, a set of discursive codes that helps us negotiate the meaning of individuals in response to their shared social environment. The “home mode” is not simply a technological device deployed in

¹ James Moran, *There’s No Place like Home Video* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

a private setting (the family), but is defined by Moran as an active mode of media production representing everyday life, a “liminal space in which practitioners may explore and negotiate the competing demands of their public, communal, and private personal identities”.² The “home mode” articulates a generational continuity over time, providing a format for communicating family legends and stories, yet it concurrently adapts to technological transformations, such as the introduction of new types of equipment: first the movie camera, later the video, and more recently the digital camcorder. Significantly, the “home mode” also changes in response to the introduction of new cultural forms, for instance, the showing of the funniest home movies on television. And last but not least, the “home mode” is affected by social transformations such as the position of the family in Western society.

Over the past fifty years, media practices used to capture the family have changed in conjunction with the position of the family in Western societies. In this chapter, I analyze how the verb “capturing” refers to both the medium and its object: video and TV – twin tools of visual representation – mediate and are themselves mediated by notions of family. As Moran poignantly sums up: “While we use these media audiovisually to represent family relations to ourselves, we also use family relations discursively to represent these media to each other.”³ I will first explore the significance of intertwined technological, cultural, and social changes in the “home mode” of the past decades and analyze how these changes echo in historical media portraits of American families. We need this history in order to understand how, in the age of camcorders and digital communication, the “home mode” continues to construct and reflect family life as well as our memory of it. This contemporary reflexivity, illustrated by the children’s request for the father’s camcorder, also becomes explicitly manifest in a number of recent uses of the “home mode” in documentaries, television series, and on the World Wide Web.

Transforming the Home Mode: From Home Movie to Home Video

From the early beginnings of film, consumer technologies like movie cameras have been drafted into the depiction of family life, whether as tools for idealization or inquiry and criticism. While quite a few studies have been written on home movies in relation to the history of film or photography, few scholars have paid attention to the transformation of technologies in conjunction with changing social

² Ibid., p. 59.

³ Ibid., p. 103.

and cultural patterns of family life.⁴ As Patricia Zimmerman points out in her classic study of amateur film in the twentieth century, the invention of increasingly lighter cameras seduced ever more parents into chronicling their children, thus providing a visual homage to the familialism of post-war America: “Home movie-making, then, synchronized with the elevation of the nuclear family as the ideological center of all meaningful activity in the fifties.”⁵ Nevertheless, and in spite of Zimmerman’s suggestive observation of synchronicity between the success of the home movie and the prevalence of nuclear-family ideology, even Zimmerman and Richard Chalfen uncritically transpose the technological and ideological effects of the home *movie*, onto “home modes” prevalent in later decades. As a historical cultural practice, however, home-movie making was never the result of purely technical conditions, but derived its meaning from relations to simultaneous developments in social and cultural life.

The growth of the suburban family in the 1950s is inextricably intertwined with the emergence of television as a symbol of individual wealth and social cocooning. Television and home movies share many similarities. As television entered the private homes of the 1950s, images of screen families started to fill up living rooms across America and shaped the concept of the nuclear, suburban family unit. Not coincidentally, many televised families, like those portrayed in *LEAVE IT TO BEAVER* or *THE ADVENTURES OF OZZIE AND HARRIET*, conflated real life and screen reality; Ozzie and Harriet also formed a couple in real life. Capturing one’s own family in the 1950s and 1960s meant to imitate the idealized family as shown on TV. The possession of an 8 mm camera in itself signaled the newly acquired material wealth that was prominently shown off both in television series and the home movies of these decades. On the one hand, a parent’s home movie camera functioned as a confirmation of intimate family life, an amateur production that sharply defined itself against the increasingly popular public images of families on television. On the other hand, home movies enabled one to freeze precious moments in the past, which could then be retrieved in order to entertain the family in the present. As objects of memory, home movies feature a family’s life as a concatenation of ritual highlights, from birthday parties to first steps, and from weddings to graduation ceremonies. The ability to record everyday events, to construct family life as-it-was, signified the power to model bliss and happiness after the ideal shown on television. Although home movie productions appeared to connote “privateness” in contrast to the “publicness” of televised images, this

⁴ For exceptions, see Richard Chalfen, *Snapshots Versions of Life* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Press, 1987) and Patricia Zimmerman, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

⁵ *Reel Families*, p. 134.

technological-ontological distinction obviously collapses in the face of the mutual shaping of family ideals.

As the 8 mm movie cameras of the 1950s and 1960s gave way to the video cameras of the 1970s and 1980s, the style and content of the “home mode” changed accordingly, contrasting the hegemonic portrayal of idealized families, even if never replacing it. In terms of its material apparatus, the lightweight video camera equipped the amateur user with an unobtrusive instrument to record everyday life. Video’s ontology, unlike film, was no longer based in chemical but rather in electronic image processes, allowing for an unmediated display of moving images on the television screen. Video culture, as Sean Cubitt contends, promoted a “metaphysics of presence”: A documentary style which favored the inconspicuous presence of a camera as a fly-on-the-wall, as if the filmmaker had blended in with the natural environment.⁶ It would be far too simple to reduce the *vérité*-style of an era to the effect of a newly introduced media technology, but it is certainly no coincidence that video provided a way for capturing ordinary people’s life-as-it-is in addition to the prevailing idealized way of filming everyday life-as-it-was.

The home video became a potential instrument for recording quotidian reality, even if this reality did not live up to the traditions of family portraiture. A lightweight video camera lends itself much more than the 8 mm camera to unexpected and unobtrusive shootings; a family row or a sibling secretly stealing a cookie no longer evaded the discreet eye of the camera. And that new apparatus seemed particularly suitable to recording an everyday family life that was quickly changing in the wake of larger social and cultural transformations. A political climate with increasing protests against established norms of patriotism and paternalism defined this new generation of young adults; large numbers vocally opposed their parent’s values about class, race, gender roles, sexual, and personal identity. The nuclear family became a contested concept, as a new generation paved the way for sexual liberation, emancipation and social diversity.⁷ Home video defined itself in opposition to home movies, as a subversive mode to the nuclear family ideal privileged by 1950s home movies. In addition, amateur or home video also came to define itself in opposition to television as a tool for rebelling against mainstream, collective values: community activists, gay and women’s liberation movements used this medium to spread “other” concepts of identity and life style to counter homogeneous mass media images. Video thus became a weapon in the struggle for emancipation, further confounding the cleft between the purported privateness of video and publicness of television images.

⁶ Sean Cubitt, *Timeshift: On Video Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999, p. 37).

⁷ See Arlene Skolnick, *Embattled Paradise: The American Family in an Age of Uncertainty* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

Yet, once again, we need to point out the codependent relationship between domestic television and home video. Starting in the late 1960s, images of family as conveyed by typical postwar television series, and prolonged by series like *THE BRADY BUNCH* and *THE PARTRIDGE FAMILY*, were gradually supplemented by portrayals of less ideal and more “realistic” families, such as the Bunkers in Norman Lear’s popular *ALL IN THE FAMILY*, which started in 1971. Frequent confrontations between Archie Bunker and his son-in-law Michael – a second-generation, Polish immigrant nicknamed “meathead” – played out contemporary generational conflicts over political convictions, gender politics, and race relations in a society characterized by upheaval and rapidly changing norms. The discrepancies between these depictions of American families and the idealized images in domestic sitcoms were all too poignant. Contrary to popular belief, American networks have always produced portraits of dysfunctional families as a counterpoint to idealized family series.⁸ Television never single-authored the hegemonic “public” identity of the American family, just as the home video never uniquely covered the private lives of individuals. Instead, as James Moran aptly observes, “each medium attempts to provide a home audience’s hankering for audiovisual images of themselves, borrowing from each other over time, thus inventing and reinventing each other’s conventions of representation and patterns of interpersonal communication”.⁹ Television and home video mutually shaped the “home mode” in this historical time frame.

There is no better illustration of the entanglement of TV and home video in this era than the PBS series *AN AMERICAN FAMILY*. A new genre, that of family portrait documentary, was coming of age in the early 1970s when young filmmakers started to experiment with the new techniques of cinema vérité.¹⁰ *AN AMERICAN FAMILY*, a twelve-part documentary series, premiered on January 11, 1973, and captured seven months in the life of a “real” California family – the couple Pat and Bill Loud and their five teenaged children Lance, Kevin, Grant, Delilah, and Michele. Producer Craig Gilbert and filmmakers Alan and Susan Raymond followed each member of the household at a turbulent time in their lives – the Louds’ marriage ended in a divorce, the oldest son Lance came out as gay, and the family unit was literally splitting up. “Meet TV’s first real family tonight and share their lives in the 11 weeks to follow” as a PBS announcement described this new television for-

⁸ See Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) and Ella Taylor, *Prime-Time Families: Television Cultures in Postwar America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

⁹ *There’s No Place like Home Video*, p. 106.

¹⁰ Jim Lane, *The Autobiographical Documentary in America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), pp. 94-5.

mat.¹¹ The immensely popular series struck a chord with the American audience, as the Louds' turmoil mirrored quite a few experiences that "real" families encountered in this decade of change. The center was not holding – to echo Yeat's famous dictum ascribed to the post-1968 generation by Joan Didion – and TV was recording its falling apart.

Since the series itself, as a unique and revolutionary media phenomenon, has received due scholarly attention¹², I will here zoom in on the construction of the "home mode" in *AN AMERICAN FAMILY*, because it exemplifies the struggle with codes inscribed in the home movies of the 1950s, in favor of the newer, more immediate style of home video and cinema vérité. The conventions of realism were changing toward capturing the mood and feel of everyday life, conveying a sense of being there and staying tuned even if that reality was not pretty.¹³ *AN AMERICAN FAMILY* subscribed to this new style as it suited the function of capturing family-life-as-it-is. In the words of the PBS announcement: "The Louds are not actors. They had no scripts. They simply lived. And were filmed." Film crews that followed the Louds, as Jeffrey Ruoff relates in his reconstruction of the series, became part of the furniture and their presence went almost unnoticed by the Loud family members, even while recording the couple's rows over Bill's extramarital affairs and their decision to file for divorce.¹⁴ Lance, the oldest son, lived in New York and received a lightweight Portapak recorder to document his own observations in addition to being filmed. This direct-cinema style sharply contrasted the photographic and home movie images edited into the series in order to visualize the Loud's past family life. As Ruoff explains:

The home movies and family photographs themselves represent an important detour from the observational focus on images and sounds recorded in the present. The Loud's home movies chronicle festive occasions such as Thanksgiving dinners and baby Lance taking his first steps. These nostalgic recollections suggest happier times, offering a powerful contrast to the Loud's contemporary lives.¹⁵

¹¹ Jeffrey Ruoff, *An American Family: A Televised Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. xvii.

¹² The series has been exhaustively reviewed in the press since it aired in 1973 and after; there have also been numerous academic articles written that deal with *AN AMERICAN FAMILY* and its documentary mode. For an overview, I would like to refer to the extensive bibliography included in Ruoff's *An American Family: A Televised Life*.

¹³ See Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

¹⁴ *An American Family. A Televised Life*, p. 29.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

Those incremental snippets of home movies and photographs not only signify life-as-it-was for the Louds, they also serve as a confirmation of collective memory of the 1950s as an era of happiness and peaceful family life scaffolded by ceremonial, ritual signposts and cemented in a transparent social structure with distinct roles for each family member. The camera registering life-as-it-is stands in opposition to the previous “home mode” in both style and content, as it articulates the era’s crumbling normative ideals by fixating the camera on the “other” side of family life: an emancipating housewife, a homosexual son, an unfaithful husband. The Loud’s new, mediated memories are recorded in a different fashion because the family can no longer live up to the ideal that had previously been constructed through the lens of the home movies.

The oppositional “home modes” featured in *AN AMERICAN FAMILY* are clearly in dialogue, just as the PBS series is in dialogue with its fictional counterparts on television, both conventional and more subversive sitcoms such as *ALL IN THE FAMILY*. But whereas the fictional generational conflicts played out by the Bunkers are filled with historically determined conflicts concerning sexuality, politics (Vietnam), identity, and race, the confrontations in America’s “first real family on television” are much less historically determinable, as they only casually allude to pressing political events or social debates raging at that time. The “realist” record of a family falling apart, even if this reality was presented in the condensed and edited format of a twelve-part series, itself became a milestone in the history of American television. What attracted the audience at the time was most likely the way in which the Louds explored and negotiated the competing demands of their private personal identities and prevailing collective norms in front of an observational public eye. The documentary camera, long before the introduction of the so-called “reality TV” in the 1990s, became a constitutive element in the shaping of family life and personal identity. All of the family members, but most notably Pat Loud and her eldest son Lance, conceded in hindsight that the presence of a film crew in their house forever changed family life, even decades after the series was aired. Pat Loud wrote a book about her experiences and frequently appeared on television, also when *AN AMERICAN FAMILY* was “revisited” by camera crews ten, fifteen, and twenty years after the premiere. Lance Loud, who became a filmmaker himself, even furbished the “last episode” of the series: WNET/PBS aired a production of his struggle with, and eventual succumbing to, HIV/AIDS in 2001. Capturing the family, as a scheme for understanding and remembering, became a constitutive part of family life – an act that both reflected and constructed the basic notions of individuality and togetherness, of deviation and belonging. The “home mode” became substantially altered in the 1970s and 1980s, along with the American family and its audiovisual representation through “public” and “private” media.

The Home Mode in the Age of Digital Technology

It is imperative to understand the evolution of the “home mode” and its technological, social and cultural constituents, because without recognizing its historical roots it will be difficult to account for its specificity as we enter the digital age. New technological devices, such as the digital camcorder, the World Wide Web, the webcam, the DVD and the compact disc, are not in and of themselves triggers for new cultural forms. As I have argued above, a medium is both a material and a social construct, whose metaphors and models provide a horizon for decoding present knowledge. With the emergence of a new digital apparatus, traditional analogue image-making tools are replaced by a set of algorithmic codes that are stored and distributed in digital structures, independent of their aesthetic or functional content. Along with this fundamentally altered technological base comes a succinct difference in meaning attached to digital as opposed to analogue video. Moran appropriately describes this difference as: “Digital icons undermine the authority of the video image and distance the artist from the actual process of image creation: whereas analogue video’s aesthetic has been valued as immediate, literal, and naturalistic, digitized video is more often construed as contrived, synthetic, and analytic.”¹⁶ Indeed, digital video in many ways destabilizes the supposed “naturalness” of analogue video, as an emerging digital infrastructure shifts the center of gravity from simply *shooting* to complete *processing*, from *observational* filming to ubiquitous *surveillance*, and from image-sound recordings to *multi-media productions*.

Let me explain each of these prominent shifts in greater detail. With regard to the digital camcorder, it is no longer uncommon for amateurs to supplement video shooting with home editing and distribution. Today’s computer hardware and software makes it possible to create near-professional standards of editing and full-fledged productions, complete with subtitles, sound, and sophisticated montage. Burned onto a DVD, the family’s summer vacation in Cuba is now an audiovisual product that may compete technically and stylistically with travel programs featured on television. Future distribution to a potentially worldwide audience will be easily achieved if bandwidth increasingly permits the downloading and uploading of large files on the Internet. Secondly, whereas fly-on-the-wall cinema techniques set the standards for arresting “reality” in an era of analogue video, the webcam can these days be considered the symbolic hook for “life-as-it-is”. A naturalistic mode of filming gives way to a surveillant mode of recording: fixed webcams cover all an unwitting subject’s movements. Even if the subjects are aware of the camera’s presence, there is no actual intervention from a camera

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

crew. This mode of surveillance is not only frequently applied in public areas, where cameras control the movements of passengers, but the webcam installed in a home is also rapidly becoming a common means of self-exposure on the World Wide Web.¹⁷ Finally, traditional home movie and video image-sound recordings increasingly yield to multimedia productions integrating documents, pictures, texts, (moving) images and links to webpages. Multimedia productions on DVD no longer privilege the chronologically ordered visual narrative prescribing a viewer's reading, but also promote browsing through a library of connected files and (sub)texts. The digital cultural form breaks with inscribed codes of sequential episodes, allowing past and present images – even if they are shot in different technical modes – to merge to create a hybrid media product. In sum, digital tools appear to give the individual amateur more autonomy and power over a more complex, (multi) mediated portrayal.

A new media apparatus, as mentioned above, affects the practices of production in conjunction with ideologies of the home that reconstitute the family as a discursive domestic space. So how does the “home mode” in the era of digital technologies change along with notions of family and past and present representations thereof? For one thing, the digital mode suits the contemporary, fractured notions of family and individuality. As Moran observes, families in the 1990s and the twentieth-first century are no longer “natural” units; they are “families we choose” or domestic relationships between individuals that are often constructed as family ties.¹⁸ Extending the home video logic of the 1980s (the “real” family captured in its rebellion against normative domestic values), the camcorder of the 1990s allots even more power to individual users to construct their own views of family. According to Keith Beattie, the digital camcorder is “creating new visual styles that situate the viewer in an intimate relationship with the subject of autobiography”, due to the absence of a camera crew or the need for a producer/editor.¹⁹ Instead, the family we choose is the family that chooses to film itself, giving it a more direct voice and more power over their representation. In an era that popularizes the presence of webcams in a connected home, that home is increasingly filled with televised images of families-under-surveillance. New conventions of reality programming define what constitutes a “real family”: a number of individuals who voluntarily move into a house, succumbing to a regime of creat-

¹⁷ See Sheila C. Murphy, “Lurking and Looking: Webcams and the Construction of Cybervisuality” (In *Moving Images: From Edison to Webcam*, edited by John Fullerton and Astrid Söderbergh Widding. London: John Libbey, 2000, pp. 173-180) and Michele White, “Too Close to See: Men, Women, and Webcams” (*New Media and Society*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2003, pp. 7-28).

¹⁸ *There's No Place like Home Video*, p. 47.

¹⁹ Keith Beattie, *Documentary Screens: Nonfiction Film and Television* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 105.

ed conditions, and continuously monitored by numerous surveillance cameras. The “Big Brother” effect, in a way, is the televised, formatted counterpart of circuited webcams installed in a family’s home, continuously beaming pictures of “real family life” on the Internet. The family, at the turn of the century, seems more like a unit of voluntary members, a constellation that is never natural but which may serve as a social experiment to see who survives and who does not under the scrutiny of the public eye. The “home mode” is still a space for struggle, where competing demands of individuality and collectivity are played out in cyberspace. Although the “home mode” – both in private video culture and in the public format of reality TV – allows more space for deviation from the nuclear family than before, it still bespeaks the same urge to explore the social laws of belonging and the same desire to understand the self in relation to larger units of collectivity.

The emergence of a new type of “home mode” in the digital era does not imply the disappearance of the modes previously popularized by the home movie and the home video. On the contrary, what we see in contemporary media productions is a peculiar remediation of previously dominant “home modes”; one recent production that I would like to analyze in more detail exemplifies this dialogue of “home modes” – movies, analogue video and digital media – in which each mode inscribes a historical and contemporary depiction of family life. The documentary *CAPTURING THE FRIEDMANS* (Andrew Jarecki, 2003) confronts viewers with old and new domestic representations and, perhaps more importantly, with the powerful role of media in both constructing and remembering family life.

CAPTURING THE FRIEDMANS: The Making and Breaking of a Family

Andrew Jarecki’s “document” is not just a documentary; the DVD version, which I will focus on here, renders a much more comprehensive view of the harrowing family saga he is trying to tell. The Friedmans are a typical middle-class Jewish-American family from Great Neck, Long Island, where Arnold and Elaine, both in their fifties, have raised three sons: David, Seth and Jesse. A retired school-teacher, Arnold teaches computer classes for kids in the basement of their home and is assisted by his youngest son Jesse, then eighteen. In November 1987, they were both arrested on charges of repeated sexual abuse of boys who attended these classes. The police raid heralded months of denigrating incarceration, their release on bail, a neighborhood witch hunt, and – within the Friedmans home – family rows over the best strategy to keep Arnold and Jesse out of jail. While police inspectors interview the alleged victims – boys between seven and twelve – the local news covers the scandal in all its sensational details. The family is torn apart by conflicting emotions of guilt, doubt, suspicion, and loyalty; David chooses the

side of his father and brother and resents Elaine, who is in more than one way the family's outsider. She was never convinced of Arnold's innocence, because he had lied to her in the past about his pedophile inclinations and molestations. When her endearing attempts to save Jesse, by urging both father and son to plead guilty, inadvertently backfire, her oldest son David bitterly turns against her. In separate hearings, Arnold and later his youngest son both enter guilty pleas and are sentenced to substantial jail time. Arnold eventually commits suicide in 1995 while imprisoned, and Jesse is released in 2001 after having served thirteen years of his sentence.

Although the events unfolding in retrospect before the viewers' eyes are dramatic by themselves, it is the way the Friedmans are captured that prevents this documentary from becoming either sensationalist or partisan. Rather than following a chronological narrative logic, the documentary relies on the viewer's ability to identify three different types of film and to intertwine the distinct historical and contemporary time frames to which they refer: the home movies shot by Arnold in the 1950s through the 1970s, David's home video footage recorded after the arrest in 1987, and present-day interviews conducted by Jarecki.

For starters, the documentary features home movies and family pictures shot by Arnold Friedman primarily in the period 1950s–1970s – images in perfect accordance with the conventions of home movies at the time: happy scenes of the boys' birthday parties, beach fun, and family vacations. Filming appears to be a family tradition – a narcissistic way of preserving the Friedman's heritage on tape – which we learn from an early 1940s recording that grandfather Friedman made of his six-year-old daughter, performing as a ballerina in front of the camera. We learn from Elaine's voice-over that, several months after shooting this film, Arnold's sister died of lead poisoning. The joyful pictures of Arnold's childhood form a sharp contrast to Elaine's commentary regarding her husband's admissions of having repeatedly raped his younger brother Howard while sleeping in the same bed with him. Howard, interviewed in the present by Jarecki, desperately denies having any recollection of his brother's self-confessed acts ("There is nothing there"). This incongruity between the ideal family life featured in the home movies and purported reality cues the viewer to be suspicious when David Friedman, in turn, also claims to having nothing but rosy memories of his youth. His memory is consolidated by Arnold's home movies of the boys and their father playing in great harmony, having fun, joking amongst themselves. Clearly, the home movies authenticate idyllic family life, but due to the comments made by various family members, the viewer can only doubt their status as documents verifying a happy youth.

The second type of "authentic" documentation stems from David's deployment of the video camera. Honoring the family's tradition, David had just bought

a video camera in 1987, when the family began falling apart following the arrest and the subsequent trial. In line with the conventions of 1970s and 1980s cinema vérité and home video, the camera keeps rolling as siblings engage in heated disputes at the dining table.²⁰ Mother Elaine often begs for someone to turn off the camera, but the men clearly control the family's representation and often ignore her requests. David and Jesse take turns in filming family rows but also record remarkable moments of frivolous acting – a sense of humor that obviously binds father and sons. In response to director Jarecki's question of why he started to film his family's ordeal, David says in the documentary: "Maybe I shot the video tape so I wouldn't have to remember it myself. It's a possibility. Because I don't really remember it outside the tape. Like your parents take pictures of you but you don't remember being there but just the photographs hanging on the wall." Here, David cogently identifies the power of home video and home movies as dual instruments for constructing and remembering family life. On the one hand, he needs to record his own version of reality because his father is going to jail, and he does not want his own future children and grandchildren to remember their grandfather from newspaper pictures. On the other hand, he wants to "document" his father and brother's innocence. For instance, David films Jesse while driving to the courthouse where Jesse intends to enter his guilty plea in the hopes of obtaining a reduced prison sentence. At one point, David forces his brother to admit his innocence when he asks: "Did you do it, Jess?" to which Jesse solemnly responds: "I never touched a kid." This home video footage painfully contrasts with the official court video we see later in the documentary, showing a crying, remorseful Jesse admitting his guilt to the judge – an act so convincing you no longer know which "documentary evidence" you're supposed to believe.

The video camera, evidently deployed to capture life-as-it-is, turns out to be just as unreliable as the old home-movie camera capturing life-as-it-was. Both "home modes" "record" a version of reality that may later serve as a desired benchmark for "truth" – whether this truth is a memory of ideal family life or an alternative version of an alleged sexual offence nourished by mass hysteria. Yet, what is evident from David Friedman's use of home video is that the potential of future use is already inscribed in the recording's present. At one moment during the turmoil in 1988, David turns the video camera onto himself, sitting on his bed, and starts a monologue: "This is a private thing, you know... if you're not me, you're not supposed to be watching this. This is between me and me, between me now and me in the future." Indeed, what is the rationale for making a video with-

²⁰ While David had bought and frequently used the video camera, his brother Jesse had a habit of audio taping the family's rows at the dinner table. Some of these audio-taped fights can be heard in the documentary.

out the intention of using it to tell the family story someday, in some form? David and Jesse undoubtedly utilize the home video to assert some measure of control over the events as they are unfolding, perhaps in an attempt to avoid the family breaking up. But in doing so, they consciously build their future defense – their personal memory of a torment that was, in their version, uncalled for and unjust.

The third type of footage, conventional on-camera interviews conducted by Jarecki, reframes and unsettles the documentary evidence offered by pieces from the Friedman's family archive.²¹ Interviews with family members (Arnold's brother Howard, his wife Elaine, and their sons David and Jesse; their brother Seth declined to be interviewed) are supplemented by a number of interviews with people involved in the Friedmans' indictment: their former lawyers, police investigators, alleged victims – then children, now adults, who both confirm and deny former allegations – parents of alleged victims, and an investigative reporter who wrote on the case. Intercutting contemporary interviews with old news footage and trial records, the filmmakers manage to feature many angles of the case without ever privileging one single truth. In fact, as director Jarecki suggests in an interview, the documentary serves as the trial that never was (there were only hearings in front of a judge), and the audience serves as a jury. From the puzzle of recordings, viewers ultimately decide for themselves what happened to this family.

The conundrum of slippery and quivering truth, which is clearly present in the screen version of *CAPTURING THE FRIEDMANS*, is even more palpable on the DVD version of the documentary. Needless to say, digital equipment was instrumental in the seamless cross-editing of the three (historical) types of recordings. But what makes the DVD even more powerful is the inclusion of many extras: unseen home movies, full interviews with witnesses for the prosecution, a family scrapbook with photos, and more home-video footage. In addition, the extra disc contains coverage of the discussion after the New York premiere, where many people involved in the case dispute their versions of what happened with members of the family and the filmmakers. And most significantly, the disc contains a ROM section where the viewer can read key documents, such as letters from Arnold and a police inventory of a search of the Friedmans' house. As the extra documents become an integrated part of the puzzle, the viewer is encouraged to sharpen his or her judgment by reading more "evidence", to either buttress the judge's decision and/or back up the family's defense. The seamless web of digitized documents weaves the family's narrative into an open-ended hypertext of possibilities: facts,

²¹ In the interview with Andrew Jarecki featured on the DVD, the director relates how in the middle of shooting the film, David Friedman came up with 25 hours of taped home video and consented to its being used for the documentary.

testimonies, truths, and illusions. This hypertext does not end with the DVD, but is carried on via a website that keeps its readers updated on the continuous saga of the Friedman family. David and Jesse (now released after having served 13 years of a longer sentence) try to get a retrial for Jesse based on material presented in Jarecki's film (especially his interviews with witnesses) to prove their father's and Jesse's innocence.

Conclusion

CAPTURING THE FRIEDMANS is a documentary of a "real" family in crisis, much like AN AMERICAN FAMILY was a portrait of a "real" family falling apart in the early 1970s. Both documentaries include substantial private materials from the families' shoeboxes, and their personal footage reflects the various "home modes" that have dominated our visual culture. What I have tried to show in my analyses of these films is how technical, social and cultural conditions codetermine the construction of "family" and our personal and collective memory of it. In both documentaries, we can see the disparity between the signified meaning of home movies in the 1950s as depictions of ideal families, and the signified meaning of analogue video as a record of "real" family life, even in its destabilizing stages. CAPTURING THE FRIEDMANS – both the screen version but particularly the DVD version – shows how digital equipment enables a fractured notion of family; the Friedmans amongst themselves are deeply divided over the incongruous versions of what happened to their family. This kind of fractured concept, where the final conclusion is left to the viewers' discretion, is powerfully scaffolded by the technical possibilities offered by digitization: the DVD enables the inclusion of multimedia documents (text, footage, pictures), while the World Wide Web enables continuing interaction and discussion. Two generations of "home mode" are carefully crafted into a third one. The digital production makes the viewer reflect on what constitutes a contemporary family, but, more profoundly, on the effect that media (the mixture of private footage and public coverage) have on our definition of life-as-it-is or life-as-it-was.

The reality of the Friedman family is unmistakably defined in relation to the "real" families we have seen on television since the mid-1990s. In contemporary television culture, the conventions of reality are increasingly informed by standards of so-called reality-TV, where a contrived family – whether it is ten people living in a "Big Brother" house or a group convening on a deserted island – is captured as a "reality show" by ubiquitous cameras. Television series like THE OSBOURNES (US), depicting the everyday life of a celebrity and his family, have been copied in almost every Western country. Variations on the reality format, such as GOTTSCHALK ZIEHT EIN (Germany) featuring a celebrity-television host

who invites himself to function in a “real family”, replacing or substituting the father of that home, have one thing in common: the notion of family is a contrived one, and the home setting is a staged construction. Andrew Jarecki, in an interview also included on the Friedman DVD, states that his film takes a stance against currently reigning notions of reality on television: “We are so tuned now to reality on television, but you watch the Friedmans for a minute and you see the incredible power of ‘real’ reality as opposed to that reality on CBS-TV where you see people starving on an island, but you know all the while they are surrounded by cameras...” Jarecki’s multimedia document subtly counteracts the “realist” notion of reality-TV: he tries to provide an alternative visual definition of a family unit that has never been and never will be a unity. And yet, rather than choosing to arrange a (dysfunctional) family like in most reality-series, Jarecki captures the Friedmans’ fractured reality by incorporating various “authentic” “home modes” in his documentary production. The DVD, with its many contradictory pieces of evidence, certainly expands the conventional genre of “documentary” yet rejects the genre of reality-TV. Perhaps it is important to note that the legacies of the home movie and the video are still at work in *CAPTURING THE FRIEDMANS*, just as the legacy of the documentary is still at work in reality-TV. In coming to terms with these new forms of “reality” on the screen, John Corner has coined the term “postdocumentary” to describe new forms of tele-factuality.²²

Reality or truth, as we learn from *CAPTURING THE FRIEDMANS*, can never be known, because reality – both past and present – is a product of memory as well as a production of media. Through our “home modes” we construct the memories of tomorrow. “Family” is always intrinsically captured by its instruments of mediation, and every generation has its own tools to understand and reframe that concept. If we want to understand how both media and memory change along with notions of family, we may depart from Andrew Jarecki’s improvised definition of memory in the aforementioned interview: “We think we can put our memories away in a box and we can go check on them later and they will be the same, but they are never the same; they are these electro-chemical bubbles that continue to bubble over time.” Memories, “home modes” and families always evolve together; the real challenge is to unravel these braids and recognize their historical complexity in relation to their contemporary relevance.

²² John Corner, “Performing the Real: Documentary Diversions” (*Television and New Media*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2002, pp. 255-269), p. 257.

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Filmography

- AN AMERICAN FAMILY (Public Broadcasting Service, USA: 1973) TV series directed by Alan and Susan Raymond.
- CAPTURING THE FRIEDMANS (HBO Documentary and Notorious Pictures, USA: 2003) directed by Andrew Jarecki.

Migrant Children Mediating Family Relations

Sonja de Leeuw

MY FAMILY is the simple title of several collections of family pictures taken with disposable cameras by children of different origins. The pictures were taken at their individual homes in Roosendaal, a relatively small city in the southern province of North Brabant in the Netherlands. The pictures were the result of several children joining a media club as part of a European research project called *Children in Communication about Migration (CHICAM)*.¹ The assignment was to introduce their families to people “who do not know their cultures”. The first responses to the assignment were ambivalent. The children very much liked the idea of taking a camera home to play around with. However, not all children were comfortable with the idea of taking pictures at home. For them, this would mean taking their families out of the privacy of their homes, into a public space, where their family members would be “available” to a potentially wide and unknown audience. Nevertheless, after finishing their photographic work, all of the children gave their permission to show their work to others. They wanted their pictures to be seen; they wanted to be seen themselves. In many ways, the picture series are relevant for an understanding of the concept of family in Diaspora communities.

The stories that were written along with the pictures and presented together in a small exhibition gave us only a first glimpse of how family life is experienced by refugee and migrant children, and how it has become a site of negotiating identities and memories and of reconstructing the very notion of family as a place called

¹ As a CHICAM researcher, I was involved with the Roosendaal media club during a three-year European research project funded by the European Commission. The theme was Improving Human Resource Potential and the Socio-economic Knowledge Base: New Perspectives for Learning (Framework 5). It was coordinated by the Institute of Education, Centre for the Study of Children, Youth and Media, University of London. The project ran from November 2001 to October 2004. The Dutch project team at Utrecht University (Research Institute for History and Culture) also involved media educator Frans van Lokven, MiraMedia (Ad van Dam) and research assistant Frouke Rijdsdijk. For more information about the whole project see: www.chicam.net.

“home”. As the CHICAM club work continued, the children produced more media works about how they experience family relationships. The children photographed family members in various situations mainly related to religious and ethnic circumstances. The photos, for example, show images of family members in their living rooms, at their kitchen tables, outside, praying, celebrating, sitting together, eating; we also see shots of a Somali tapestry, a Moroccan vase, and many other objects from their home countries. In this chapter, these representations will be discussed in the context of processes of identity formation. We observed the children as they dealt with the obvious cultural tensions between the “old” and the “new” world, and we found that the children operated as mediators in the construction of cultural identities. This chapter, then, follows some of these children in and through their work of mediation, and describes how children negotiate competing claims with respect to self-representation and identity construction.

Identity in Diaspora

Religion and ethnicity are just two components of what Gerd Baumann calls the “multicultural triangle”.² The third one is nationality. These three notions of culture seem to be the basic terms with which people define their identities.³ Many scholars have convincingly argued that we should leave behind essentialist notions of culture and identity and have referred to cross-cuttings of multidimensional identities that take place in urbanized Western societies.⁴ People are active negotiators of cultures, and therefore cultures in themselves cannot be reduced to finished objects. However, as people also tend to look for cultural continuity, both essentialist and non-essentialist notions of culture and identity go hand in hand: “all having of culture is a making of culture, yet all making of culture will be portrayed as an act of reconfirming an already existing potential.”⁵ People who encounter daily multicultural practices have developed a so-called “dual discursive competence”⁶ which allows them to easily switch between stereotyped and dynamic understandings of culture, between the support of a strong unified nation-

² Gerd Baumann, *The Multicultural Riddle: Rethinking National, Ethnic, and Religious Identities* (London: Routledge, 1999).

³ There are other terms as well. Even though the main focus here is on cultural identity, gender is always another aspect of social identity (as is age) and can always be interconnected with ethnicity and religion.

⁴ See for example Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” (In *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990, pp. 222-238) and Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996).

⁵ *The Multicultural Riddle*, p. 92.

⁶ *Ibid.*

al culture (e.g., via sports) and fixed religious rules, and between the notion of a global culture and a hybrid identity.

In situations of migratory displacement, in disrupted lives like those of refugee families, the notion of identity becomes unstable, sometimes even lost. It seems accurate to describe these unstable identities as hybrid. However, coping with the experiences of Diaspora, dealing with discontinuity involves a search for continuity that allows for the construction of a new “home”. For families living in the Diaspora, fundamentals are crucial. The other side of hybridity, therefore, is the need for people to redefine “home” as something they can hold on to. The notion of home is being articulated, and as such, imagined within the concept of family. It is also within the concept of the home and the family that the “multicultural triangle” of religion, ethnicity, and nationality is renegotiated.

Identity in what Stuart Hall⁷ calls the “global post modern era” means more specifically ethnic identity and often appears at the center of cultural debates. Ethnic identity is partially shaped by the media and is thus related to the struggle over cultural space in which certain representational strategies that reflect dominant discourses are active.⁸ One can easily point to the phenomenon of under-representation or misrepresentation of ethnic minorities in mainstream media production. More interestingly, in relation to mediated identities, however, is that it is precisely in “global post modernity” that public spaces are increasingly being transformed into micro-public spheres in which ethnic minorities create their own independent communities with the help of such media as home movies and pictures.⁹ This is particularly true for Diaspora communities in search of identity in the new world. Even though they need to settle in the particularity of new nation-states, they have a cross-geographic frame of reference that is being preserved over time and over boundaries.

First and foremost, family life is affected by experiences of Diaspora, as it holds the essential notion of belonging to a home that has become problematic in situations of disruption and displacement. Generally speaking, dominant media discourses do not reflect these experiences. Within Diaspora communities even so-called genres broadcast on TV programs devoted to minority views have a

⁷ Stuart Hall, “What is Black in Black Popular Culture?” (In *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, edited by David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen. London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 465-475).

⁸ See also Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁹ Daniel Dayan discusses this extensively in “Media and Diasporas” (In *Television and Common Knowledge* edited by Jostein Gripsrud. London: Routledge, 1999, pp. 18-33). Here we also see how the “home mode” discussed by José van Dijk in the previous chapter in a very specific way is important to Diaspora communities and migrant families.

marginal status compared to “particularistic” media¹⁰ productions that circulate in private spheres. This is even truer when it comes to the experiences of refugee and migrant children. CHICAM took these experiences as its very starting point while creating a quasi-public productive space in which the children became media producers.¹¹ The CHICAM project shows that for migrant and refugee children, media use and media production are means of self-representation and of personal and inter-personal empowerment; making media productions means raising your voice, not only within the Diaspora community but also in the public arena.¹²

Children Making Media

CHICAM focused on the social and cultural worlds of refugee and migrant children in six European countries: Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, Sweden, and the Netherlands. The project focused on exploring and developing the potential uses of media and communication technologies as a means of empowering these children and enabling them to realize their potential. Four themes were earmarked for investigating the relationship between media, migration, and childhood. These were: peer group relationships, school relationships, family relations, and media literacy.¹³ CHICAM was conceived as a form of “action research”, combining ethnography and analysis based on social and cultural theory. The research plan required the establishment of a media club in all six countries that accommodated children in the making of visual representations of their lives and their experiences in their new homes over the course of one school year using photography, digital video, and the Internet. The research focused on the children and prioritized the children’s own views of their lives, families, and migration experiences. Ethnographically styled, the research was an in-depth study of small groups of children and their social relationships. It involved the production process, audience reception, and the productions themselves, including formal and informal interviews with the children and their families and with other

¹⁰ In “Media and Diasporas”, Dayan distinguishes between genres of minority TV such as ethnic minority programming and media forms developed in the private sphere.

¹¹ The German partner had some previous experience in enabling and researching self-made media productions. See: Horst Niesyto (ed.), *Video Culture: Video und Interkulturelle Kommunikation* (München: KoPäd Verlag, 2003).

¹² The project’s aims have been described in *Project Deliverable no. 1*. London, April 2002, www.chicam.net.

¹³ The project was developed by the Institute of Education at London University. See *Application to the European Commission*, Institute of Education, London, 2000. One of the long-term aims of the project was to improve migrant and refugee children’s basic living conditions especially in the fields of education, culture, and social and emotional support.

adults from their social surroundings. The study has generated a range of original data, some of which will be discussed here.¹⁴

The Dutch media club was established in Roosendaal at the Heilig Hartschool, a primary school in a bad state of disrepair with approximately eighty to ninety per cent immigrant pupils, all from nearby neighborhoods. The children were followed in the course of 2002-2003 (the year of the project). The fifteen children that joined the club came from Morocco, Turkey, Somalia, the Congo, Iraq, Syria, and Armenia. The CHICAM club provided the children, who commonly do not have easy access to “free spaces”, with a protected space for creative media productions. By making media productions, the children created a particular media space for themselves in which they could explore the potential of visual media as a means of communication. They were able to represent themselves in their own terms and to speak about themselves in a free and open manner. In discussing family relations, I will primarily draw upon the experiences in the Dutch club and cross reference occasionally to observations made in other CHICAM media clubs.

Family Conceptions

The project’s partners in Greece and the Netherlands developed the various conceptions of family as well as the guidelines for the research on the family theme.¹⁵ Early into the project we decided that the family was too limited a concept to be able to accommodate the experiences with family relations in the context of migration. Families are social structures, which are organized either around the conjugal tie (nuclear families) or blood ties extending over generations (consanguineous or extended families). The pressures of survival in new, unknown circumstances created different living patterns and arrangements. In order to accommodate different conceptions of family and to incorporate the current domestic circumstances of the children, we decided to use the concept of “domestic group” interchangeably with that of “family”. Both domestic group and

¹⁴ See Nadina Christopoulou and Sonja de Leeuw, *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Family Relations of Migrant Children in Media Clubs in Six European Countries* (The European Commission, Community Research, February 2004, www.chicam.net).

¹⁵ See Christopoulou and De Leeuw, *Home Is Where the Heart Is*. The main aspects we focused on were: 1) family history, in regard to roots in the country of origin as well as the ways in which the past is remembered and negotiated in the present; 2) family life, in regard to the current living circumstances and domestic arrangements of the children as well as the ways in which they deal with adult control and negotiate their roles; 3) social context, in regard to the surroundings within which the family defines its existence in the new country; and 4) the role of media in the family, in regard to the particular uses of media in the new country and the effect that they have on family life.

family include the significant bonds between people living under the same roof who, strictly speaking, do not belong to the family. In the specific context of Diaspora families, then, the domestic group and notions of home and belonging are synonymous with family life. We have noticed that the domestic groups were of crucial importance and were often created in order to secure basic necessities and to provide an otherwise incomplete framework.

Family relations contain different notions of identity as they relate to perceptions of the family both “there” in the home country and “here”. With respect to the process of identity construction, the international research project made it clear that two specifically relevant topics were to be prominent in each of the involved clubs.¹⁶ The first is “family history” and how the children conceptualize the past. For some children, family history was a traumatic concept. The second topic is “family life” as such (in the new country) as it reflects a continuous negotiation between two cultures and different and often conflicting notions of cultural identity. A less articulated but still revealing topic with respect to media and identity is the role that media play in the family as a means of both maintaining and breaking cultural links.

Reconstructing Family History

The children in the Dutch club worked in various media that offered specific opportunities for reflection upon memories of family life in the country of origin. It became clear from the way the children designed their FAMILY TREES that they seem to have a strong sense of the various generations who belonged their family: they even included their great-grandparents. In general, they positioned themselves right in the middle, surrounded by family members, most of whom they did not even know personally. The need for continuity and for a reconfirmation of family roots was strongly felt. Moreover, in composing families, the use of names seemed to be important, both in terms of establishing continuity and in terms of confirming family ties. One of the boys from the Congo used nicknames his mother had given his brothers and sisters. He had clearly positioned himself within the continuity of family tradition by using his own nickname in the family tree.

We have found that the family theme can best be addressed on an individual basis; the individual production in turn was a good starting point for exchanging information about backgrounds and experiences. Each of the children made a FAMILY VIDEO SHOW based on existing family photos they had selected at home and which they brought to the club. The children were first asked to tell each other about these photos, then to make a selection, to shoot this selection with a digital

¹⁶ See Christophoulou and De Leeuw, *Home Is Where the Heart Is*.

video camera and then to write a text to go along with the photos that was later dubbed in as voice-overs spoken by each child. In various ways, pictures and how families deal with them indicate to what extent Diaspora families remain connected to the country of origin, which represents a lost home to them.

A boy brought lots of photos of his home country of Somalia. They represent a life as it was taking place “there”, showing his grandfather’s land, the camels he owns, the drinking place, the beautiful light, the color of the sand. Romantic notions of African life are inscribed, reinforced by the boy’s story that accompanied the photos, which in turn he had heard from his own father. Traditions of oral storytelling, through which the family keeps its own culture and history alive, were reproduced in the boy’s family video show. Through the mediated family, ethnic identity becomes a question of memories, memories of home.¹⁷

Another example may be more revealing of how various media help to reconstruct a disrupted family history. The photos that the Congolese boy selected all present his family members, whom he knows not only by name but also by their exact age. He himself had no autobiographic memories of the Congo. He used his imagination to create a family history; he invented stories that mixed the stories that were being told and the ones he might have heard or read about the Congo, for example on TV or in a newspaper. These stories accompany the photos of his many family members. The distinctions between truth and fantasy do not seem relevant, while the creation of a fully formed picture is. Using photos and a commentator-type voice made it possible for him to create a narrative that told his family history as a continuous story in which the “there” and “here” were linked.¹⁸

Two Iraqi brothers brought only a few pictures from home. One photo, taken in Iraq, shows their grandfather and their little brother. In the room we can see a tea stove and on the floor some mattresses. Another photo shows grandmother and the same little brother. Both boys had great difficulty remembering who the people in the photos were. Their struggle is reflected by the silent intervals in their story, told by one of the boys, and even reinforced because of the broken Dutch he spoke. The lack of memories had a reason that became clear when we visited the Iraqi family. Their mother made it clear that she had not shown the photos to the children, because she did not want them to form a particular picture of life and family there. The family was very much living in the here and now. To some extent, they were hiding a part of their family history from the next generation. Here, iden-

¹⁷ See, for the relationship between identity and memory, e.g., David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* (London: Routledge, 1995, p. 91).

¹⁸ In the final chapter of this volume, Patricia Pisters argues in a similar way that migrant cinema is important for the creation of histories of families and communities.

tity is not so much a question of memories of the past; rather, it becomes a question of projections of the future.

Family history was obvious and personal to all of the children involved in the project. What is important here is that it is a defining factor in the construction of identity. It is not only where one comes from that defines one's identity in the present, it is also the series of stories told about one's origin, and the (big) picture made out of these stories, that determine "who am I" at a certain moment in time. We have experienced how the CHICAM club has offered a space for the reconstruction of a family history with the help of audiovisual media and to discover how memories were being negotiated through media use. The reworking of the photos, absent or present, helped to (re)define the children's relationship with their pasts. What stands out from the experiences in all of the clubs was that experiences of Diaspora, of family separation and reunification, dramatically modify how family history was viewed.¹⁹ The negotiation of memory shapes identity. In the new country, identity is the result of a constant negotiation that takes place within the family, involving changing cultural values in the context of migration.

Representing Family Life

In the children's representations of everyday family life, what became visible was how the children experienced a life lived between two worlds and two cultures and how they constructed identities that were flexible enough to cope with different demands. In some cases, they chose to create an ideal picture. For the girl from Armenia, family life meant sitting and eating together. In her FAMILY VIDEO SHOW, she used photos exclusively of the family having fun and showing affection towards each other. The photos were all taken in the host country. One of them even shows the family celebrating Saint Nicholas, a truly Dutch tradition. The representation of a happy family life indicates that the family has been successful in starting a new life in a new country.

There are many areas in which the children have had to negotiate between the various roles they are expected to play in and outside of the family. Since these proved difficult things to talk about, we used the format of animation to avoid direct confrontations. Instead, the children could think of "real" situations from their own lives as a basis for an imaginative story in which possible tensions could be elaborated playfully. In one animation short called THE ASYLUM-SEEKERS CENTER, the Syrian girl offers us a glimpse of family life in a situation of "homelessness", expressing the uncertainty of being and of becoming. The drawings were filmed first; her story was recorded separately and dubbed in later. She began by

¹⁹ See Christophoulou and De Leeuw, *Home Is Where the Heart Is*.

introducing the asylum-seekers center and then herself and a friend playing. In only a few images she manages to present a range of events that commonly occurs in a refugee's life in an asylum-seekers center and actually did in hers: someone is shown dying as the family tries to survive in a very small trailer with the constant fear of being evicted from the trailer by the police as part of the deportation process. The possible happy ending is a house of one's own. This animation short enabled the Syrian girl to rework her own experiences and worries. For her the experience of living in an asylum-seekers center was still very important and crucial in how she perceived the world. In an interview, she especially highlighted the rituals and religious holidays that were most intensely celebrated and remembered by her. These celebrations gave her something to hold on to. Even though the nuclear family was very close, she felt strongly connected to other Syrian families. Here the notion of the constructed extended family, the domestic group, comes to the fore, primarily by offering a site of remembering the home country and of reconstructing an ethnic identity. She bonded both with children who had shared the experience of living in an asylum-seekers center and with children who shared the same ethnic background. In preserving the cultural identity of a migrant community, old family routines in particular are held on to, to emphasize the role of the child as mediator between the old and the new world. In an asylum-seekers center, therefore, the negotiation of identities is not adequately described by the term hybridity; rather, people tend to restore the "imagined communities" they feel they belong to.²⁰

The animation short (without spoken text) *KWIK, KWEK EN KWAK*, made by the Congolese boy, using all sorts of licorice, very successfully reflects the situation at home and what the family house looks like. Apparently, he did not like it when his mother left the house, because then he had to babysit his three younger siblings. They were apparently very naughty and sometimes played a war game using small wooden cubes. They angered him by throwing cubes at his head while he was watching television – this is basically the story his animated short tells. Some elements that characterized the family deserve further analysis and context. The boy did not mind his responsibilities as long as the three young children behaved themselves. He is not even the family's eldest; there is an older brother who apparently did not live at home, and there is his older sister who has assumed many of the mother's responsibilities as well as translating for his mother who barely speaks any Dutch (only French and a Congolese "family language").²¹ *KWIK*,

²⁰ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

²¹ For an extended analysis of the role of the oldest sister in migrant families, see Wim Staat's chapter in this volume.

KWEK EN KWAK also shows one of his favorite home activities: watching music videos on television. In his animated short, he designed five frames with pictures of his family on the wall: one of his older sister, one of himself, and one each of the three younger siblings. By literally drawing family portraits he has confirmed his family ties. He also presented himself as an average teenage boy who likes to watch TMF and enjoys “global” youth culture, although he did not hide his African background, even to the point of using various African icons in his animation drawings. In his VIDEO DIARY, for example, he plays a sort of dancing, African king, who wears a curtain as a cloak. This child has successfully managed to combine both the “here” of life in the Netherlands with the Congolese “there” backgrounds of his identity.

The media-club children often articulated cultural orientations in which the “here” and the “there” were interrelated. Sometimes, however, the here and there were kept remarkably separate. One of the Moroccan boys, in his FAMILY VIDEO SHOW, presented himself at the crossroads of two cultures: a photo of him in a Muslim costume, given to him by his grandfather upon his return from Mecca, is juxtaposed with a picture of him as a successful kick boxer showing the cup that he won. His FAMILY VIDEO SHOW displays the dual discursive competence of switching from one identity to another, from a religious culture of traditional costumes and ancestry to a more globalized culture of sports and youth.

The Role of Media in Family Life

The examples from the Dutch club are not unique in this regard; the children in all of the media clubs involved represented family life in diverse ways, reflecting the two major CHICAM conceptualizations of the representation of family life: on the one hand, they focused on the constant attempt to sustain family links that were disrupted by the journey, while on the other hand, it was directly related to the investment made in starting anew in the new country.²²

In defining their place both inside and outside the family, the children were forced to negotiate between the demands of the family traditions and the rules and demands of the outside world. Children in migrant families first and foremost become mediators between private and public spaces, as they are often called upon to represent the entire family in the public sphere. They experience specific responsibilities precisely in the area where the old and the new world interact. Cultural identity as a result becomes the children’s site of negotiation and reconstruction. Many children stressed their cultural identity while referring to their home country as a cultural entity (i.e., being Turkish, Moroccan, Somali),

²² See Christophoulou and De Leeuw, *Home Is Where the Heart Is*.

whereas some pointed to the fact that this can go hand-in-hand with being or becoming Dutch, underlining that they indeed do practice a dual discursive competence. They experienced cultural identity mainly through religion and through ethnic background, but not necessarily defined in relation to nation-states. For example, the African boys in the club found one another, sometimes despite the fact that they came from different religious backgrounds. Baumann's triangle²³ seems to apply only partly, as nationality, connected to geographical borders, was less an issue. Ties with the home country were strongly confirmed and experienced through cultural traditions and through their mother tongues. All of the children spoke their own mother tongue at home with their parents, most of whom were not fluent in Dutch.

Language proves to be a strong bearer of cultural identity. It contains the family stories and histories, and it helps keep people connected to a homeland. But language is also a tool used to develop a new sense of identity, to get connected to new communities. For all the families language seemed to be an important tool in sustaining continuity in family life as it is here and now and to link the "there" and "here" by, for example, supporting "the Arabic of Damascus" as one of the girls solemnly stated. For some children, language represented mobility, of finding their place in a global world; these children preferred to speak English. The use of language in particular reflects the negotiation of identities in the context of migration.

By addressing the family within the media club, children were offered the opportunity to affirm continuities and redefine their notion of "home" by using media. Different formats had different results. The FAMILY VIDEO SHOW made it possible to work with personal material like photos brought from home and to process this material using a media format. As a result, the children became producers who were dealing with the histories behind the photos and how to communicate these stories with others. The FAMILY VIDEO SHOW thus proved to be a relevant format for the children to reflect on family life, both "here" and "there". Animation turned out to stimulate the children's fantasies and visual thinking; it also enabled the discussions of personal experiences without being too confrontational. The photos and drawings became realistic for the children as they were processed into a video movie; they refer to real experiences that were stimulated by the movie-making process.

Although the genre of fiction film most clearly spoke to the children's fantasies, it turned out to be the most difficult format to relate directly to their personal experiences. It appears that fiction and personal experiences (reality) were completely different things for the children. Their conception of fiction was thus

²³ Religion, ethnicity and nationality, in *The Multicultural Riddle*, p. 92.

of limited use in terms of addressing aspects of family life in Diaspora. This became clear when the children were asked to tell a story that addresses inside-family, life experiences. Because their major references for fiction were TV and film, they produced stories using the conventions of soap operas (the girls) and crime series (the boys) that for the most part overruled their own family storylines. Fiction offered the children the opportunity to make things more exciting and crazier than reality. It made it possible for them to be someone else for a short while and thus distance themselves from their daily experiences including their family lives.

Paradoxically, fiction was not utilized by the children for what it is known for, the presentation of an interior emotional world. On the contrary, their fictional productions about the family focused on external matters and material objects that did not reflect the very notion of home in terms of belonging to a home. The documentary format and personal video essays offered them more room for the expression of emotional relationships involved in the conception of the family as a place called “home”. This is an observation that was shared by all of the clubs involved in the project, even though some children to some extent articulated the emotional structure of the family in a fictional *mise-en-scène*, for example, by creating a scene around the mother figure.²⁴

Children Mediating Family Tradition in Newly Found Homes

We have observed how for the children and their families, “family” mainly meant a private, even domestic space in the literal sense that was isolated from the public domain. In the CHICAM club, the family became the subject matter that involved various interactions between private and public space. In these interactions, the children were the main mediators linking the outside world to the interior space of the family. Their media productions contributed to the creation of a micro-public sphere in which identities were restored and specific familial cultural interests, in terms of traditions and ethnic backgrounds, were emphasized.²⁵ At the same time, as the children tended to operate in a larger social context, their productions reflected the ways in which their migrant and refugee families settled down in the new country. Thus, their productions tended to express

²⁴ A girl in the Greek club who created a *mise-en-scène* for a fictional story about the home admitted that she re-arranged the objects in the kitchen in order to make it “look beautiful”. Her mother was standing in the middle of most of her framed shots. She was very eager to emphasize her mother’s importance in holding the household together and taking care of the whole family. See Christopoulou and De Leeuw, *Home Is Where the Heart Is*.

²⁵ In “Media and Diaspora,” Dayan discusses how, eventually, a public micro-sphere will become influenced by the public sphere at large, which may lead to homogenization processes among minority groups.

multiple identities positioned between preserving and forgetting, between history and the future, between “there” and “here”.

The family was not solely represented in photo albums, and mediated in video shows, animation, and the like. The notion of family is constantly being reconstructed. The connection between the private and public spheres becomes visible when we look at how media are actually used both in structuring communication among family members and also in constructing coherence in the family as a whole. The consumption of media programs by the family as a whole intensifies the process of identity negotiation in the private, domestic space.

Marie Gillespie corroborates this particular aspect of identity construction as observed in the CHICAM clubs.²⁶ She has performed an ethnographic analysis of so-called TV talk: Families, that is, family members of different generations, talking about TV programs or videos borrowed from a video library. In her view, TV talk among family members and among friends represents a re-creative consumption of TV and is crucial for the experiencing of identities. The children’s assignments concerning the consumption of media and culture (through media) in our CHICAM research might have put some pressures on traditional family and community functions. Still, we found clear indications that media use among the various families interrelates both discourses of nostalgia and integration.

As was observed among all of the CHICAM clubs, media use within the family is framed by cultural conventions, which was evident from witnessing the various power negotiations between the parents and children. Parents more or less control the media consumption patterns of their children because the media supposedly have a bad influence on them. Media are also used as a means for both maintaining and breaking various cultural links. Renting video movies from the home country invoke nostalgia (recalling the “there”), while satellite TV links the “here” to “there”. As an instrument of integration, television in particular urges the children to become acquainted with the new society. Children experience what we have called a plurality of possible lifestyles mainly through television. These lifestyles are oriented simultaneously towards traditional domestic spheres and broader spheres of popular entertainment programming. Television thus offers a platform for experiencing different identities, both global and sub-cultural, both related to youth culture and adult culture.²⁷ The children in this instance become the mediators of various social worlds to which all of their family members belong.

The CHICAM research project has made it clear to what extent processes of identity construction take place within the domestic space of the family and how

²⁶ Marie Gillespie, *Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change* (London: Routledge, 2000/1995).

²⁷ See research findings 11, 12 and 13 in *Home Is Where the Heart Is*.

these are being mediated in “private” productions. “Particularistic” media focus on the transfer of memories and identities in a way that is very different from public media. Above all, they try to establish the continuity necessary to survive experiences of disruption in the context of migration. By producing their various media projects, the children managed to create a particular media space for themselves. This was an important point since the children involved in the project did not “own” many concrete things from their pasts. Their productions (both about their pasts and about their present lives) became new artifacts for them that helped confirm their identities and helped them to fantasize about their futures. Migrant family life affects children, but it is highly likely that the children will have even more effect on the specifics of Diaspora family life. In this sense, migrant children will emerge as the expert mediators of our multicultural society.

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Chapter 3

The Shooting Family: Gender and Ethnicity in the New Dutch Police Series

Joke Hermes and Joost de Bruin

A group of adults is seated in a kitchen. It is evening, the lights are low, and the atmosphere is intimate. They are listening to an older man who is explaining what really happened. “Such a shame”, says an older woman, as she pours them an after-dinner drink. The younger man, the Indonesian man, and the younger woman nod. *BAANTJER*’s signature tune begins and it is the end of another episode of the Netherlands’ most popular television drama series.¹ *BAANTJER* is a police series that has been on the Dutch commercial TV station RTL4 since 1995. Episodes are based on an older book series – the cast has been updated to include a woman and a non-white man instead of just two white guys. The nation loves this (work) family headed by Inspector De Cock, whose team is served a meal by his wife at the end of each episode while he clears up their questions about the motive of the killer and how he nailed the culprit. We have seen grisly shots of the crime victims, we have visited nightclubs, gay bars and other unsavory locations, and now we are safely home with mum.

BAANTJER presents us with a number of ideologically loaded vignettes. For instance, it foregrounds a particular version of what might count as a “family”. The softly-lit warm family kitchen and a mother serving dinner suggest that we have time-traveled back to the 1950s, an era of the idealized nuclear family, real mums, and the colonial other as a well-behaved child. Does *BAANTJER* show us a country stuck in the 1950s? Or is it television’s predilection for the family that obscures changing social mores? Might the nation’s sense of identity be changing behind these beloved traditional television formats? And will the consequences be positive for those previously excluded because they chose other living arrangements, or chose to rewrite gender codes or have a sense of pride in not being white?

A closer look at representational practice in recent Dutch television should

¹ *BAANTJER* had an audience of over 3 million viewers in 2003, which made it the second best-watched program in all categories.

prove enlightening, especially since BAANTJER is not the only home-made high-rated police series. Among them, the public and (the new) commercial broadcasters began producing some nine new police series in the 1990s. Prior to that the Dutch only saw foreign-produced crime dramas, with the exception of a series about a French police officer (MAIGRET, VARA, 1963-1965) that is a precursor to BAANTJER: Maigret and De Cock wear similar raincoats and hats; the big city setting (Paris and Amsterdam) is also familiar. But Madame Maigret's existence is only implied; we never get to see her, while Maigret's team back then was all-male. Perhaps then Mrs. De Cock's presence is significant, despite her stereotypically female role, as are the presence of a woman and a non-white man on De Cock's team.

Whereas BAANTJER's team is structured like a traditional family (mum-dad-kids), SPANGEN, the second-best watched crime series in The Netherlands, is a "new" family, with a two-woman aunt-niece relation at its heart and more room for presenting diverse ethnic and sexual identities. SPANGEN was launched on the public broadcasting network TROS in 1999. SPANGEN is based on a German script (DOPPELTER EINSATZ) but is compared to the older American police series CAGNEY AND LACEY (CBS, 1982-1988), because its central characters are a two-woman detective team, who work in a city precinct. In this chapter, we will discuss television's strong bond with the family, and we will take a closer look at two "work families" in BAANTJER and SPANGEN. Comparing the two series will allow us to show that television's families are reinventing themselves. At first glance, SPANGEN and BAANTJER could not be more different. BAANTJER foregrounds the patriarchal authority of the traditional family man, while SPANGEN features two women – one young with short-term relationships, the other a divorced mother who does not live with her son – and is considered to be more progressive. However, the BAANTJER and SPANGEN cases are not dissimilar either. We will suggest that this can be understood as a result of the changing ideological status of, interestingly enough, hegemonic white masculinity.

Television's Work Family

Families are television's core business. In *Prime-Time Families* (1989), Ella Taylor shows how television was intended and developed as a family medium, and that its key drama genres revolve around families. Comedy's highly stable nuclear families spring to mind, as does the dysfunctional extended family of the soap opera.² Many of the characteristics of the blood-related, imagined family were taken over by work families in the course of television history. Social issues endangering the traditional family in the 1970s (feminism, the social movements and the increasing incidence of divorce) could thus be addressed, while the idea

of the family as a safe and harmonious social space could be kept intact. According to Taylor: “(I)n television (from the mid-1970s onwards), *workplace* comes to express (among other things but with particular force) an idealized construction of family, a workplace utopia whose most fulfilling attributes are vested not in work activity but in close emotional ties between co-workers.”³ An added advantage of the workplace setting was that it “opens its characters and invites its viewers to greater participation in the world outside, both organizational and beyond”.⁴

The television workplace was (and is) an idealized domestic allegory (nowhere more so than in BAANTJER) that, in John Ellis’s terms, allows for “working through” contemporary social anxiety.⁵ Taylor counsels that “if we understand the television narrative as a *commentary* on, and *resolution* of, our troubles rather than as a reflection of the real conditions of our lives, it becomes possible to read the television work-family as a critique of the alienating modern corporate world and an affirmation of the possibility of community and cooperation amid the loose and fragmentary ties of association”.⁶ Allowing for the differences in time and place, from the 1980s to the new Millennium, and from the United States to the Netherlands, Taylor’s observations make good sense. The most striking aspects of the Dutch police work families are the emergence of women as professionals and the inclusion of non-white colleagues. Given the significance of the “family” in the petit-bourgeois Netherlands, this is highly significant. Feminism and multiculturalism have clearly appeared on the national agenda, but how do they appear in the Dutch cultural imagination? It needs to be taken into account that the writers of the new series could build on cop series made elsewhere (shown on Dutch television since the early 1960s), and thus they were familiar with the international codes of what the “shooting family” should look like. They were also working for a fledgling industry – only just gearing up to commercial fast-paced productions of television drama. We can therefore presume that the Dutch police series were made “straight from the heart” with relatively little serious reflection or sophistication; their representational politics, as a result, are located close to the everyday goals of the series’ makers.

A more precise look at the narrative function (i.e., the centrality and agency) of the women and non-white characters reveals how national identity and its histor-

² See David Marc, *Comic Vision: Second Edition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) and Christine Geraghty, *Women and Soap Opera* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990).

³ Ella Taylor, *Prime-Time Families: Television Culture in Post War America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 111, italics in original.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ John Ellis, *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty* (London: IB Taurus, 2000).

⁶ Taylor, *Prime-Time Families*, p. 153, italics in original.

ically evolved notion of gender and ethnic difference are negotiated against international “standards”. Also negotiated were the kinds of story lines that were okayed by the commissioning TV stations and the settings favored by producers. On the one hand, as we will go on to show, global popular representations rebalanced national definitions. On the other hand, the national historical imagination proved tenacious, and, alas, conservative in how the characters of “new family members” were elaborated, even if generally new notions of a multi-gendered and color-less professionalism were accommodated.

In both *BAANTJER* (RTL4, 1995-present) and *SPANGEN* (TROS, 1999-2004) there appears to be a relation between the (narrative and visual) space given to women and to non-white characters, which suggests that the more “emancipated” a series, the more room there is for diversity. This explains why *SPANGEN* with its multicultural cast and unconventional women characters is considered to be more progressive than *BAANTJER*. Nevertheless, in both series a range of (sub)culturally specific experiential knowledges is portrayed and employed by the detectives. Both in *SPANGEN* and in *BAANTJER*, then, white heterosexual masculinity literally becomes more suspect almost as a side-effect. Divested of its position of normativeness, respectable, white, middle-class manhood becomes a strong candidate for “bad guy”, while the “usual suspects” (Moroccans, Turks, Surinamese, but also gays) are mostly just that: suspects, red herrings. We will start by discussing the newest family members: the non-white characters in *BAANTJER* and *SPANGEN*.

BAANTJER’s Keizer

Both *BAANTJER* and *SPANGEN* have an ethnic other as colleague as part of the detective crew. In his overview of the discursive practices around, and representation of, African-Americans in American network television, Herman Gray⁷ sketches a development from (1) assimilation and invisibility, to (2) pluralist (separate-but-equal discourses), to (3) multiculturalism and diversity. Neither *BAANTJER* nor *SPANGEN* can be truly characterized as multicultural or ethnically diverse. Although Gray’s model is devised for African-Americans, a case can be made for *BAANTJER*’s Keizer as “assimilated” and whitened. *SPANGEN*’s Thomas is depicted mostly according to the codes of pluralism, although occasionally there is room for multicultural representational practice. We will discuss *BAANTJER* first and then *SPANGEN*.

De Cock and his side-kick Vledder (the younger white guy) are featured in most

⁷ Herman Gray, “The Politics of Representation in Network Television” (In *Television: The Critical View*, 6th ed., edited by H. Newcomb. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 282-305).

scenes. They visit the suspects in their homes and interrogate them in the police station. De Cock solves the murder case in the final scenes of the episode. The other two officers, Vera Prins and the Indonesian-looking Appie Keizer, have minor roles. They do most of the desk research work, they check alibis, look for information on suspects. Keizer is the resident computer wizz. When Prins and Keizer venture from their desks, it is to bring crime-related objects to the lab. Prins sometimes plays a part in the story lines where women are the victims. This mechanism does not apply to Keizer. It took ten seasons of BAANTJER before we got to see his ethnic background used incidentally in a story line. Whereas Prins is occasionally empowered as a woman who has implicit knowledge about women and femininity, Keizer is never seen having insight into non-white culture. His “otherness” is restricted to his appearance. BAANTJER’s Appie Keizer is a well-adjusted “white” figure. Keizer talks, dresses, and behaves like the average white Dutch person. There is no more than a touch of the feminized oriental male about him.⁸

Multiculturalism and ethnic difference are not altogether absent from BAANTJER, but are dramatized in relation to either the victims or those suspected of committing the crime. Assimilating the Indonesian Keizer as white can be interpreted as an emancipatory move, but it also basically denies Keizer access to power and identity. In the context of Dutch colonial history, it comes as no surprise that an Indonesian was cast for this role. Indonesians are commonly regarded as the most assimilated ethnic subculture in the Netherlands and commended for it. In no small way this has been aided no doubt by Oriental stereotypes and the servile attitude Europeans thought they recognized in Asian hospitality.⁹ In a discussion of Dutch colonial novels, Pamela Pattynama shows how Indonesian males are seldom granted an autonomous sexual or other role. They are spiteful and jealous. The fear of the aboriginal male was contained by feminizing him.¹⁰ Although the BAANTJER producers are hardly old colonialists,

⁸ Pamela Pattynama, “Oorden en woorden: Over rassenvermenging, interetniciteit en een Indisch meisje” (*Tijdschrift voor Vrouwenstudies*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1994, pp. 30-45 (“Words and Places”)); Ella Shohat, “Gender and Culture of Empire: Toward a Feminist Ethnography of the Cinema” (In *Otherness and the Media: The Ethnography of the Imagined and the Imaged* edited by H. Naficy and T.H. Gabriel. Chur, Switzerland: Harwood, 1993, pp. 45-84).

Yvonne Tasker also mentions “the history of representation in which Chinese men and women have been constituted by the West as ‘soft’”, in “Fists of Fury: Discourses of Race and Masculinity in the Martial Arts Cinema” (In *Race and the Subject of Masculinities* edited by Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997, pp. 315-336), p. 317.

⁹ See the classic by Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Routledge, 1978); and Ian Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West* (London: Routledge, 2001, especially “The Curse of the Smile”, pp. 138-149).

¹⁰ Pattynama, “Words and Places”.

they have not deemed it necessary to question their portrayal of Keizer as a stereotypical nice guy, whose main assets are his administrative capabilities.

SPANGEN's Thomas Samuels

Set in Rotterdam rather than Amsterdam, *SPANGEN* features two women detectives, Sylvia Richter and Nicky Spoor, with one outranking the other. Richter, as played by well-known movie actress Monique van de Ven, is older, divorced and has a teenage son. Spoor, played by a popular television-show presenter Linda de Mol, is younger and more wayward. In the first season, she was often involved with somewhat unsavory characters including a Dutch-Surinamese criminal. Thomas Samuels (Surinamese) and Robin de Wolf (white, young) are the other two detectives. The chief, Jacobus Stam, is not a very prominent character but in as far as he is shown is a classically stern father figure.

As mentioned earlier, *BAANTJER* and *SPANGEN* are very different when it comes to presenting the work family and its internal relationships. *BAANTJER* has its patriarch while *SPANGEN* centers around the female duo, Richter and Spoor. The ethnic other as colleague and working-family member is also cast in a different way. *BAANTJER*'s Keizer has a hue rather than a color:¹¹ His skin tone is non-white but it doesn't mean much; he is the token non-white character. *SPANGEN*'s Thomas Samuels, on the other hand, is obviously a young Afro-Surinamese man, who is streetwise in both fashion and behavior. In other words, he is emphatically "colored".

SPANGEN has basically featured a case every episode since it began but also featured a case that spanned half a season, which was part murder case and part a showcase for the developing relationship between the younger Spoor and a murdered woman's son. As in *CAGNEY AND LACEY*, there is a serial aspect; the central characters are developed over time. Divorced mum Richter comes to terms with her estranged son, and recovers enough self-confidence to start an affair with a colleague from another division. Spoor matures somewhat and has less ill-advised affairs and contacts with the criminal underworld. Meanwhile, Thomas Samuels and Robin de Wolf develop considerably less than the two female stars, but over time, his ethnicity is eventually addressed as he settles in as a team/family member.

Thomas Samuels is in his thirties and dresses "black": baggy trousers, sneakers, an oversized sweater and sometimes a knitted cap. Although his general attitude is very relaxed, he can react emotionally in situations in which he senses in-

¹¹ Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 45 and ff., p. 6, p. 22.

justice or discrimination. When this happens, he loses self-control and shouts at others. He has more stereotypically “ethnic” characteristics than his counterpart Keizer in *BAANTJER*, even though his emotionality also feminizes him; be it in a different way his male emotional femininity transgresses public codes of behavior both for women and for men, while Keizer is a typical, self-effacing “good girl”. Thomas, generally, has a better position and a larger role. For instance, he belongs unconditionally to the community of police officers in *SPANGEN*. Like the others, he has his own cases, he interviews suspects, and interprets the story’s developments. Rather than an assimilated ethnic other, he is allowed some measure of difference. He is the bearer of what Herman Gray, in “Recodings”, terms “a distinct sensibility”, as indicated by his “...language, dress, sense of place, relationship to time, place and bodily movement...”.¹² Although Thomas’s ethnic background is a handicap in a number of episodes, and his color is sometimes used in an overly functional manner, it is also a source of cultural knowledge. As a character, Thomas ends up being multi-coded. He spans the discourses of pluralism and multiculturalism.

Sometimes Thomas is coded via the discourse of pluralism (separate but equal to whites) as a typical example of Ross’s argument that black policemen are the link to the world of black crime. The possibilities of such a role are limited.¹³ It is also an uncomfortable position of which Thomas is clearly aware. Black street codes do not mix easily with the professional code of behavior of a police officer. The scripts do not present resolutions to his dilemma. At times, however, Thomas’s street knowledge and credibility work to his advantage.¹⁴ Because they speak the same (street) language (i.e., high fives, “brother” as greeting) Thomas is trusted by an Antillean contact, whose information helps solve the case in “Sedation”. Difference rather than equality is foregrounded and valued here. This respectful rendering of Thomas’s cultural knowledge and recognition of the positive worth of his double cultural-ethnic experience and belonging (as a black man and a professional in a white police force) mark *SPANGEN*’s narrative as also grounded in the discourse of multiculturalism.

The ongoing negotiation of the most appropriate discursive construction of Thomas as a black character is evident in many instances, one of which has to do with stereotypical white unease with black sexuality. In episode 1.3 (“Child Labor”, 2000) Thomas is visited by his girlfriend at the police station. She is angry because she has discovered that he has been cheating on her; typical black male be-

¹² Herman Gray, “Recodings: Possibilities and Limitations in Commercial Television Representations of African-American Culture” (In *Otherness and the Media*, pp. 117-130), see p. 123.

¹³ Karen Ross, *Black and White Media* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), pp. 117-8.

¹⁴ Episode 3.11, “Sedation”, 2002.

havior is the innuendo. She yells at him, starts fighting and leaves in distress, which evokes laughter from the watching (white, male) uniformed cops. Intrigued, they regard the behavior of the black couple as entertainment, but their laughter is also a sign of discomfort with the situation. At first it seems that it is just another case of a black couple who don't know how to behave by allowing their personal lives to become public. But the white men do not know how to behave either. They both do and do not want to witness this scene. This betrays the deep-seated historical suspicion that, according to Dyer, relates whiteness to immateriality (pure spirit) and non-reproductiveness: "(To) be truly white and reproductively efficient are mutually incompatible... as a result, whites are going to be swamped and engulfed by non-white multitudes."¹⁵ Non-white sexual energy and reproductivity bear watching, while the notion that non-whites have more direct (and thus better and more pleasurable) sexual relationships, turns any black relationship a site of tension and suspicion among whites.¹⁶

Despite BAANTJER and SPANGEN's feminization of the black male colleague (by limiting his tasks, and constructing him as easily emotional with little rational control over his behavior), feared consequences of ethnic difference and multiculturalism are not always neatly kept within their proper bounds. Nor are they meant to be. To overstep the boundaries of accepted mores, political correctness, and stereotypes while presenting the crime committed is par for the course in this genre. The dramatic potential of the genre of the police series is obvious here. Ethnicity is directly connected to a range of commonsense judgments that are partly prejudice, partly experiential knowledge. This makes ethnicity a sensitive area of social knowledge and opinions, and thus a perfect guise for the series' wrongly suspected characters, or "red herrings." Social prejudice is effectively marshaled to enhance suspense and viewer pleasure, while at the same time, social mores and power hierarchies are commented upon.

BAANTJER's favorite strategy is to situate murders in interesting and slightly "suspect" places such as sex clubs, gay bars, and student dorms. Whenever circumstance allows, non-whites are introduced into the story. Because the BAANTJER format is cast in iron,¹⁷ incidental characters are usually dealt with one-dimensionally. As a rule, the charge of racist stereotyping is deftly avoided by introducing not just one but several Turkish, Moroccan or Surinamese characters, each of which is slightly different in his or her one-dimensionality. Of course, this

¹⁵ Dyer, *White*, p. 216.

¹⁶ See Dyer's chapter "White Death" (In *White*, pp. 207-223).

¹⁷ Ronald Ockhuysen, "Piet Romer doet zijn best" (*De Volkskrant* (Voorkant), 2 April, 2003, p. 9).

particular script-writing strategy of avoiding racism charges when more extreme characters are introduced implies that non-whites live in groups or clans and thus do not need to be viewed as individuals. Another favorite ploy (in both series) is to have a different ethnic background as a problem in a secondary story line, which again lessens the devil-and-the-deep-blue-sea burden of (obvious) political correctness versus the charge of racism.

The Work Family

Ethnic difference is presented very differently in the cases of colleagues and suspects. Clearly the meanings of ethnicity depend on the position of the character and on the context in which it is represented. The work family and its residence, the police station, are of crucial importance here. In an earlier piece, one of us argued that the Dutch police series, despite its appearances of female emancipation, is an incredibly naive genre when it comes to the representation of gender.¹⁸ By simply sidestepping all notions of feminism and suspicions of social gender-inequality, Dutch police stations are presented as oases of gender tranquility. There is respect for women chiefs, and female team members have important tasks. Even women of Surinamese descent have a fair chance of advancing in the police hierarchy (such as Astrid, a Surinamese police officer in *BLUE BLUE (BLAUW BLAUW)*, also set in Amsterdam, RTL4, 1999-2003). Needless to say, this is a utopian and patently untrue version of Dutch (police) reality.

The more emancipated *SPANGEN* is less claustrophobic in its depiction of work-family relations than most of the other new police series. The relationship between the two women characters, especially in the earlier seasons, was not an easy one. More modeled on an aunt and wayward niece relationship than on the loving stranglehold of the nuclear family, *SPANGEN* presents a different kind of relationship between central characters than one usually sees in Dutch television dramas (whether it be police series, comedy or soap opera). *SPANGEN*'s references to material family relations underline the constructedness of all these arrangements. Richter is a divorced mother who functions as a weekend father. Her motherhood is strictly symbolic. Meanwhile, Chief Stam's lover is revealed to be a man with whom he has had a long-lasting relationship. Stam's symbolic fatherhood is thus disconnected from any reference in the real world. Work-family relations in *BAANTJER*, on the other hand, suggest obviousness and naturalness. De Cock is portrayed not only as the team-father but also as the husband of the

¹⁸ Joke Hermes, "Poldermodel politie: Nederlandse politseries" (*Skrien*, vol. 33, no. 5, 2001, pp. 45-47).

team-mum, who ritualistically cooks a meal for the guys and girl when they return home after a long day's work.

SPANGEN, on the other hand, insists on questioning patriarchal authority and the status of the nuclear family. This post-feminist take on social relations produces the standard issue non-white team member as a credible Surinamese figure – who conveys a different sense of space, movement, time, dress code, and so on. The team relations in SPANGEN have a symbolic meaning that has cleverly been dissociated from actual practice and are thus open to negotiation and, possibly, change. Likewise gender or skin color may be open to such bargaining.

The home of the work family is the police station. In BAANTJER the police station is a straightforwardly safe place. Emotion is relegated to the outside world and the interview rooms. The work-family is close-knit.¹⁹ This is not the case in SPANGEN. In the very first episode (“Border case”, 1999) Richter arrives to start her new job as a detective. Upon entering the building she is taken hostage by an illegal alien who is desperate to seek help for friends who are being exploited and killed in the Rotterdam harbor. She is freed at gunpoint by her new colleagues who do not even bother to comfort her, making for a dubious welcome at the very best. Richter, however, immediately takes on the case of her assailant and is thus positioned as a translator. She uses her feminine gender training to recognize the strong emotions of her attacker as ultimately legitimate. Following up on her hunch, she literally travels the city landscape, including its no-go areas of crime and badness: the offices of the criminals, the warehouse where illegal workers are housed, the industrial area where they are put to work, and the place where they meet their untimely deaths.

The SPANGEN team negotiates between various worlds, while the BAANTJER team solves a case and maintains a clear boundary between themselves and the “bad guys”. In BAANTJER, it is only Vledder’s amorous indiscretions that occasionally lead the team into trouble, but this usually entails trouble with the press (Vledder’s lover is an ambitious female journalist). It is De Cock’s patriarchal prerogative to keep in touch with the world out there via his local pub in the red-light district. To emphasize the extent of his freedom to maneuver, De Cock is often seen drinking brandy with the pub owner; he has been known to use a set of picklocks to enter premises he has no legal right to enter (much like his British counterpart Frost). Apart from De Cock’s fatherly inquiries, the work-family’s relationship to the outside world, however necessary, is fraught with distrust and a need for distance. The result of this kind of hermeneutics of suspicion is that all others/outside are always suspects. Regardless of their ethnicity, their knowledge

¹⁹ Perhaps because it simply does not allow for difference: neither on the part of the woman team member Prins, nor on the part of the Dutch-Indonesian Keizer. Both are (honorary) guys.

and experiences are secrets to be pried from them. The end result of any inquiry means the destruction of people's lives. The standard closing scene suggests that this is regrettable, while we are comfortably ensconced with the team in the place where their sense of family is strongest: Mrs. De Cock's kitchen.

The extent to which team members are allowed "outside" as representatives of the forces of law and order in a white society is an effective means to gauge the multiculturalism of the series. By this measure, neither Keizer's rare walks along the canals of the red-light district (where the police station is) nor Thomas's cases are all that important. De Cock's privileges come as no surprise either. As the white patriarch par excellence, he of course is allowed to go out into the world. But what about Spoor? She roams around in the outside world, which in her case entails any number of dubious contacts. Sending out this young, blond female is certainly risky. During the second season, she earns her honorary status when she consents to spy on her lover, who is the chief suspect in a murder case. It spells the end of their affair. Spoor may not be rewarded for her outrageous crossing of lines, but the series as a whole does offer food for thought. Both gender portrayal and the representation of ethnic difference are open to renegotiation.

End of the Great White Male

For SPANGEN, having women as central characters has had two major consequences. First of all, rewriting authority away from white straight males allows other differences to be expressed as well. Thus, in SPANGEN we find a more convincing non-white colleague than in BAANTJER, and the multicultural story lines certainly test the limits of the format. Secondly, to make the central women characters interesting, the writers have made sure that these characters cannot run back to home and hearth, because they have none – that is to say, they are not given a chance to find a "good" guy to start the "real" families that would make their dwellings a home. As a result, seemingly respectable white heterosexual masculinity – whether in colleagues or suspects – is recast in paranoid terms: Spoor and Richter's seemingly okay lovers make clear that nothing is what it seems to be. Even more intriguingly, Spoor and Richter's only recourse is to become more and more professional. The work-family model in the post-feminist mode chases them out of the kitchen. Which is why BAANTJER needs to have Mrs. De Cock in *her* kitchen at the end of each episode. It is the only way to show its pre-feminist investment in the (extinct) patriarchal nuclear family as emblem of a natural order of things. Now that neither real nor work-families can be taken for granted any longer, nostalgic pleasures are only convincing when they can offer visual proof of what is fantasized as the loss of the safest place on earth – home with mother.

The family format of the police series, while providing an entry for the repre-

sentation of ethnic difference in a variety of ways, does not invite us to share ethnic or gender identification. Rather, ethnic difference and (the problems of) the multicultural society are there to entertain us, as are the women's relationships in *SPANGEN*. We are supposed to enjoy and behold but certainly not politicize or criticize social relations. Ethnic representation in a metaphorical sense is used as the proverbial red herring: not only as a decoy in the narrative puzzle that police series are, but also as a strategy of containment rather than transgression in an ideological sense.²⁰ *BAANTJER*'s offer of interactive participation to viewers illustrates this. During the commercial breaks and at a fixed cost, viewers can send text messages by mobile phone and vote for who they believe committed the murder. *BAANTJER* thus openly plays with our prejudices and preconceptions by setting up ethnic others as suspects – while rarely offering them as the actual perpetrators. Meanwhile, the possibilities of investing straight white masculinity – found wherever you go in these series – with double meaning lurk invitingly below the surface.

We have to conclude that mainstream Dutch broadcast television's view of ethnic difference, especially in crime drama, is very much a study in repressive tolerance. At a price, we have black police officers, villains and victims, as well as unjustly suspected individuals, who appear to have been solely discriminated against because of the color of their skins. And yet, we do want to point out that the vantage point chosen in the episodes discussed here do not always confirm white middle-class experience. The Dutch police series is not an incorrigible assimilationist exercise.²¹ There are also implicit structuring metaphors²² that suggest that the police series can reflect on issues of multiculturalism and make them acceptable rather than a complex social danger zone. New forms of (work) family may yet emerge. Despite television's conservative image and the police-series' pleasure in always restoring law and order, this can also be a space of social change, starting perhaps from its consistent "blackening" of mainstream white masculinity, in *SPANGEN* as much as, but perhaps more remarkably, in *BAANTJER*.

On average, non-white characters do not play major parts in either series; on the contrary, the usual state of affairs is the occasional appearance of a non-white "red herring" character amongst the suspects. The perpetrators, however, are often respectable, not-too-young, well-off men. They have families, money, jobs and, seemingly, an honorable and worthwhile goal in life. As in the case of Spoor's and Richter's lovers in *SPANGEN*, we learn to distrust them. Jealousy, greed,

²⁰ Gray, "Recodings", p. 127.

²¹ Gray, "Recodings", p. 117.

²² Shohat, "Gender and Culture of Empire".

boundless ambition, or lust is their downfall. More often than not, Dutch police series take pleasure in presenting white masculinity as a wolf in sheep's clothing. Dyer's suggestion that whiteness has also colonized deviancy would seem to be borne out by these series.²³ However, white men in these police series do not fare well: they seldom remain secure in their invisibility and their embodiment of the norm. Too often seemingly ordinary white guys are unmasked as murderers, rapists, and extortionists who harbor the darkest of sentiments and lusts. We are onto them. As viewers we are offered masculinity as performance. The "fun" in watching masculinity-at-work is in its unpredictability, in its capacity to dissimulate emotions, in its duplicity which may gratify our suspicious minds. Although no woman or non-white man could enjoy such representational space, neither does masculinity remain the implicit norm nor pillar of western rationality and society. Despite their differences, both emancipated SPANGEN and patriarchal BAANTJER undermine the great white male.

To be sure, the (work) family is no one's safe haven. The women either have no life of their own (Prins) or regret falling for untrustworthy guys (Richter and Spoor); the non-white men (Keizer and Thomas) are kept on a short leash by the scripts and are conditionally taken up in the family fold. But all the white guys have something to answer for, too. Even De Cock needs to plead his case weekly to ward off any questions of his superior deductive powers. As a commentary on changing social relations, television's police-work family suggests that resolution of unequal ethnic representation appears a long way off. Of course, paradoxically, that is what we love these series for. We keep wanting to think that these happy families are not mere fantasies but at the same time we are relieved when they are. The De Cock family dinner in the kitchen appears idyllic at first sight. This weekly coda, however also suggests that the idyll is one that Keizer and Prins pay for in obedience to the great white father. Who would wish to be trapped in such a position? In SPANGEN more clearly than in BAANTJER, feminism and post-colonialism have started to trouble the representational surface of the television series; underneath the surface, in BAANTJER more surprisingly than in SPANGEN, they are already creating havoc by consistently casting suspicion on white masculinity. While BAANTJER appears to signify the pleasure of traditional and colonial ethnic and gender relations in its 1950s look, it is using nostalgic wishfulness against taking whiteness for granted as standard for normality or as guarantee for moral uprightness. The looks of the series deceive, the 1950s have gone, and multiculturalism is becoming part of the national imaginary.

²³ Dyer, *White*, p. 219.

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Part 2
Private Matters, Public Families

Chapter 4

Family Portrait: Queering the Nuclear Family in François Ozon's SITCOM

Jaap Kooijman

La famille c'est sympa mais il y a des limites.

— tagline SITCOM

The opening scene of François Ozon's first feature film *SITCOM* (1998) shows a mansion in the sunny French countryside, the idyllic home of the bourgeois family. Arriving home from work, the father (François Marthouret) is greeted by his family singing "Joyeux Anniversaire". Before the birthday song is over, the father shoots each family member dead. All the action takes place inside the home, outside of the audience's view. Not until nearly the end of the film, after a long sequence of flashbacks explaining the events leading up to the killings, do we actually see the father shooting the family, with blood staining the family portraits placed on the mantelpiece. However, as also often happens in American soaps, the shooting of the family turns out to be just a dream. In the end, the father has not shot the family; rather, the family ends up killing the father.

In this chapter, I will examine how *SITCOM* reworks the image of the normative family, from the destruction of the bourgeois family to its replacement by an alternative "queer" family. *SITCOM* takes the perfect situation comedy (sitcom) family of the 1950s as its starting point, only to play with the conventions of this Anglo-American and globally mediated television genre.¹ Using Warren Susman's notion of the "dual representation" of the American suburban family in popular media such as television and film, I will discuss *SITCOM* by showing how the image of the perfect American sitcom family is effectively used to problematize the distinction between the public (the conventional image presented to the outside) and the private (the secret desires exposed within). Particular attention is paid to the "coming out" of the gay son, and by extension, the Spanish maid and the

¹ For a historical overview of the (re)presentation of mediated families, see also José van Dijk's chapter in this volume.

African gym teacher, all characters who tend to be marginalized in the conventional sitcom family. Both the “sexually non-normative” and the “racial other” trigger the exposure of hidden desires, thereby “queering” the presentation of the sitcom nuclear family.²

The Auteur Shoots his Family

“I didn’t actually kill my parents,” François Ozon once said in an interview. “Only in the film. ... Always the same obsessions. My parents didn’t mind as long as I had them killed only in films, not in life.”³ In Ozon’s films, the shooting of the family is indeed an obsessive theme. In his very first film, the 6-minute silent short film *PHOTO DE FAMILLE / FAMILY PORTRAIT* (1988) made as an assignment for the film academy, the son (Guillaume Ozon) ends a quiet family evening at home by stabbing his sister (Julie Ozon) to death, poisoning his mother (Anne-Marie Ozon), and suffocating his father (René Ozon) with a pillow. Subsequently, he positions them on the sofa in the living room in preparation for a family portrait. Using the self-timer, the son includes himself in the photograph. The film ends with a freeze frame that resembles a conventional family portrait, with the notable exception that most of the family members are dead. With *PHOTO DE FAMILLE*, Ozon literally shoots his own family, as the nameless family members – simply identified in the credits as, in this order, “the son”, “the mother”, “the father”, and “the daughter” – are played by his real-life nuclear family. The film thus not only portrays the making of a family portrait, but is one as well. Moreover, *PHOTO DE FAMILLE* brings forward the double meaning of shooting the family. On the one hand, shooting (killing) the family implies the destruction of the family, while on the other hand, shooting (filming or photographing) the family is a way of preserving the family and presenting it – through conventions like the family portrait – to the outside world.

A family shooting also forms the starting point of Ozon’s 14-minute short film *VICTOR* (1993), which begins with four family snapshots of the father and mother

² I follow Alexander Doty’s loose definition of “queerness” as “a quality related to any expression that can be marked as contra-, non-, or anti-straight”, while recognizing, as Doty does, Theresa de Lauretis’s argument that gay sexuality (or other queer identities) “acts as an agency of social process whose mode of functioning is both interactive and yet resistant, both participatory and yet distinct, claiming at once equality and difference” (Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p. xv). See also Sudeep Dasgupta’s “Queering the Centre: Marginality, Sexuality and the Politics of Multiculturalism” (*Thamyris*, vol. 7, nos. 1 & 2, Summer 2000, pp. 149-160).

³ As quoted in Ryan Gilbey, “François Ozon: Me, myself and Catherine” (*Independent.co.uk*, 15 August 2003, online edition: <http://enjoyment.independent.co.uk/film/interviews/story.jsp?story=433615>, available October 20, 2004).

with their son Victor (François Genty), followed by a scene in which the son shoots his parents dead. Victor continues to live with his dead parents, dressing them up for dinner, for the night, and for a stroll in the garden, where he positions them on the swing to witness him masturbating. Only after the maid and her boyfriend (the hunky stranger whom Victor has been lusting after) seduce him into joining a threesome, is Victor able to bury his parents. In the final shot, Victor is about to board a train and leave home, dressed in the undershirt of the boyfriend, which all suggests that the shooting of the family can be interpreted as an act of sexual liberation and rebirth. This notion is reinforced by the French film poster of *VICTOR*, which features a family portrait that was not included in the film. Here the living parents hold the adult Victor, dressed only in diapers, in their arms as if he were a baby, the conventional image of a young couple presenting their newborn to the outside world.⁴ The film poster itself functions as a family portrait, a presentation of the diegetic family to the outside audience. With the portrayal of the adult Victor as baby, the restrictive and normative image of the heterosexual family has already been rendered unstable. Yet, to enable the inclusion of non-normative subject positions (the gay son, the maid, the stranger) within the family portrait, the normative family first has to be shot.

Both *PHOTO DE FAMILLE* and *VICTOR* can be seen as “sketches” for *SITCOM*, because Ozon’s first feature film also prominently presents a shooting of a family and connects this shooting to exotic outsiders and an eccentric insider, the gay son. It is tempting to explain Ozon’s “always the same obsessions” with killing his parents by the fact that he is an openly gay director and by the reoccurrence of gay themes in his films. As film critic Jonathan Romney has argued, *SITCOM* “belongs in the by now altogether cosy cinematic tradition of *épater les bourgeois*, although Ozon is perhaps the first to ‘out’ the tradition, taking it to queer territory”.⁵ However, without suggesting that the identity (sexual or otherwise) of Ozon the filmmaker as “auteur” is unimportant, I will resist the temptation to see the destruction of the normative family as merely a liberating tool to enable the open expression of queer (as gay) identities.⁶ Rather, the “coming out” in Ozon’s films can be seen as a reworking of the normative, which has more to do with the normative itself than the queerness that is used to question it. As Diana Fuss states in *Inside/Out*: “Homosexuality, read as a transgression against heterosexuality, suc-

⁴ <http://www.francois-ozon.com/images/victor/Victor01.jpg>, available October 20, 2004.

⁵ Jonathan Romney, “Sitcom” (*Sight and Sound*, vol. 9, no. 1, January 1999, p. 56).

⁶ In an interview with the American gay magazine *The Advocate*, Ozon stated, “In France you are a director first. People don’t care if you are gay or heterosexual. But each time I go to America, people tell me, ‘You’re gay, you’re gay.’ Nobody does that in France” (Howard Feinstein, “Ozon Layers.” *The Advocate*, 18 July 2000, online edition: http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/816/816_ozon.asp, available October 20, 2004).

ceeds not in undermining the authoritative position of heterosexuality so much as reconfirming heterosexuality's centrality precisely as that which must be resisted."⁷ A similar argument can be made about the normative position of the nuclear family. Shooting the family in the sense of destroying the family cannot be separated from shooting the family in the sense of preserving and portraying the family. In other words, the destruction of the family in Ozon's films seems to reconfirm rather than undermine the family's centrality, yet, simultaneously, enables a reworking of the way in which this normative family is constructed.

The De(Con)struction of the Bourgeois Family

SITCOM has been perceived as a destruction of the bourgeois nuclear family, which immediately suggests a comparison to Pier Paolo Pasolini's classic *TEOREMA / THEOREM* (1968), as this film also can be perceived as such. In both films, exotic outsiders trigger the destruction. In *TEOREMA*, an anonymous, handsome, white, male visitor (Terence Stamp) disrupts the daily life of a bourgeois Milanese family. First he – or better, the bulge in his pants – awakens an almost religious lust in the maid Emilia (Laura Betti). Subsequently, the stranger seduces all of the family members, one by one: son Pietro (Andrés José Cruz Soublette), mother Lucia (Silvana Mangano), daughter Odetta (Anne Wiazemsky), and finally father Paolo (Massimo Girotti). After the stranger's sudden departure, the family has changed forever. The daughter is institutionalized, the mother starts sleeping with male hustlers she picks up in the street, the son leaves home and becomes an expressionist painter (clearly denoting his "coming out" as a gay man), and the father decides to hand over his car factory to the workers and strips down naked in the middle of the train station, an image that dissolves into the final scene that shows him, again naked, running up and down a volcanic mountain.

In *SITCOM*, the family's degeneration into sexual perversion begins when the father brings home a white laboratory rat. That evening, the mother (Évelyne Dandry) invites the new Spanish maid Maria (Lucia Sanchez) and her African husband Abdu (Jules-Emmanuel Eyoum Deido) to join the family for dinner. After being bitten by the rat and joining the family at the dinner table, son Nicolas (Adrien de Van) announces that he is gay, and subsequently, back in the son's bedroom, Abdu seduces him. That same night, daughter Sophie (Marina de Van) attempts suicide by sleepwalking out the window. During the months that follow, the sexual perversion increases. The paralyzed Sophie, confined to a wheelchair, plays sadomasochistic games with her boyfriend David (Stéphane Rideau), who,

⁷ Diana Fuss, "Inside/Out" (In *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, edited by Diana Fuss. New York and London: Routledge, 1991, pp. 1-10), p. 6.

in his turn, has sex with the maid. After his coming out, the nerdy son Nicolas transforms into a fashionable hip queer boy who entertains his numerous guests with zucchinis in his bedroom. Nicolas and Sophie also share a bath together, suggesting incest that is intensified by the fact that Adrien and Marina de Van are brother and sister in real life. The sexual perversion and incest accumulate when the mother sleeps with her son Nicolas in an attempt to cure his homosexuality. Only the father refrains from participating in the sexual perversion, showing no interest in interfering when his wife tells him the family is out of control. He also refuses to join the family therapy session. Once the family realizes that not the rat but the father is the instigator of the sexual perversion (after the father eats the microwaved rat, he turns into a giant black rat himself), the family kills him.

There is a striking similarity between *TEOREMA* and *SITCOM* in the way in which the exotic stranger gains access to the secluded family life. In both films, the gay son provides the opening through which the family can – literally – be penetrated, enabling the infiltration of “otherness” that challenges the heterosexuality and whiteness of the normative western nuclear family. The gay son functions as the family’s “soft” spot, a point of entrance for the outside that enables the exposure of the family from within.⁸ In both films, the exposure is also not only limited to the son’s homosexuality, suggesting that male homosexual desire is only one of many “closeted” desires that lurk beneath the perfect image of the nuclear family. But unlike *TEOREMA*, in *SITCOM* the son’s homosexuality is announced; Nicolas “comes out” and his coming out functions as the starting point of the sexual perversions that follow. In this way, the gay son has a double function. His presence not only marks the deviance that challenges the normative, heterosexual, nuclear family, traditionally based on reproduction, but also foregrounds that family life – often placed within the realm of the private – is by definition public as well.⁹ The gay son can only be “out” when his private life has been publicly announced, just like the heterosexuality of other family members is “outed” through rituals such as engagements and weddings. Thus, the coming out of the gay son does not make the family public, but merely reveals that the family has been public all

⁸ In *LES TERRES FROIDES* (Sébastien Lifshitz, 1999), the film discussed by Sudeep Dasgupta in this volume, Djamel is both the exotic stranger and a “queer son”, who enters the family by literally penetrating his half-brother, the gay son of the bourgeois family.

⁹ The “gay son” performs a similar role in the American documentary series *AN AMERICAN FAMILY* (PBS, 1973), discussed by José van Dijck in this volume. While the twelve-hour series documented the “real life” of the Californian Loud family, the series – perhaps disproportionately – focused on the gay son Lance, who came out to his family (and the American public) on national television during the series and whose flamboyant “openly gay” life-style received much media attention. In his study of *AN AMERICAN FAMILY*, Jeffrey Ruoff calls Lance Loud “the single most reflexive element” of the series, “who relentlessly breaks frame” (Jeffrey Ruoff, *An American Family: A Televised Life*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, p. 90).

along. Instead of leading to the destruction of the bourgeois nuclear family, the openly acknowledged presence of the gay son can be seen as the “outing” of the family. Through the gay son’s deviancy, the normative image of the family is revealed as being a construction, a public façade.

The Dual Representation of the American Sitcom Family

François Ozon’s use of the English title *SITCOM* (which is the original “French” title, not a translation to enable international exposure), which refers to a typical yet not uniquely Anglo-American television genre, invites a reading of the film as a comment on the role of Anglo-American pop culture in the global – or at least Western – audiovisual cultural landscape. Although *SITCOM* is a French film about a French family set in France, the title forces the viewer to place the film within a broader context. Anglo-American pop culture is globally omnipresent, providing non-Americans with – to use Rob Kroes’s term – a visual *lingua franca*; Anglo-American pop-cultural images, such as the image of the perfect sitcom family, have become “free-floating signifiers internationally understood, free for everyone to use”.¹⁰ However, although the image of the sitcom family is “American”, this does not mean that *SITCOM* is about an American family. Rather, Ozon appropriates an image that is widely recognized as part of Anglo-American audiovisual pop culture to question the normativity of the nuclear family in general, and perhaps the French bourgeois family in particular.

Initially, Ozon wanted to shoot *SITCOM* as a series of three 26-minute episodes (entitled respectively “Une famille ordinaire”, “La décadence”, and “Le monstre”), thereby staying closer to the television genre that inspired him to make the film. According to Ozon, the sitcom, in its attempt to reach a wide audience, tends to favor consensus over conflict and is just not offensive enough: “Everything is neutralized. That stimulated me to introduce conflict into it, to knock down the spectator.”¹¹ Yet, *SITCOM* is not a sitcom but a feature film, and only the title makes an explicit connection to the sitcom television genre. The differences are significant. The typical sitcom is a series of episodes of roughly twenty-plus minutes each, its narrative interrupted by commercial breaks. Since sitcoms may

¹⁰ Rob Kroes, “Advertising: The Commodification of American Icons” (In *Trading Culture: GATT, European Cultural Policies and the Transatlantic Market*, edited by Annemoon van Hemel, Hans Mommaas, and Cas Smithuijsen. Amsterdam: Boekman Foundation, 1996, pp. 137-147), p. 140.

¹¹ Interview included in the press kit of *SITCOM*. My translation of: “*La sitcom est très consensuelle. Pour toucher le plus de gens possible, elle doit évacuer tout ce qui pourrait déranger. On n’y trouve aucune transgression, tout est désamorcé. Cela me stimulait beaucoup de venir y introduire du conflit, de bousculer le spectateur.*” (<http://www.chez.com/filmoozon/97SitcomDossier.htm>, available October 20, 2004).

run for years, viewers have a chance to become familiar with the characters, as they grow into regular “friends” or even “family members” present in the living room. Based on plots that emphasize the providing of solutions to situations of conflict, resulting in emotional closure, sitcoms tend to showcase a realistic slice of family life. They invite viewers to mirror their own experiences to the situations portrayed on the screen. *SITCOM*, on the contrary, is a feature film that merely takes the sitcom family, rather than the sitcom genre, as a starting point. In that sense, *SITCOM* is similar to recent American films such as *SERIAL MOM* (John Waters, 1994), *THE TRUMAN SHOW* (Peter Weir, 1998), *HAPPINESS* (Todd Solondz, 1998), *AMERICAN BEAUTY* (Sam Mendes, 1999), and *FAR FROM HEAVEN* (Todd Haynes, 2002), which all seem to comment on “media realities” and share the premise that the happy suburban family is a hyper-real façade to cover up and suppress the darker side of human/family life, including murder, incest, alcoholism, homosexuality, and racism. *FAR FROM HEAVEN* is particularly interesting when comparing it to *SITCOM* for its depiction of both repressed homosexuality and racism, to which I will return later in this chapter. *SITCOM* does not mimic the conventions of the sitcom to present a parody of the genre, as does the infamous child-molestation sitcom scene in *NATURAL BORN KILLERS* (Oliver Stone, 2002). Stone’s sitcom scene is a harsh parody, in which the family’s degeneration and obscenity are juxtaposed with the canned laughter of the live studio audience. *SITCOM* does not literally copy the sitcom genre, but instead uses the associations of the sitcom as part of Anglo-American pop culture – its superficiality, artificiality, and hyper-reality – to reveal the construction of the normative nuclear family.

The typical sitcom has been traditionally associated with the American consumer culture of the 1950s, when, with the post-war suburban boom, television became the dominant medium in presenting a normative image of the middle-class white American suburban nuclear family.¹² As Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean have argued, television was the “electronic hearth” of the American suburban family: “Television became mythic and ideological as the unifier of the fragmented post-war family, an emblem of ‘togetherness’, of technology’s domestication and as a sign of suburban achievement.”¹³ The nuclear family was central to the suburban life of comfort and affluence, and it was television that brought the family together and presented the conformity of the family’s “togetherness” to the outside world. In his essay “Did Success Spoil the United States?” Warren Susman states:

¹² Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Post-War America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Ella Taylor, *Prime-Time Families: Television Culture in Postwar America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

¹³ Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean, *American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 274-5.

[T]he new medium of television found its function in domestic-centered television shows, from *I LOVE LUCY* to *I REMEMBER MAMA*, all seen in the “family room.” (Indeed, think of all the family words enveloping the new suburban life-style: family-size carton, family room, family car, family film, family restaurant, family vacation.) In essence, one can represent the new affluent society collectively in the image of the happy suburban home.¹⁴

Yet, Susman also argues that the image of the perfect happy suburban family was only one side of a “dual collective representation”. The decency, contentment, and security of suburban life led to a longing for crime, violence, and obscenity, which was represented through cultural artifacts such as Hollywood movies (such as film noir), comic books (the dual identity of the superhero), music (rock ‘n’ roll), and magazines (*Playboy*). As Susman suggests, Americans “developed a dual collective representation of themselves, nicely rendered by competing images of the family.”¹⁵ This dual collective representation of suburban life and family is clearly visible in the now classic film *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE* (Nicholas Ray, 1955). The families of the teenagers Jim (James Dean), Judy (Natalie Wood), and Plato (Sal Mineo), all fail to live up to the ideal of the perfect suburban family, prompting the three teenagers to create an alternative nuclear family of their own. They run away to an abandoned mansion, where Jim and Judy function as Plato’s parents, whose character is clearly, though not explicitly, marked as homosexual.¹⁶ Only after Plato, the gay son, is shot dead does the alternative family lose its function, and the hegemonic position of the “real” nuclear family, specifically the patriarchal rule of Jim’s father, is restored. *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE* is similar to the sitcom genre, in that it introduces conflict within the suburban family (juvenile delinquency, dominant mothers, and non-authoritarian “effeminate” fathers) only to provide emotional closure through the reconfirmation of the normative and heterosexual nuclear family.

The dual representation of the American family can also be found in the sitcom genre itself. With the exception of early family sitcoms such as *FATHER KNOWS BEST* (1952-1963), *LEAVE IT TO BEAVER* (1957-1963), and *THE BRADY BUNCH*

¹⁴ Warren Susman, “Did Success Spoil the United States? Dual Representations in Postwar America” (In *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*, edited by Lary May. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989, pp. 19-37), p. 22.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁶ The second time that Plato is introduced, he opens his high school locker where he has a picture of movie star Alan Ladd and a small mirror on the inside of the door. Plato uses the mirror to admire Jim in the reflection, opening the door a bit further to get a better view. Note that Plato, portrayed by the Italian-American actor Sal Mineo (thus “Latino” in contrast to the Anglo-American James Dean), is also marked as “racially other”. Since his biological parents are absent, the African-American maid functions as Plato’s immediate family.

(1969-1974), which all presented a perfect image of the white suburban nuclear family, popular sitcoms have challenged this normative image by presenting alternative families such as working class families in *ALL IN THE FAMILY* (1971-1979) and *ROSEANNE* (1988-1997), African-American families in *THE JEFFERSONS* (1975-1985), *THE COSBY SHOW* (1984-1992), and *FAMILY MATTERS* (1989-1998), single-father families in *FULL HOUSE* (1987-1995) and *BLOSSOM* (1991-1995), single-mother families in *MURPHY BROWN* (1988-1997) and *GRACE UNDER FIRE* (1993-1998), extended, alternative life-style families in *THE GOLDEN GIRLS* (1985-1992) and *WILL & GRACE* (1998-present), and even a family of aliens in *3RD ROCK FROM THE SUN* (1996-2001). Moreover, the normative image of the perfect television sitcom family has been ridiculed in sitcoms such as in addition to the aforementioned *ROSEANNE*, *SOAP* (1977-1981), *MARRIED... WITH CHILDREN* (1987-1997), *THE SIMPSONS* (1989-present), and *UNHAPPILY EVER AFTER* (1995-1999). Even those sitcoms that present traditional white middle-class families, such as *FAMILY TIES* (1982-1989), *HOME IMPROVEMENT* (1991-1999), and *EVERYBODY LOVES RAYMOND* (1996-present), suggest that keeping up the appearance of the perfect family is a difficult task.

Although he does not use the term dual collective representation, John Hartley argues that this discrepancy between the image of the ideal sitcom family and its less-ideal alternative makes the sitcom such an attractive genre. Sitcoms do not merely present a normative example, but also pay attention to “the ‘not-quiteness’ of family life, and to some of the grittier issues lurking under suburban consumerism”, providing both pleasure and a potential for political criticism. “One of the pleasures of watching sitcoms was to observe how bizarre some of the family set-ups were, no matter what their surface ‘smileyneess’ suggested about ‘family values’.”¹⁷ This dual representation – a clear-cut distinction between the public “smileyneess” presented through a conventional portrayal of the nuclear family and the private yet exposed “grittier issues” lurking underneath – enables a questioning of the normative image. However, the political potential of the sitcom is limited. Although broader social issues may be addressed, they remain within the private realm of the domestic sphere. Even within the less normative sitcom families, the solutions to the conflict situations tend to be personal, and once the family conflict is solved, the equilibrium of the family is restored, without any social change in the larger society. In the end, the nuclear family is still dominant, even in “feminist” sitcoms such as *MAUDE* (1972-1978) and *MURPHY BROWN*. As Lauren Rabinovitz has shown, when the biological father is physically absent, there is always a symbolic father or patriarchal figure to assure the reconfirmation of the

¹⁷ John Hartley, “Situation Comedy, Part 1” (In *The Television Genre Book*, edited by Glen Creeber. London: BFI, 2001, pp. 65-67).

nuclear family.¹⁸ Most important, the sitcom family may be “dysfunctional” and not as perfect as the normative image prescribes, the family’s centrality remains largely uncontested. So the question now is, what in the final analysis would make Ozon’s *SITCOM* more radical than the sitcom television genre it refers to?

Outing the Dark Desires: Queering the Sitcom Family

Before returning to *SITCOM*, I will take a closer look at Todd Haynes’s reworking of the 1950s Hollywood melodrama in *FAR FROM HEAVEN*. With this remake of Douglas Sirk’s *ALL THAT HEAVEN ALLOWS* (1954), Haynes, like François Ozon, comments on the dark and hidden desires, attractions, and repulsions of the perfect nuclear family as depicted in, in this case, the 1950s Hollywood melodrama. *ALL THAT HEAVEN ALLOWS* had already presented the class restrictions of the bourgeois family when a widowed housewife (Jeanne Wayman) falls in love with her gardener (Rock Hudson) but in turn is then rejected by her children. Todd Haynes re-presents with *FAR FROM HEAVEN* the style in cinematography and mise-en-scène of the classic melodrama, in addition to the story line. However, in comparison to Sirk’s story, he makes two significant changes. First, the housewife, Cathy Withaker (Julianne Moore), is not a widow but has a husband, Frank (Dennis Quaid), who is struggling with his homosexual desires. And second, Raymond (Dennis Haybert), the gardener with whom Cathy falls in love, is an African-American man living in the black part of the town. With *FAR FROM HEAVEN*, Haynes brings to the surface what was repressed in the image of the nuclear family all along but could never be expressed, not even in the 1950s melodrama that has human tragedy and forbidden desires at its heart.¹⁹ It is this shift towards a double queering of the family, both sexually and racially, that makes *FAR FROM HEAVEN*, despite its apparent classic looks, much more radical than the melodramas to which it refers.

In a similar way, *SITCOM* is more radical than most television sitcoms, even the more subversive ones. *SITCOM*’s opening shot makes it clear that the image of the family is a construction. Like the sitcom, which is taped in front of a live studio audience, *SITCOM* makes the presence of the audience explicit by showing the opening of a stage curtain. The use of bright, almost artificial colors gives the

¹⁸ Lauren Rabinovitz, “Ms.-Representation: The Politics of Feminist Sitcoms” (In *Television, History, and American Culture: Feminist Critical Essays*, edited by Mary Beth Haralovich and Rabinovitz. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999, pp. 144-167), p. 146.

¹⁹ See for more elaborate analyses of interracial desire, e.g., Robert. J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); and Randall Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003).

diegetic environment an idyllic quality; the perfect exterior reinforces the perfect image of the family. In this way, the sitcom family is presented as a hyper-reality, reinforcing the notion that the exterior of the nuclear family is a façade. As stated before, *SITCOM* does not mimic the conventions of the sitcom, but uses its characteristic elements such as the conventional sitcom family and the domestic setting. As is the case in sitcoms, the majority of the action takes place within family rooms such as the living room, the kitchen, and the dining room. With the exception of the psychiatrist's office (where the mother reveals family secrets that are hidden beneath the perfect exterior), places outside the home such as work and school are only referred to, never shown. Yet, although inspired by the sitcom genre and using elements such as the typical sitcom family and its domestic scenery, *SITCOM* is not limited by the sitcom's plot conventions that provide solutions to conflict situations, resulting in emotional closure.

The mother is a stereotypical stay-at-home mom who is annoyed by the father's lack of interest in family matters, yet never fails to defend him when he is criticized by one of the children. The father and mother are shown in bed together several times, a conventional sitcom situation reminiscent of, for example, Cliff and Clair Huxtable on *THE COSBY SHOW* who, before they go to sleep, discuss the state of the family. But while the setting is similar, the dialogue is strikingly different. "Honey, we've got to talk," the mother tells the father, who continues to read the newspaper and only responds with clichéd proverbs. The mother worries that the children are not doing well, but he just mumbles, "youth must sow its wilds oats," to which the mother responds: "Yes, but does that include being a homosexual and a practicing sadomasochist? You think it's normal that your son left school to have in-home orgies?"²⁰ As the sexual perversion progresses, the father remains untouched. Even when the daughter confronts the father with the incest of the mother and son, the father responds that he already knows and does not mind. "I don't think incest will solve the problems of Western civilization, but your mother is an exceptional woman," he says. Unlike the other family members who act out their hidden desires, the father remains a passively distant patriarch. Only in his dreams does he act, and thus it is in a dream that the father shoots the family dead.

The shooting literally stains the perfect image of the family as presented to the outside world, as blood is splashed on the framed family portraits that are placed on the mantelpiece. Subsequently, and like the final scene of *PHOTO DE FAMILLE*, the father arranges the dead bodies on the sofa, as if to prepare them for a family photograph. However, it is different from *PHOTO DE FAMILLE* in that the father does not position himself within the picture, foreshadowing the action that fol-

²⁰ All cited dialogue is based on the English subtitles of the *SITCOM* DVD edition.

lows. After the father is exposed as being the rat, the family stabs him to death. With the family killing the father, the white patriarch can no longer function as the symbolic head of the nuclear family, thereby opening a space for the construction of an alternative family that actually does challenge the normative. The only way to end sexual perversion is a reformation of the family that does not suppress hidden desires, but instead includes these desires within its construction. *SITCOM* differs from *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE*, because the gay son is included in the family, while the father's patriarchal rule is emasculated; it differs from *TEOREMA* because the exotic strangers – the Spanish maid Maria and the African gym teacher Abdu – do become part of the family. These inclusions make the redefined family “queer” in the sense that the family members do not need to give up their non-normative identities, neither sexual nor racial, to be included. And thus, rather than re-establishing the normative, the queer family de-centers the nuclear family's centrality as it redefines the normative idea of the nuclear family into a less closed category.

The public presentation of this alternative queer family takes place not only in the film, but also in two promotional family portraits released together with *SITCOM*. The first one, which was also used as the French film poster, shows the bloody but alive family members just after the father has shot them. Unlike in the family portrait in the film, they are not positioned on the sofa, but are posing outside in the garden. The mother stands in the middle, flanked by daughter Sophie and her boyfriend David on the left, and by son Nicolas, maid Maria, and Abdu on the right. Their clothes are ripped, and they are covered in blood, but they are smiling into the camera. The second picture is a family portrait made during the film's final scene (though not used in the film itself), at the father's funeral. Here the family's queer character is made explicit, as the characters are grouped in three pairs, suggesting two homosexual relationships: Sophie (no longer confined to a wheelchair) together with David, Nicolas together with Abdu, and the mother together with Marie. All family members are dressed in dark formal clothes – conventional funeral dress – and have their back turned to the camera, but still smile into the camera as they look over their shoulders. Fittingly, on François Ozon's official website, the photographs are entitled, respectively, “Photo de famille” and “Family portrait”.²¹ Although both portraits present the family in a conventional way to the outside world, they also break with the conventions: the first through its depiction of the family in bloody clothes, and the second through its depiction of the family members with their backs to the camera. In this

²¹ “Photo de famille” <http://www.francois-ozon.com/images/sitcom/sitcom13.jpg>, this is the picture on the cover of this book; “Family portrait” <http://www.francois-ozon.com/images/sitcom/sitcom12.jpg>, available October 20, 2004. No explanation is given why one title is in French and the other in English.

way, the façade of the normative family is broken as the family's queerness is included within the image. François Ozon does not return to the (unstable) nuclear bourgeois family, but actually offers an alternative one.

Conclusion: Honey I'm home

In his review of *SITCOM* for the online *Slant Magazine*, Ed Gonzalez responds to the oft-heard criticism that, with *SITCOM*, François Ozon merely wants to shock the spectator and fails to effectively expose the normative image of the sitcom family. "True enough. But Ozon doesn't want to fuck with the system as much as he wants to put some dick into it."²² Gonzalez is obviously referring to the sex scene of Sophie's boyfriend David and the maid Maria, which prominently features actor Stéphane Rideau's naked and erect penis. One could indeed easily dismiss this impressive exposure of naked flesh as just another one of Ozon's shock effects, like the mother-son incest scene; yet, such a dismissal fails to recognize that by "putting some dick in it" Ozon actually does "fuck with the system." The explicit sex scene can be situated at the same level as the literal shootings of the family in the film. By explicitly exposing the naked desire lurking underneath the perfect exterior of the sitcom family (in the film, Sophie takes a Polaroid picture of David's erect penis which, subsequently, is used to expose and punish hidden desires), Ozon challenges this perfect exterior, and makes the private desire public. The exposure of David's erect penis is just another form of "coming out" which breaks down the barrier between the public and the private, and includes the private queerness in the public image, the family portrait.

With *SITCOM*, François Ozon presents a family portrait that shoots the family in both senses. On the one hand, Ozon destroys the normative nuclear family, shooting the conventional sitcom family dead, while on the other, he shoots a new family portrait which includes the traditionally marginalized – both sexually and racially – others. Although, by doing so, the family's centrality is reconfirmed, its normative character is challenged. Through its appropriation of Anglo-American, pop-cultural images, *SITCOM* takes the normative sitcom family to its almost absurd extreme, thereby opening the space for an alternative, queer family that may not succeed in destroying the nuclear family completely, but which does challenge its normativity. The inclusion of earlier suppressed desires within the construction of a new definition of the family de-centers its normative position. François Ozon shoots the family by "putting some dick in it," thus shooting a family portrait that recognizes rather than denies the family's queerness.

²² Ed Gonzalez, "Sitcom" (*Slant Magazine*, 2004: http://www.slantmagazine.com/film/film_review.asp?ID=988, available October 20, 2004).

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Filmography

FAR FROM HEAVEN (Clear Blue Sky Productions, John Wells Productions, Killer Films, Section Eight Ltd., TF1 International (France), USA Films, Vulcan Productions, USA: 2002) directed by Todd Haynes.

PHOTO DE FAMILLE / FAMILY PORTRAIT (Film Office France, France: 1988) directed by François Ozon.

REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE (Warner Bros., USA: 1955) directed by Nicholas Ray.

SITCOM (Fidélité Productions, France: 1998) directed by François Ozon.

TEOREMA / THEOREM (Aetos Produzioni Cinematografiche, Euro International Film (EIA), Italy: 1968) directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini.

VICTOR (F.E.M.I.S., France: 1993) directed by François Ozon.

Chapter 5

Radicalism Begins at Home: Fundamentalism and the Family in MY SON THE FANATIC

Laura Copier

Introduction

On December 22, 2001, a Paris-to-Miami flight made an emergency landing in Boston after a passenger tried to detonate bombs hidden in his sneakers. The terrorist, British citizen Richard Reid, was arrested. In a US court Reid, dubbed the “shoe bomber,” pleaded guilty and declared: “I know what I’ve done... At the end of the day, I know I done the actions.”¹ Even though Reid apparently was fully aware of his actions and the reasons for his actions, the media turned their attention to Reid’s family history for a possible explanation for his behavior. Reid was born in England, the son of an English mother and Jamaican father. He grew up in the London suburb of Bromley, a place that is, according to the BBC, “hardly a natural breeding ground for dissidents”.² Perhaps then, the explanation for Reid’s terrorist act could be found in the absence of his father during his childhood. Even though it seemed as if Reid’s father was willing to take the blame, by stating that “I was not there to give him the love and affection he should have got”, he did not take any responsibility for his son’s beliefs. Muslim extremists were to be held responsible for the brainwashing of his son, and more importantly: Richard Reid had been motivated by religious beliefs, not the belief of the Reid family: “They are two very different things. If he had done it through family beliefs I would have found it very hard to understand.”³

The explanation Richard Reid’s father gave for his son’s behavior – the strict acting out of religious beliefs – fits in with common conceptions of fundamentalism and more specifically, Islamic fundamentalism. In their book *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri elaborate on the recurring characteristics of

¹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/2298031.stm>, available October 21, 2004.

² <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1731568.stm>, available October 21, 2004.

³ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/2300671.stm>, available October 21, 2004.

(Islamic) fundamentalism. Hardt and Negri claim that fundamentalism is often reduced “to a violent and intolerant religious fanaticism that is above all ‘anti-Western’”.⁴ It is this feature of religious fanaticism, which is fundamentalism, as opposed to what Reid’s father called “family beliefs”, that is usually singled out as a possible explanation for terrorist behavior. This common conception of religious fanaticism in fundamentalism, however, obscures the incentive for fundamentalism. According to Hardt and Negri, fundamentalism is not so much a movement driven by an envisioned return to a pre-modern, or traditional, past; instead, fundamentalism is really directed against the present social order.⁵ Fundamentalism as a movement, Hardt and Negri argue, seems to appeal to those “who have been further subordinated and excluded by the recent transformations of the global economy”.⁶

The exclusion of certain groups or individuals seems to imply a sense of non-belonging, of being kept out of something, of being out of place in the present order. Fundamentalism then could function as a means to claim a position, or put differently, a space, in the present social order.

The film *MY SON THE FANATIC* (1997) tells the story of a Pakistani family divided by the fundamentalist tendencies of its only son.⁷ The film shows how Islamic fundamentalism is the son’s way of claiming a place for himself, against the present social order, which gradually disrupts the family. Yet, careful analysis shows

⁴ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 147. Hardt and Negri also refer to Christian fundamentalism in the United States. They are interested in fundamentalism as a reaction to contemporary social structures. This perspective on fundamentalism is shared by David Morley, who points out that anti-immigrant feelings in Europe have led to a nostalgic variety of fundamentalism: “cultural fundamentalism” (“Bounded Realms: Household, Family, Community, and Nation”. In *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place*, edited by Hamid Naficy. New York and London: Routledge, 1999, pp. 151-168, pp. 163-4).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁷ Directed by Udayan Prasad, screenplay by Hanif Kureishi. Synopsis: Parvez is a Pakistani cab driver in Northern England who chauffeurs prostitutes around town and makes just enough money to support his wife Minoo and his beloved son Farid. The relationship between Parvez and Farid, in whom Parvez had invested all his hopes and expectations for a better future, turns sour when, on the verge of becoming engaged to the daughter of the chief of police, Farid unexpectedly cancels the engagement and aligns himself with a group of hard-line Islamic fundamentalists. Parvez, who has rejected religion, is deeply upset by this turn of events, and matters become worse when his wife Minoo endorses Farid’s beliefs. His mother’s support prompts Farid to invite a spiritual leader into the household, much to Parvez’s chagrin. Feeling alienated from his family, Parvez turns to Sandra, a prostitute with whom he strikes up a friendship that becomes a love affair. The situation takes a turn for the worse, when Farid’s group decides to “clean up the neighborhood” by assaulting the local prostitutes, among them Sandra. An enraged Parvez kicks Farid and his friends out of the house. Parvez’s affair, however, has come out and Minoo decides to leave him to return to her family in Pakistan. The film ends with Parvez in the deserted family home, uncertain about what the future will bring.

that the family home itself already holds the seeds of its own disruption. Fundamentalism, as a strong oppositional force, merely exposes the latent conflict within the family. The conflict is staged within the family home, and entails a struggle over spaces, and their purpose, in the family home.

My analysis will focus exactly on the spaces found in *MY SON THE FANATIC*, and on the ways the conflict is both staged and acted out in those spaces. In this respect, a *mise-en-scène* analysis is the most suitable approach. The central question will be: how will family-home settings allow both conflict and re-appropriation of space in *MY SON THE FANATIC*? Or put differently, what are the elements and patterns in the *mise-en-scène* of this film that will guide the viewer through conflicts fundamentally undermining the family home? My main focus will be on the balance and at the same time tension that is created between the characters of the film and the settings they are in. It is through the analysis of character versus setting that a number of binary oppositions in *MY SON THE FANATIC* come into focus, oppositions that are intricately linked with the theme of the film. The most important opposition, and the one I will deal with at length, is the opposition between the public and the private.

Mise-en-scène of Oppositions

I will start with the analysis of the opening sequence of *MY SON THE FANATIC*. This sequence lasts approximately 14 minutes and can be divided into four separate segments. The opening sequence provides the viewer with an exposé of both the main characters and the main objective(s) of the film. Moreover, in this sequence several pairs of oppositions are presented, which continue to dominate the rest of the film.

The first oppositional pair is *British versus Pakistani*; it is this dichotomy, displayed in the very first scene of the film, which introduces the characters. The film starts with a long shot of the Fingerhut mansion, home of the chief of police, his wife and lovely daughter, beautifully situated on the outskirts of the city. The first interior shot is a close-up of the Fingerhut family photo album, which contains pictures of daughter Madelaine. This shot immediately gives the viewer an important visual clue regarding the main function of this scene: the British Fingerhut's and the Pakistani family (their family name remains unknown) celebrate the coming engagement between Madelaine and Farid. Proud father Parvez seizes the occasion to take pictures of the two families and to convince Mrs. Fingerhut of the excellent character of his son. Parvez's actions seem to stress that he and his family are fully integrated members of British society. The "proof" of their integration lies in the pictures.

A closer look at this sequence reveals how the apparent integration of the two

families is established via the *mise-en-scène*. All the shots of Parvez's photographs are stylistically confined to what David Bordwell has called the "same-frame heuristic". This means that if characters appear in the same frame, they are united. By positioning characters in one frame, "it reintegrates space, reunites the individual with his group to establish a sense of wholeness".⁸ The act of photography seems to cement Parvez's family's inclusion in both the Fingerhut family and British society at large.

The attempts at bridging the gap between the British and Pakistani family are further underscored by the use of deep-focus. In this type of shot emphasis is placed on the dynamics between foreground and background. The foreground posits both heads of the family (again within the same frame heuristic), while in the background first Farid, then Madelaine appears. What is striking about the set-up of this shot is the emphasis on the fathers, which implies a reluctant joining of the two families (I use the word reluctant, since it is mostly Parvez who does the joining of both men), while in the background several things take place. First we see Farid, standing between Fingerhut and Parvez. This implies both his solidarity with both "fathers" and his in-between-ness. Then Madelaine's appearance in the background stresses their togetherness. The shot then briefly consists of a doubled or mirrored alliance between the two fathers and their children. However, when Madelaine attempts to put her father's policeman's hat on Farid's head, he pushes her away. Shortly thereafter, the foreground positioning of Parvez and Fingerhut has also dissolved. This is a direct reference to what will happen in the remainder of the film, and is commonly identified as an example of foreshadowing.⁹ Here the film discourse, in this case the deep-focus shot, presages upcoming events. The two families will never be joined together by the marriage of Farid and Madelaine: Farid dumps Madelaine specifically because of his hatred for her policeman father (Farid could never wear a policeman's hat, as she jokingly tries to make him do).¹⁰ Moreover, by canceling the engagement, Farid becomes estranged from his own father.

From the opening scene one might assume that the film will deal with a conflict between cultures (British vs. Pakistani) as well as a conflict between generations:

⁸ David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 179.

⁹ Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland, *Studying Contemporary American Film: A Guide to Movie Analysis* (London: Arnold, 2002), pp. 89-90.

¹⁰ Hatred appears to be Farid's main motivation, although *MY SON THE FANATIC* does go into much detail concerning the build-up of that hatred. George Lipsitz, in "'Home is Where the Hatred Is': Work, Music, and the Transnational Economy", suggests that migrants internalize the hatred they encounter in the host country and subsequently "flaunt their marginality" (In *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place*, edited by Hamid Naficy. New York and London: Routledge, 1999, pp. 193-212), p. 210.

old versus young (underscored by the title of the film). Furthermore, a certain kind of parallelism can be found in these two binary oppositions: British culture is presented as an old tradition in relation to which the Pakistani immigrants always are newcomers. Many films stage conflicts between generations where the modern younger generation feels misunderstood or unaccepted by the parents, *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE* (Nicholas Ray, 1955) being perhaps the most famous example. In *MY SON THE FANATIC*, however, the generational conflict is complicated culturally, most particularly by Parvez, who doesn't belong to the old British tradition and doesn't fit into his son's newly found home in religious fundamentalism either. While the opening of the film indeed suggests that father Parvez is deciding for his son in a traditional authoritative way, the point is that the film undermines and subverts the all-too convenient conceptions of generational conflicts. Even though the "cultural and age difference" themes are important with respect to the unfolding of the film's narrative, the dichotomies of British vs. Pakistani and older generation vs. youth are juxtaposed in the character of Parvez.

It is not until the second, third and fourth segment of the opening sequence that the key dichotomy of *MY SON THE FANATIC* is introduced: *the opposition between public and private*. Here the character of Bettina is introduced. She serves as a metaphor for the public: she is a prostitute. However, this character only functions in the public domain. Being a prostitute is just one aspect of her character; in fact, her character has two sides: the public figure of the prostitute Bettina and the private woman who goes by the name of Sandra. The two names constitute an interesting paradox: the "professional" name Bettina is widely known, yet absent from any public registers. Only those who are close to her know her "private" name Sandra, and yet it is this name that can be found in all the public registers. The juxtaposition of these two roles is also marked by a change in physical appearance: Bettina wears a blonde wig, whereas Sandra is a brunette. Her role as a character belonging to the public is immediately established by the fact that she is forced to have sex with one of her customers in Parvez's taxi, not in a private hotel room. Bettina/Sandra, moreover, appears opposite the character of Minoo, Parvez's wife.

Minoo is quite literally trapped in private space. Apart from the first scene of the film, the visit to the Fingerhut mansion, Minoo is strictly confined to the privacy of domestic space. However, just like Bettina/Sandra, Minoo is not a clear-cut character, confined to just one particular space. The paradoxical aspect of the Minoo character lies in her public function: she is married to Parvez. In a sense, Minoo is trapped in her public role of being Parvez's wife, a role that thwarts her possibilities of entering the private world of Parvez. He sees her as his spouse, not as a friend and confidante. Their estranged marriage leads to Parvez striking up a friendship with Sandra and his eventual adultery.

Both Sandra and Minoo are characters confined to a particular space, or that is the initial assumption the viewer might have. Whereas Parvez freely moves between public and private space (a mobility which is metaphorically signified by his profession as a taxi driver), the two female characters are strongly positioned in either one domain or the other. Here the distinction between public and private space takes on a gendered dimension: some women seem to fulfill a role exclusively in public space, and others only seem to exist in a private space. Yet, the film also deals with the attempts of both women to escape from their designated space: in the end Sandra will give up being a prostitute, and Minoo will leave the house.

Mobile Spaces

Even though the balance and/or tension between character and homely settings are the main aspect of my analysis, one exception has to be made. Since Parvez is a taxi driver, he spends a lot of (screen) time in a taxi. The question arises how to label this particular space. The taxi seems an apt example of sliding boundaries between public and private space. As Philip Brian Harper argues, on the one hand, the automobile is a safe and isolated space like a home, where the driver is shielded from the outside environment. On the other hand, the apparent seclusion is often lifted at the moment when the driver has eye contact with fellow motorists. Eye contact is an immediate intrusion into the driver's private space. So, although a car (in this case a taxi) may seem like a private space, effectively it is a public space. Harper illustrates his point by using Brian de Palma's 1980 film *DRESSED TO KILL*. This film contains a scene wherein a woman named Kate Miller (Angie Dickinson) has casual sex with a total stranger in the backseat of a taxi. The taxi driver, who takes no action to interrupt the proceedings, witnesses the act and takes pleasure in it, via his rearview mirror. After the woman is killed, it is the taxi driver's testimony to the police that condemns her as both sexually and mentally distressed. The film clearly conveys that a woman seeking sexual pleasure in a taxi cannot be labeled anything but an indecent thrill seeker who, by ignoring the rules of conduct in a public space, has brought her death upon herself. As Harper rightfully points out, the woman's biggest mistake is her misapprehension of the taxi as a private space. One may be tempted to believe that a taxi is a confined, private space; however, the passive yet ultimately condemning presence of the taxi driver posits the taxi firmly in the domain of the public.¹¹

The scene in *MY SON THE FANATIC* which I mentioned earlier, where Bettina

¹¹ Philip Brian Harper, *Private Affairs: Critical Ventures in the Culture of Social Relations* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), pp. 64-68.

has sex with a customer in the backseat of Parvez's taxi, can be viewed in the same manner. Here Parvez and the viewer function as spectators of a private act performed in a public space. However, unlike the taxi driver in *DRESSED TO KILL*, Parvez is reluctant to assume the role of the spectator. He is forced to look since he has to use his rearview mirror in order to drive his car. It appears as if Parvez would like to flee from this private act, yet his responsibility as a taxi driver (and the responsibility he feels towards Bettina) prevents him from leaving his vehicle. Moreover, he is not inclined to prevent or stop the act from taking place. This indicates again that the taxi is a public space in which it is often difficult to intervene.

A Divided Space

In her book *Postcolonial Hospitality*, Mireille Rosello reads postcolonial questions of immigration through the concept of "hospitality".¹² One of the conclusions she draws is that there should be a continuum between positions of guest and host: "if the roles of guests and hosts are set in stone, if immigrants are treated as if they always have to be guests, if hosts are always generous to their poor relations... the continuum between guests and host disappears."¹³ But most importantly she concludes that hospitality always involves a risk: "even if the guest and the host exchange places, their mutual encounter must always situate itself on the course of the pendulum that swings wildly between generosity and cannibalism... the host can always devour the guest, the guest can always devour the host."¹⁴ Assimilation (of the identity of the guest) and exploitation (of the generosity of the host) are among the dangers that lurk beneath the welcoming of "strangers" into the "house".

The restaurant of Parvez's cousin Fizzy is an important setting, which has several functions in the film and can be read from the perspective of such questions of hospitality. First of all, it is indicative of the immigrant who succeeds through hard work. The film has several references to cousin Fizzy's success as an entrepreneur. Even though it was Parvez who lent him the money to start his own Indian restaurant, Fizzy has since become a very successful restaurant owner. Despite the attempted grandeur of Fizzy's establishment and the publicness of the locale, Fizzy's restaurant is still a home to the extended family, in which (unspo-

¹² Mireille Rosello, *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001). Through a reading of several novels, poems, and films, Rosello focuses on the situation of immigrants in France. The issues she raises, however, are more generally important as well.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

ken) laws of hospitality are important.¹⁵ However, the differences in the cousins' careers have challenged the relationship between the two. To Fizzy, Parvez is a man who could have made a successful living, yet somehow remained just a taxi driver. Parvez, on the other hand, seems somewhat jealous of Fizzy's success, although he is also proud of what Fizzy has achieved.

A second function of Fizzy's restaurant is that in several scenes it explicitly provides the setting for a cinematic critique of the dichotomy between public and private. The restaurant is the backdrop for two key scenes in the film. The first scene shows Parvez and Farid discussing the dinner party for Farid's wedding, for which cousin Fizzy is going to supply the food. At this point, Parvez is convinced that the engagement is still on, even though he should know better. Parvez and Farid are given a prominent table in the middle of the dining room of the restaurant. In a conventional shot/reverse shot sequence, the slumbering conflict between Parvez and Farid is rapidly reaching a climax. It is important to note that because their discussion takes place in a restaurant, a public space with a permit to sell alcohol, Parvez can drink a lot of whisky. This livens up their discussion to the point where cousin Fizzy interrupts them and urges them to tone it down. The uncomfortable position of Fizzy as a host is emphasized by the fact that he is not receiving his guests at home but in the public space of his restaurant. For Fizzy, Parvez is not a stranger; indeed, Parvez is family. Yet, Parvez is a guest in the public space of the restaurant.

Moreover, the restaurant scene also stresses the differences between Parvez and Farid. Parvez is presented as the Muslim who is not a real Muslim anymore, since a good Muslim abstains from alcohol. Farid's refusal to drink any kind of alcohol underscores his determination to be a good Muslim. More importantly, the alcohol affects Parvez's behavior to the point that he is unable to drive, which is, of course, his public function. It is in this context that Parvez begins to lose control, not only over his car (his public space), but also over his private home. For it is under the influence of alcohol that he agrees to provide shelter for the "wise man from Lahore" whom Farid has invited to stay in their home. Unbeknownst to him, Parvez, by inviting this guest, has put himself at the "risk of hospitality." This idea will become clearer later on in the film.

The other key restaurant scene confirms the fact that it may be acceptable to get a little drunk in a restaurant, but bringing a "public woman" into a well-respected establishment is considered unacceptable behavior. This scene is an il-

¹⁵ Rosello argues that assimilation for many immigrants in France, especially North African immigrants, was a way of changing their status from guest to host. Although Fizzy is certainly not completely assimilated into English culture, his success as a businessman can be seen as such – which would further help explain his hospitality.

illustration of public opinion obstructing Parvez and Sandra's blossoming romance. By inviting Sandra to a quiet dinner in his cousin's restaurant, Parvez not only tests the limits of Fizzy's hospitality and their allegiance as cousins, but he also overestimates public acceptance of the distinction between "Bettina, the prostitute" and "Sandra, the private woman". Parvez is able to distinguish between the two, but the public does not see "the woman behind the prostitute". It is immediately apparent that Fizzy and one of his waiters recognize Sandra as Bettina the prostitute, despite the fact that she is not wearing her blonde wig. In order to not undermine the restaurant's reputation, Fizzy first tells Parvez that the restaurant is fully booked. Parvez throws a fit, testing Fizzy's loyalty as his cousin. The solution is how Fizzy renegotiates his public space. He gives Parvez and Sandra a table in a separate, undecorated room of the restaurant. Thus, Fizzy denies them a space in the public eye: they are literally removed from sight, so that the restaurant can remain a public space, open to "everyone".

The consequence of Parvez's date with Sandra in a public space is that Parvez and Sandra's friendship can no longer be just a private matter. To return to the example of *DRESSED TO KILL*, this scene exemplifies a similar misapprehension of the difference between public and private space. Here, cousin Fizzy functions as the negotiator between the two domains, although his role is somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, he facilitates a quasi-private space and helps Parvez, even though one can argue that he does so out of self-interest. On the other hand, he judges Parvez, and he also does not feel the need to keep his mouth shut about what has happened in his restaurant.

This House Is Not a Home

This restaurant scene is indicative of the complicated nature of what constitutes a private and a public persona as seen in the character of Bettina/Sandra. Even though this ambivalence seems personified by and confined to Bettina/Sandra, it recurs in a more intricate and far-reaching manner in the most important setting of the film: Parvez's house. Through the analysis of the *mise-en-scène* of the house, I claim that the seed of disruption in the Parvez family lies in the family home itself. This assertion would counter the more common notion that forces of disruption move in from the outside and bear heavily upon a protected and shielded inside. The status of the house as a private space is gradually and systematically destabilized, eventually making the house a public space.

Before I move on with my analysis of the various spaces in Parvez's house, it is important to note that the entire film does not contain a single scene where all the members of the family share the same space in their family house. We see Parvez and Minoo as well as Parvez and Farid share several spaces together (both interi-

or and exterior), but never all of them together. In fact, the only scene in which the family is spatially united is the opening scene of the film, set in the Fingerhut mansion. It is most important to note that during and after their visit to the Fingerhuts, the signs of the disruption of the family become apparent for the first time.

The few exterior shots of Parvez's home suggest a typical terraced house. Furthermore, we learn that the neighborhood is fairly lower class. The prostitutes in this neighborhood are blamed (by Farid) for the low status of the area.

The interior shots of Parvez's house establish five explicitly specified spaces: the living room, the kitchen, Parvez and Minoo's bedroom, Farid's bedroom, and finally the basement. The latter two rooms are the most distinctive from the perspective of a *mise-en-scène* analysis. Farid's room is located at the top of the stairs. The room is both light and empty, since Farid has decided to sell all his worldly possessions. Farid's room stands in sharp contrast to the basement, Parvez's hangout. The basement is a dark and stuffy room where Parvez plays his Louis Armstrong records and drinks his whisky. Located at the bottom of the stairs, the basement creates a spatial tension between the two characters and the spaces they occupy. A basic *mise-en-scène* analysis of the way in which these two spaces are presented might lead one to conclude that the *mise-en-scène* mirrors the emerging conflict between father and son. Moreover, one might be tempted to assume that the clash between father and son initially will be confined to their respective rooms, from which the conflict proceeds to spread, like wildfire, throughout the entire house. Both assumptions are based on a partial analysis of the *mise-en-scène* of the house and are incorrect. Instead, I want to propose that the house's *mise-en-scène* does not so much reflect the conflict, as let the conflict act itself out as a conflict between the private and public dimensions of the family home.¹⁶ The conflict between public and private is ingrained in the family itself.

The first signs of conflict between Parvez and Farid seem rather innocent: Parvez, relaxing in his basement, is disturbed by music coming from Farid's room, a common situation in any household shared by children and parents. Parvez sneaks up the stairs and discovers that the noise is not music, but Farid's instruction tape on how to pray correctly. Parvez is put off by this, but respects what Farid wants to do in his private space and leaves quietly.¹⁷ The act of praying, or even learning how to pray, seems such a private matter that Parvez does not dare to intrude. However, the act of praying as a private matter is questioned in a

¹⁶ For linguistic backgrounds concerning the distinction between "house" (usually denoting a building), and "home", (usually indicating a life-style not necessarily bound to a building), see Joseph Rykwert, "House and Home" (*Social Research*, vol. 58, no. 1, 1991, pp. 51-62).

¹⁷ Later on in the film, Parvez will rebel against Farid and the "wise man", by playing his jazz records very loudly. This is a good example of the reversal of behavior and age between Parvez and Farid, whereby the latter almost acts as a father to the former.

subsequent scene, when we see the transformation of both the act of praying and the space in which this prayer takes place. Farid and his friends gather in his room to read the Koran and pray. This then is no longer just some private individualistic act; it has become a group act. Moreover, even though this gathering of men may still resemble a private act, performed in a private space, it has an important consequence: by turning the room into a place of prayer for a restricted group, Minoo, being a woman, is no longer allowed to enter the room. Minoo's gradual exclusion from important spaces in the house takes on greater significance in the scenes that follow.

The entrance of an important public figure further disrupts the balance between the public and the private within the family. Farid has invited a "wise man from Lahore", a spiritual leader, into the household. This act of hospitality clearly brings a "devouring" guest into the house. His arrival necessitates a drastic rearranging of the house: furniture is moved, the house is thoroughly cleaned, and pictures are removed from the walls and replaced by more suitable ones. This overhaul signals a change in the house's function: it loses its personal touch and becomes an accommodation, a gathering place for a large number of people. A telling scene in this regard is when Parvez discovers that Farid's friends have taken over the ultimate private space: the nuptial bedroom. This takeover has two implications. First, it serves as an ironic observation on Parvez's infidelity: in the previous scene Parvez was seen having sex with Sandra. Secondly, it declares that Parvez and Minoo's marriage is nothing but a farce. Up until this point, the shared bedroom was an important symbol of their marriage. The invasion of this private space, with its publicly marked signification, turns it into a public dormitory.

In the final scenes of *MY SON THE FANATIC*, the aforementioned exile of Minoo to limited parts of her own house is related to the ever-increasing expansion of the influence that the "wise man" is exerting in the house. Whereas the male characters – the "wise man", Farid and, to a lesser extent, Parvez – control and dominate the house, Minoo is locked up in the kitchen, a continuation of the aforementioned engendering of space. The division between male and female spaces is acted out in the key scene that takes place in the house. Parvez, the "wise man", and Farid are in the dining room. The positioning of the three characters is another example of same-frame heuristics: the "wise man" and Farid are in one frame, which emphasizes their union, countered by Parvez in the reverse-shot frame. Parvez asks Farid: "Where's your mother?" In the following shot, the male characters are all captured in the same frame. This seems to strengthen the unified position the male characters hold (against the absent female character); however, the same-frame heuristic is destabilized. Farid and the "wise man" are located further in the background of the frame, against a striking piece of wallpaper with vertical lines. Parvez is positioned in the foreground of the frame, against

a nondescript background. This results in a split of the same frame into two separate spaces, which expresses a breach of the male alliance. One could even say that the vertical lines of the wallpaper, against which Farid and the “wise man” are positioned, emphasize their unwavering characters. Despite the subtle division within the frame, Parvez has become a member of the male alliance, an alliance he would rather not be part of. Minoo’s refusal to come out of the kitchen or let Parvez enter the kitchen emphasizes the fact that according to the new rules of the house, Parvez no longer is in the right place when he enters the gendered domain of the kitchen. Caught between the dining room and the kitchen, Parvez is out of place in his own home.

In the end, the house is not a home to anyone. By letting public functions take over the private spaces of the house, a slumbering conflict is brought to an inevitable climax: each of the characters must first reclaim some private space, before they can return to the house for a possible reconciliation. This reconciliation is, however, not shown in *MY SON THE FANATIC*. Farid is literally kicked out by Parvez, even though Parvez assures Farid that he will always be welcome to return.¹⁸ Minoo leaves of her own accord, seeking solace by returning to her family in Pakistan. It is up to Parvez to reclaim the house, which he tentatively proceeds to do by moving his chair back to its old place.

The final scene of the film offers no indication of whether or not the family will ever reunite. Reconciliation between father and son seems almost impossible or at least a long way off; the seeds of disruption have taken root. Farid’s fundamentalism has hardened, signaling a fatherless period in Farid’s life. But unlike Richard Reid’s terrorism, presented as an inevitable result of the fatherless society, *MY SON THE FANATIC* is more hopeful. Remarkably, this glimmer of hope does not involve the younger generation; instead, it pertains to the father. In the final scene, *MY SON THE FANATIC* OPENS up a new space, a sixth space in the house. Parvez, previously out of place in his own home, finds himself at home in a place of transition. He turns on all the lights, puts on his music and climbs the stairs. At the top of the stairs, which leads from the ground floor to the basement, there is an expedient space of transition, which at least offers some, however ambivalent, hope for the future.

¹⁸ George Lipsitz has described the consequences of internalized hatred, exemplified in *MY SON THE FANATIC* by Farid’s fundamentalism. In “Home Is Where the Hatred Is”, Lipsitz has analyzed Mexican cultural identity in California. He points out that migrants aggressively exaggerate their Mexican roots, but not in an attempt to return – neither physically nor spiritually – to Mexico, but merely to taunt the Americans. Their chant was “*aquí estamos, y no nos vamos*” (we’re here, and we’re not going away, p. 210). Transposed to Farid’s internalized hatred, his angry departure, it will ultimately most likely not lead him to follow his mother back to Pakistan. Even the “wise man from Lahore” is here to stay.

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Chapter 6

Family Matters in EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN: Food Envy, Family Longing, or Intercultural Knowledge through the Senses?

Tarja Laine

In Western cinema, food and drink have often served as symbols for life and sensuality. The enjoyment of food is used to celebrate the pure physical joy of life and sensuality, reminding us of our immediate corporeal sensations, and affirming the vitality of human life. A number of films about food use food imagery in a “carnavalesque” fashion: in *BABETTE’S FEAST* (Gabriel Axel, Denmark, 1987), the maid of two minister’s daughters wins the lottery and spends the entire sum on an elaborate banquet for her Lutheran employers and their church community. In *CHOCOLAT* (Lasse Hallström, UK/US, 2000), a chocolate maker played by Juliette Binoche awakens the residents of a self-restrained French village in the 1950s with her magic chocolates. *LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE* (Alfonso Arau, Mexico, 1992) is a Mexican fable of a gifted young cook, Tita. Denied the chance to marry her beloved Pedro, Tita acquires the ability to prepare miraculous dishes with outrageous sensual effects on those who eat them. What these films have in common is the way in which food and eating serve to reflect the liberating spirit that is unleashed when the prohibitions within official culture are temporarily suspended.

I shall approach the function of food imagery in film from a different perspective, however. In Eastern cultures (China, to be precise), the significance of food and eating lies not only in the satisfaction of the most basic human instinct, but also, and more importantly, at the heart of social relations.¹ As families are created by the sharing of food and tastes, so is food a representation of family rela-

¹ Food and eating are also central techniques for building and maintaining social relationships outside the realm of the family; according to Judith Farquhar, the enjoyment involved in (especially ritual) eating derives from “the process in which eaters negotiate social pathways through an asymmetrical field”. Through food and eating, therefore, social relations in China are “thoroughly embodied” (*Appetites: Food and Sex in Post-Socialist China*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000, p. 147).

tions. In this chapter, I shall explore the question of how gastronomy figures in the film *EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN* (Ang Lee, 1994). The essay is divided into two parts. In the first part, I shall look at how the representation of food aids us in understanding family relations in contemporary Taiwan, a culture that is characterized by the conflict between the old Confucian virtue of respect towards one's parents and the new Western virtue of seeking individual happiness. This approach is not without its problems, as it suggests that through the senses (in this case, taste) one gains immediate access to otherwise unfamiliar cultural significances. Furthermore, it suggests that more "bodily" senses, such as taste, touch and smell, belong to the realm of the (exotic) other, while more "cerebral" senses, such as vision and hearing, belong to the realm of the (Western) self. This division (that has its history in enlightened thinking) also suggests that certain (non-Western) civilizations can easily be made into objects of study from a position of greater knowledge.² Senses, however, are here seen not through some kind of hierarchical relationship, where other senses are reduced to vision; instead, senses are understood as being of equal importance and can even challenge the primacy of vision.

In the second part, then, I acknowledge the subjective sensory investment (as my own "private business") in the process of analyzing the film text in the first part. I shall look at the relationship between the film and (Western) spectators (especially in the way a specific representation of food can serve the spectators a gustatory, bodily experience) and ask to what extent Western spectators can have access to the intercultural cinema of the senses? To what extent can a film about food like *EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN* create a "bridge" between the cinematic world and the spectators' private realm of the senses as a "third space" for intercultural understanding. And to what extent is this just "food envy"? In the end, I shall argue that in an intercultural encounter between (Western) spectator and (Eastern) cinema there are discrepancies that do not necessarily produce "all-owning" spectatorship (that aims to make the unfamiliar familiar), but can actually produce spectatorship that de-familiarizes the self, that respects the externality of the other, and accepts the fact that intercultural knowledge can never be wholly established or translated in terms of one culture or the other.³

² Filip de Boeck, "Het discours van de postcolonialiteit: de problematiek van identiteit en representatie" (In *Handboek Culturele Studies: Concepten-Problemen-Methoden*, edited by Joris Vlaselaers and Jan Baetens. Leuven: Acco, 1996, pp. 139-149), p. 139.

³ "All-owning spectatorship" is a term coined by Trinh T. Minh-ha, and it refers to the way the "West" treats the cultural knowledge of "non-Western" cultures as commodities, as supplements to its own cultural resources ("All-Owning Spectatorship". In *Otherness and the Media: The Ethnography of the Imagined and the Imaged*, edited by Hamid Naficy and Teshome H. Gabriel. Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993, pp. 189-204).

The Family That Tastes Together Stays Together

Several of Ang Lee's films have attempted to bridge the gap between East and West through their representations of families.⁴ In Lee's first feature film, *PUSHING HANDS* (1992), a retired Chinese tai-chi master moves to San Francisco to live with his son and his American daughter-in-law, whose Western ideas on raising children and housekeeping he finds to be peculiar at best. With *THE WEDDING BANQUET* (1993), Lee explores the crisis of a gay Chinese man living with his American lover in New York City, whose life turns into chaos when his traditional parents arrive from China for a visit. In *EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN*, Lee treats changing family values through representations of food and an appeal to the sense of taste. In other words, it is through food and taste that meaningful knowledge about family values is shared, a familial discourse that specifies the family members' affective relations to each other. Here, then, family is defined: family is not so much a concrete entity, but a way of interpreting interpersonal, familial ties: "a way of attaching meaning to interpersonal relations".⁵ In other words, there is no original core or main essence of family, but families are always in the making, in the context of the (trans)cultural.

In *EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN*, the widowed master chef Chu (Sihung Lung) prepares a magnificent dinner every Sunday for his three daughters in his home in Taipei. Everything is prepared with immense devotion, even though the old chef has lost his sense of taste, and even though the family hardly touches the food that is so carefully prepared. It seems that Chu has lost his sense of taste as he has, after the death of his wife, repressed his emotions; yet, the only way he can express his love for his daughters is through cooking. The daughters, however, just want to go on with their own lives. The middle daughter, Jia-Chien (Chien-Lien Wu), is an airline executive. She tells of her desire to move out of her childhood home, in the kitchen in which she has learned all of her father's elaborate recipes. She has given up her dreams of becoming a great chef, as her father wanted her to get a "real job". The oldest daughter, Jia-Jen (Kuei-Mei Yang), a chemistry teacher, has converted to Christianity and has resigned herself to remaining single in order to take care of their father, until she falls in love with the new sports coach at her school. She secretly marries him. The youngest daughter, Jia-Ning (Yu-Wen Wang), is a waitress at a hamburger joint, until she becomes pregnant and moves in with her boyfriend. Jia-Chien is offered a promotion to a position in

⁴ See Jeroen de Kloet's chapter in the next section of this volume for a more elaborate analysis of the specific translations of Eastern and Western (family) values in Ang Lee's work.

⁵ Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, "Phenomenology, Ethnomethodology, and Family Discourse" (In *Sourcebook of Family Theories and Methods*, edited by Pauline G. Boss et al. New York: Plenum Press, 1993, pp. 651-672), p. 654.

Amsterdam, but she turns down the offer, as she believes that her father is seriously ill. Unexpectedly, the father plans to get re-married with the childhood friend of his oldest daughter and to move out of his house. A few months later, Jia-Chien is shown living in her father's house, cooking a fabulous dinner for her father who is now visiting her. As her father affectionately criticizes her food, he realizes that he can actually taste her soup and that he has regained his sense of taste for food and for a new family life.

In *EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN*, two familial discourses are at play: the first is the moral philosophy of Confucius (551-479 B.C.) and his follower Mencius (371-289 B.C.) that forms the spiritual basis of Chinese family life and is influential to this day. The most highly appreciated moral value in this philosophy is filial piety – duty, obligation, and self-sacrifice to one's parents – which characterizes Chinese family relations.⁶ The meaning of filial piety is threefold: to show gratitude toward one's parents for the care they have given, to respect and love one's parents, and to show duty and devotion to take care of one's parents.⁷ As Mencius wrote in *The Book of Mencius*: “What is the most important duty? One's duty toward one's parents.... There are many duties one should discharge, but the fulfillment of one's duty towards one's parents is the most basic.”⁸

The second familial discourse at play is the modern, Western virtue of individual achievements and happiness. These two discourses manifest themselves in the relationship between Chu and his middle daughter Jia-Chien that revolves around food. Both are passionate about their own cooking, and both confirm their cultural identity through their attachment to food. Yet by having chased Jia-Chien away from the kitchen, Chu disturbs his daughter's role in the family: for Chu, cooking is a way of expressing his affection but also a way to exercise his power in the family that maintains the generational and gender hierarchies within it. The only place Jia-Chien can rebel against her father (and thus express her individuality) is at her once-in-a-while lover's house where she cooks fabulous dinners for him. Like her father's meals, these meals are left uneaten, indicating that there is something wrong in the relationship.

Food, then, in *EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN* functions as a medium in and of itself: food serves to express emotions as well as to mark power relations and cultural

⁶ William H. Meredith, and Douglas A. Abbott, “Chinese Families in Later Life” (In *Families in Multicultural Perspective*, edited by Bron B. Ingoldsby and Suzanna Smith. New York: Guilford Press, 1995, pp. 213-230). See also Jeroen de Kloet's article in the next section.

⁷ See Francis L.K. Hsu, *The Challenge of the American Dream: The Chinese in the United States* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1971), and X. Li, “The Effect of Family on the Mental Health of the Chinese Family” (In *Chinese Culture and Mental Health*, edited by Tseng Wen-Shing and David Y. Wu. Hong Kong: Academic Press, 1985, pp. 85-93).

⁸ Quoted in Nina Rosenstand, *The Moral of the Story: An Introduction to Ethics* (London: Mayfield, 1999, p. 478).

differences within the family. Chu loves his daughters but does not understand them, as there is a cultural gap between them that is symbolized and expressed in the difference of their food customs. Chu prepares food traditionally using artisanal methods; the film begins with an elaborate montage sequence of Chu preparing the Sunday dinner. We see Chu cleaning the fish that a moment ago were swimming in a tub, cutting the fish into filets, and covering them with flour before baking them. Everything is done with the utmost care and efficiency, using traditional equipment and fresh ingredients – the vegetables and herbs seem to come straight from the garden, the chicken has been raised in Chu's own yard, and the frogs crawl across the kitchen table. The preparation of every dish goes through several stages and everything is done by hand, with the greatest precision. These images are intercut with scenes from the hamburger stand, where Chu's youngest daughter works. Here, industrially prepared meals come off the assembly line and are served wrapped in plastic. It remains unclear what ingredients go into these meals – when a customer complains that he ordered chicken, for instance, the reply is that what he is holding really is chicken. This food is consumed rather than shared and is thus not a way for someone to attach meaning to interpersonal relationships.⁹ Furthermore, this food is consumed not because of its nourishing properties or its taste: it merely fills one up, but does not nourish, neither physically nor symbolically. Rather, this food is consumed as a commodity that reflects the increase of Western influences: individualization and a sense of separateness from others. Western food culture, then, is contrasted to a culture in which the traditional family is the extended family and many generations live under one roof.¹⁰

Furthermore, the fact that Chu has lost his sense of taste suggests that his ways of interacting with the members of his family have, as a result, been disturbed. Interpersonal relationships shape our responses to food, and this shapes our sense of self on the bodily level. As Deborah Lupton argues, “food and eating are central to our subjectivity... and our experience of embodiment, or the ways that we live in and through our bodies, which itself is inextricably linked with subjectivity.”¹¹ Chu cannot taste – unlike Jia-Chien – that the ham, for instance, has been smoked slightly too long, nor does he see that there is something wrong with his family re-

⁹ This does not mean that this kind of “meaningless” food cannot be marketed in ways that link them to values like youth, sexual attractiveness, or fun times. See Deborah Lupton, *Food, the Body, and the Self* (London: Sage, 1996).

¹⁰ On food as a commodity, see Pasi Falk, *The Consuming Body* (London: Sage, 1994). On characteristics of the traditional Chinese family, see William Meredith and Douglas Abbott. “Chinese Families in Later Life” (In *Families in Multicultural Perspective*, edited by Bron B. Ingoldsby and Suzanna Smith. New York: Guilford Press, 1995, pp. 213-230).

¹¹ Lupton, *Food, the Body and the Self*, p. 1.

lations. Chu wants to take care of his daughters and refuses to see that they do not need to be taken care of; instead, the daughters would like to help their father, but he refuses. By refusing help from his daughters, Chu refuses them their right to fulfill their filial piety, and as a result involuntarily chases them away.

In *EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN*, then, family values manifest themselves in terms of food: as Chu feels that his concern and cooking are not being appreciated by his daughters, he transfers his protective urge onto little Shan-Shan (Yu-Chien Tang), the little daughter of single mother Jin-Rong (Sylvia Chang), who is an old friend of Chu's oldest daughter. Jin-Rong cannot cook, so Chu secretly starts preparing elaborate little lunches for Shan-Shan to take to school, which immediately become a big success in class. To maintain the secret, Chu eats the lunches that Jin-Rong has prepared for Shan-Shan.

Like her father, Jia-Chien needs to attach meaning to her interpersonal relationships and to express herself emotionally through food. As Lupton points out, there is a strong relationship between (childhood) memories and the emotional dimension of food. The taste, smell, and texture of food can serve to evoke emotions and memories of previous food experiences.¹² Since Jia-Chien has practically grown up in her father's kitchen, most of her memories are about cooking. They are located in her mouth and nose. For her, the kitchen is a family realm, and cooking is a way to define affective family relations. Yet she is excluded from her father's kitchen: "If I cooked in my father's kitchen I would hurt his pride." So whenever she feels like cooking, she goes to her ex-lover's house whose kitchen (but not his heart, as he does not eat her food) belongs entirely to her. In the sequence in which Jia-Chien cooks for her ex-lover, we are shown a series of close-ups (reminiscent of the film's opening scenes) of her making dim sum with the greatest precision. It is clear that she is as brilliant a cook as her father, and the fact that her father does not encourage or even allow her to cook saddens and frustrates her greatly.

Meanwhile, Jin-Rong has found out about Chu and Shan-Shan's little secret. She is embarrassed that the great chef has to eat the terrible lunches she prepares. But as Chu declares, "I have lost my taste, so it is the thought that counts." The "thought", of course, is that food is there to be shared, to be both given and received. Sharing the food leads to their falling in love; they get married, and Chu moves out of his house. In the final sequence of the film, we see the returning pattern of a series of close-ups of hands preparing food with great meticulousness. At first we do not see who is cooking and where this is done, until a medium long shot reveals that it is Jia-Chien in her father's kitchen, now cooking the traditional Sunday dinner for the family. This time, however, Chu is the only one who comes

¹² Ibid., pp. 32-3.

to dinner. When he gently criticizes Jia-Chien for putting too much ginger in the soup, he realizes that he can taste again. By learning to receive, Chu has learned to let go; as a result, his sense of taste returns, and everybody finds his or her place in the family circle again.

The way in which food defines family relationships (which culminates in the culinary relationship between Chu and Jia-Chien) in *EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN*, then, bespeaks of the changing patterns in the multigenerational, multicultural settings of the Chinese family. Confucian virtues of familial interdependence and devotion between parents and children have remained important, even though there are tensions and conflicts between (Western) independence and (Confucian) interdependence. However, there is also a tendency that promotes harmony between opposing values. The film seems to suggest that family relations in contemporary Taiwan should be like Jia-Chien's idea of food: "in harmony with energy, taste, and the nature. Like yin and yang." As a result, the familial attachment between the parents and their children would also be based on mutual affection and love, rather than just on prevailing social customs.

Eating Chinese: Food Envy or Embodied Spectatorship and Intercultural Knowledge

The cultural differences that usually interest ethnography quickly faded around Chinese dinner tables, and the fellow feeling that arose as food and drink were shared seemed to overcome barriers of language and etiquette. "their" food became "my" food, and allowed me to focus my well-fed ethnographic energies on the "real" stuff of culture above the level of everyday sustenance.¹³

Judith Farquhar here suggests that it is possible to gain access through taste to the cultural meanings that are different from one's own. The gustatory experience offered by the film *EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN*, moreover, seems to enable the Western spectator to gain a visceral access to Chinese family values. *EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN* appeals to the spectator's senses via visual and aural clues. The opening scene with the fish, for instance, evokes the viewer's senses of smell, touch, and taste. The close-up shot of the fish allows the spectator to explore the bright color of its skin and its blood. Combined with the sound of the splashing water, it evokes the spectator's experience of freshness, and arouses a sensation of touch and smell. The close-up of dusty flour and the sounds of file and knives evoke texture and the sense of touch in the spectator. The images of rising steam

¹³ Farquhar, *Appetites: Food and Sex in Post-Socialist China*, pp. 42-3.

and smoke as well as the aural cues of sizzling pans evoke the smell of fire and cooking food, while the visual close-ups of brown, thick gravy, juicy spare ribs and chili evoke a sense of taste. According to Laura Marks, it is common for cinema to evoke sensory experiences through intersensory, so-called synesthetic links (the perception of one sensation by another modality, such as the ability to distinguish colors by their “tone of voice”).¹⁴ Synesthetic images are often used in intercultural cinema as a critique of visual mastery, in order to bring the images closer to the spectators’ other senses.¹⁵ The sensuous cinematic experience, then, is a function of the interplay of the senses.

As senses are a source of social understanding (our taste and our responses to food, for instance, are shaped by our cultural memories and interpersonal relationships), intercultural cinema by definition operates simultaneously at the juncture of several systems of cultural knowledge:

The cinematic encounter takes place not only between my body and the film’s body, but my sensorium and the film’s sensorium. We bring our own personal and cultural organization of the senses to cinema, and cinema brings a particular organization of the senses to us, the filmmaker’s own sensorium refracted through the cinematic apparatus. One could say that intercultural spectatorship is the meeting of two different sensorial systems, which may or may not intersect. Spectatorship is thus an act of sensory translation of cultural knowledge.¹⁶

Intercultural films such as *EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN* may be able to make cultural, sensory experience available to the spectator. No wonder, then, that I felt strangely confident in theorizing Chinese family values in the first part of this chapter.

Having some history in eating Chinese food (and even in trying to cook it myself, although not as elaborately as Chu in the film), I felt a sense of belonging when I saw *EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN*. Through my own culinary memories, I felt that I had access to an understanding of the centrality of food in Chinese family values. My confidence, however, has also made me suspicious. To what extent can an intercultural film like *EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN* really create this kind of “third space” for intercultural understanding, and to what extent is this just a matter of using the “exotic other” as a “spice” “that can liven up the dull dish that

¹⁴ Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000, pp. 194-242).

¹⁵ By intercultural cinema I mean a cinema that cannot be defined as belonging to any one single culture and that suggests movement between two (or more) cultures.

¹⁶ Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p. 153.

is mainstream white culture?"¹⁷ Food and taste can be resources of cultural knowledge; they actually may be the most flexible, interactive, and welcoming medium for sharing that knowledge. But to what extent can my personal and private sensuous experience of the film really give me access to that knowledge? To what extent can I encounter the other, and to what extent am I just a "food adventurer"?¹⁸ To what extent, then, does my interest in other cultures equate food adventurism? To what extent is it just food envy? Perhaps I appreciate the freshness of ingredients, the elaborate, artisanal methods of cooking, and the traditional family values in *EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN* primarily because I find them exciting and unusual in comparison to my own?

To value a culture simply because it brings me into contact with something different from my own is to value it because of an incidental fact about myself; such a form of appreciation makes my experience the most relevant aspect of the exchange, and makes me the only relevant measure of the interest of a culture.¹⁹

According to Lisa Heldke, this is an attitude that advances a harmful relation to the other culture as well as to one's own, as the food adventurer, in his or her valorization of tradition and "authenticity" tends to devalue the importance of his or her traditions and the way in which those traditions have contributed to his or her cultural identity.

In my reading of *EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN*, for instance, I rejected hamburgers for being primarily industrial and impersonal food, whereas in fact there clearly is a family dimension: hamburger restaurant chains profile themselves as family restaurants, are children friendly, and cater to the needs of the family group as a whole. But perhaps I also rejected them because I do not find them exotic enough, even though, as Heldke points out, hamburgers are a strikingly unique food item for many people in this world.²⁰ The carefully prepared, "authentic" Chinese dishes, on the other hand, may give me the impression that I am accessing authentic family relations. But obviously, it is my personal perspective that makes something "exotic" and "authentic". When did my perspective become the universal

¹⁷ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 14.

¹⁸ "Food adventurism," coined by Lisa Heldke, refers to an attitude that is not far from cultural colonialism. Food adventurers love to try new cuisines, and they are always in search of new and remote culinary cultures that they can use as raw material in their own food practices to make themselves more interesting (*Exotic Appetites: Ruminations of a Food Adventurer*. London: Routledge, 2003).

¹⁹ Heldke. *Exotic Appetites*, p. 15.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

standard against which difference is revealed? My gustatory experience and my search for Chinese family values, then, may end up being a self-centered investigation, motivated by a desire to fill the emptiness in my own, individualized culture. My unfamiliarity with Chinese food and Chinese values, then, would become a standard by which I define the authentic identity of the Chinese family, and my desire to make this cultural knowledge familiar for myself would become merely food envy and family longing. I would appear to be not only devaluing my own family traditions, but also “snatching” them from the other, even when “not hungry”.

As Marks points out, we cannot simply decide to move into new forms of sensory knowledge.²¹ The food adventurer’s tongue may learn to acquire new tastes quickly, but his or her acculturated body is slower than the tongue. Sharing food and drink at a Chinese dinner table may offer someone a small glimpse of Chinese family values, but a Western food adventurer can never inhabit the Chinese cultural sensorium or the Chinese system of values. Instead, the only thing that connects food adventurers to this system may be their desire to make the “exotic” into something familiar to themselves. Having cut themselves off from their own food ways and family traditions, food adventurers now must investigate other cultures for something to eat and connect to.²²

Having said this, however, I do not believe that intercultural understanding is impossible. If that were the case, we would have to assume that cultures exist in isolation from each other, and that human beings are culturally obstinate and inflexible. Yet, if I attempt to understand and connect myself to a particular ethnic system in the context of the intercultural, I first have to understand how intercultural encounters shape *my* ways of being in the world. According to Marks, this is precisely the function of the intercultural cinema of the senses. Intercultural cinema should trouble the ease with which we approach culture that is not our own, and compel its spectators to confront the ways in which they impose their own cultural practices and systems of value (such as food ways and family traditions) on another culture.²³ Furthermore, intercultural cinema should begin to supplant the primacy of vision as a source of “knowledge”. For instance, by emphasizing the more “bodily” senses at the expense of “cerebral” vision, intercultural cinema should help distance the spectators from their own cultures, which they see reflected around them so predominantly that they have become “invisible” to them. This invisibility even causes them to think of their culture as no culture at all, but as a kind of background against which other cultures can be displayed.²⁴

²¹ Marks, *The Skin of Film*, p. 241.

²² Heldke, *Exotic Appetites*, p. 53.

²³ Marks, *The Skin of Film*, p. 241.

²⁴ Heldke, *Exotic Appetites*, p. xxi.

Mikhail Bakhtin described this interpersonal and intercultural encounter as dialogic: "In the realm of culture, outsidership is a most powerful factor in understanding.... Without *one's own* questions one cannot creatively understand anything other or foreign.... Such a *dialogic* encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixing. Each retains its own unity and *open* totality, but they are mutually enriched."²⁵ In the spirit of Bakhtin's dialogism, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam argue that entire cultures are disposed to "mutual illumination", which "takes place both 'within' and 'between' cultures and thus provides a model for dialogical cross-cultural study".²⁶ The challenge of intercultural cinema, then, is not to invite its spectators to merge with some other culture, but to invite them to use their understanding of another culture in order to rethink their own cultural standards that have become invisible to them.²⁷

EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN invites its spectators to do this by first seducing the spectators with tasty images, but ultimately resisting their absolute integration into the Chinese cultural sensorium. Several distancing food elements in the film suggest that the significance of Chinese family relations is more complex than a Western spectator may assume. For a representative of the Western supermarket culture, the fact that Chu prepares all the dishes by hand from scratch is such a distancing, defamiliarizing element. Some of the ingredients that Chu uses, such as frogs, are distancing as well. At the wedding of the governor's son, Chu prepares extraordinary dishes with names like "Healthy Sharkfin" and "Lucky Dragon Phoenix" that may have a specific symbolic significance in Chinese wedding culture that remains unclear to the Western spectator (the "Stinking Tofu" that Jia-Ning shares with her heart-broken friend may be symbolically more accessible). Out of these simultaneously welcoming and distancing food elements in EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN, a "fusion food" emerges that is really not about mixing East and West, modern and traditional, but about raising the senses of the eater/spectator and stimulating him or her intellectually. The family that appears through this kind of representational practice, in a growing number of intercultural films, is not a fixed entity (the stable nuclear family), but a moving concept in the context of the transnational.

²⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), pp. 6-7.

²⁶ Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994), p 241.

²⁷ See also Paul Willemsen, "The National" (In *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory*. London: BFI, 1994. pp. 206-219).

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Filmography

- EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN / YIN SHI NAN NU (Central Motion Pictures Company, Good Machine, Taiwan/USA: 1994) directed by Ang Lee.

Part 3
Translating Family Values

Chapter 7

Saved by Betrayal? Ang Lee's Translations of "Chinese" Family Ideology

Jeroen de Kloet

I think the American president, not only in the nation, but worldwide, is the ultimate father figure. So when he fails, it's like robbing people of their innocence. There's a great sense of loss of trust, of faith. The Chinese see that a bit differently, though – we lost our innocence 3000 years ago.

*Ang Lee, 1997*¹

I think translation is defined by its difference from the original, straining at identity. The management of this difference as identity is the varied politics of the situation of translation.

*Gayatri Spivak, 2001*²

Born on the First of July

On 1 July 1997, a hot and rainy Tuesday, Hong Kong, which had been under British colonial rule for 150 years, was, in the dominant discourse at least, returned to Chinese rule. BORN ON THE FIRST OF JULY was the title given to a compilation CD produced and released precisely on 1 July 1997 by a Taiwanese record company "What's Music". The Taiwanese, Hong Kong and mainland Chinese bands featured on the CD were invariably part of the semi-underground, alternative music scenes of the respective places.³

¹ Quoted in Jennie Yabroff, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, 1997 (<http://www.salon.com/ent/int/1997/10/17lee.html>, available, November 28, 2003).

² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Questioned on Translation: Adrift" (*Public Culture*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2001, pp. 13-22), p. 21.

³ The music cultures in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong are by and large dominated by the more commercial sound of *Canto* and *Manda* pop, a sound that is often, and unfortunately, downplayed by academics as, for example, "sickly sweet love songs". See Michael Dutton, *Streetlife China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 239. Beijing, in particular, has emerged as the center of what is often constructed in popular and academic discourse as the more alter-

Quite apart from offering alternative constructions, the contributions on the CD not only incorporated the hand-over into the dominant narrative of a family reunion, the reunification of the Chinese family, but also injected this family with a strong sense of patriotism. The hand-over to China was *celebrated* as a happy family event, rather than a complex shift in power (by some referred to as a re-colonization of Hong Kong).⁴ The CD *BORN ON THE FIRST OF JULY* underlines the power of a political identity that thrives on the notion of the Chinese family. Among the CD's fourteen songs, only one voice raises critical questions about the familial return of Hong Kong to its motherland. In the song, "Beyond that day", by Beijing rock star Cui Jian, the singer-cum-songwriter asks his mother (that is: the mainland authorities):

Do you really understand the sister I have never met,
 or do you really understand me?
 If we all of a sudden fall in love with one another,
 what are you going to do?

 Mother,
 the day my sister comes back, is a chance
 to go beyond that traditional concept of family.⁵

Like the CD's other contributions, this song illustrates the pervasiveness of family ideology, and how this ideology is transposed towards the general level of Chineseness. Cui Jian, like the other contributors, invokes the family reunion as a metaphor for the political event; yet, unlike the rest, he pushes the metaphor to the limit of an incestuous affair, forcing his audience (including the mainland authorities) to test the boundaries of the traditional concept of family.

But what lies beyond the family? If even alternative bands have a uniform voice when it comes to the family, and the only subversive note is the insinuation of incest, arguably the ultimate intrafamilial formation, how can one move beyond the family? The CD project was essentially intracultural – all the featured bands perform within the context of Greater China (here understood as comprising China, Hong Kong and Taiwan) and their audiences remain by and large confined to Chi-

native and (counter-) political sound of rock music. See Jeroen de Kloet, "Let Him Fuckin' See the Green Smoke beneath My Groin: The Mythology of Chinese Rock" (In *Postmodernism and – China*, edited by Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000, pp. 239-274). However, Hong Kong and Taipei also have their own rock cultures.

⁴ Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997).

⁵ Translated by Chow Yiufai.

nese audiences. Intracultural, here, is signified in terms of authorship (since all of the bands are based in Greater China), production (the CD was produced by a Taiwanese company) and consumption (the audience is located in Greater China).⁶ In this chapter, however, I take Cui's appeal seriously and search for ways to move beyond the traditional concept of family. It is perhaps necessary to leave the safe and familial grounds of the homeland to offer some new perspectives of the Chinese family. I will, therefore, leave behind the *intracultural* in favor of the *intercultural*. This chapter, then, searches for authorship, production, and audiences no longer within cultures, but rather in between cultures.

This chapter explores the possibilities intercultural expressions offer for the interrogation of the highly politicized Neo-Confucian Chinese family ideology, with its particular focus on its articulations of harmony, hierarchy, filial piety, and patriarchy. It singles out the work of diasporic filmmaker Ang Lee to critique this Chinese family ideology.⁷ Drawing on both Rey Chow and Walter Benjamin, I will interpret Ang Lee as a translator of the theme of the Chinese family into different settings (or combinations of time and space). In my analysis, I will be (ab)using bits and pieces from his oeuvre, namely *THE WEDDING BANQUET* (1993), *THE ICE STORM* (1997), *CROUCHING TIGER HIDDEN DRAGON* (2000) and *HULK* (2003). It is my contention that such *intercultural* translations open up readings of Chinese family ideology that remain often unspeakable or inaudible in *intracultural* articulations exemplified by the CD *BORN ON THE FIRST OF JULY*.

Global Cultural Impurity

Lee's oeuvre oscillates between places and times, between genres and styles, inevitably pushing such dogged questions of authorship, authenticity and tradition on the one hand and questions of translation on the other to the forefront. I will search for the cinematic tactics by which Lee translates Chinese family ideology in terms of specific places and times. The diasporic background of the maker, his intercultural oeuvre, ranging from the American suburban *THE ICE STORM* to the chivalric *wuxia* epic *CROUCHING TIGER HIDDEN DRAGON*, as well as the diverse background of his (imagined) audiences offer me the perfect cultural mix (or what Benjamin would call "flux"⁸) to delve into issues of translation.

⁶ Examples of Chinese popular music that reaches Western audiences are extremely rare. See De Kloet, "Let Him Fuckin' See".

⁷ See also Tarja Laine's chapter in the previous section of this volume, for an explanation of Confucian family ideology, and for an analysis of the importance of food in the work of Ang Lee and Chinese family ideology.

⁸ Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" (In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968, pp. 69-82).

Ang Lee, born in 1954, Taipei, moved to the United States at age 21. Given his diasporic background and the times and places in which his movies have been made, Ang Lee's oeuvre can be considered profoundly *impure*.

I prefer to use the concept of impurity, rather than hybridity, so we can both circumvent the discursive and often celebratory burden of the latter concept, and foreground the cultural ambiguities or pollution involved in the processes of translation.⁹ Impurity implies a proliferation of dirt,¹⁰ the looming possibility that it may unsettle, betray any neat and tidy, hopefully healthy and self-perpetuating ideology such as the Chinese family – a pollution of origins. Ang Lee's impurity is further propelled by the uncertainty of the audience's gaze both in Greater China and in the rest of the world. Ang Lee's intercultural translations negotiate not only his own diasporic status, but the different implied audiences as well.

Reflections of cinematic travels tend to center around the formalistic rather than the thematic aspect of translation. For instance, Tarantino's *KILL BILL* is considered to be a translation of the filmic language of Hong Kong *kung fu* cinema, just as *THE MATRIX* relies heavily on the martial arts aesthetics of Hong Kong films. Here I am less concerned with the formalistic translations in Lee's work than with his thematic translations, in particular those of the family. Drawing on Walter Benjamin, cultural theorist Rey Chow warns against the danger of reifying the origin into the real and most truthful source when analyzing cultural translations. Translation not only refers, etymologically, to "tradition", it also refers to betrayal.¹¹ To insist on seeing a cinematic work as a translation is to insist on the questions of tradition and betrayal. Likewise, my choice of reading Ang Lee's works as thematic translations is to invoke the theme of the traditional Chinese family and the possibilities of moving beyond, or betraying, these traditions.

The act of intercultural translation is crucial if we are to move beyond the traditional concept of family. However, this requires further reflection on the relationship between the "original" and its translation. "It is assumed that the value of translation is derived solely from the 'original,' which is the authenticator of itself and of its subsequent versions."¹² Inspired by Benjamin's essay on translation, Chow instead interprets translation as "primarily a process of *putting together*."¹³ Consequently, translations may produce meanings that remain invisible or unspeakable in the "original". "Translation is a process in which the

⁹ Homi K. Bhaba, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁰ Jo Tavener, "Media, Morality, and Madness: The Case against Sleaze TV" (*Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2000, pp. 63-85).

¹¹ Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 182.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 184.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 185-6.

'native' [here: Chinese family ideology, JdK] should let the foreign affect, or infect, itself, and vice versa."¹⁴ The native is infected by the foreign, just as the foreign is infected by the native – thereby contaminating, polluting the "origin."¹⁵ A translation consequently contaminates rather than copies. In the words of Benjamin: "A translation touches the original lightly and only at the infinitely small point of the sense, thereupon pursuing its own course according to the laws of fidelity in the freedom of linguistic flux."¹⁶ The freedom of linguistic flux is, however, not unlimited. When Lee translates the theme of the Chinese family into different periods of time (past, present, or future), different places (the US, China, or a fantastical world), different articulations and betrayals begin to emerge, as my analysis will show.

I would also argue that producers of diasporic culture like Lee are in a particularly good position to engage in intercultural translations, a task that has hitherto been colonized by Western anthropologists. Lee thus becomes a kind of new ethnographer, which Chow calls for:

A new ethnography is possible only when we turn our attention to the subjective origins of ethnography as it is practiced by those who were previously ethnographized, and who have, in the postcolonial age, taken up the active task of ethnographizing their own culture.¹⁷

Chow focuses on the works of acclaimed fifth-generation filmmakers like Zhang Yimou, arguing that their work can be interpreted as cultural translations that parody Western orientalism. Their ambiguous translation of orientalism exoticizes China and at the same time reveals its dirty secrets, its violence, and its corrupt traditions.¹⁸ In a similar way, albeit not as strongly related to orientalist discourses as the Fifth-Generation filmmakers, Lee's cinematographic and thematic translations – most significantly the theme of the family – become acts of betrayal. And it may well be that in the current postcolonial period, betrayal is what we need, since it implies an interrogation of reified traditions like the Chinese family. I believe my analysis can be taken beyond the boundaries of Chineseness and family ideology: I consider Lee's position emblematic of contemporary cultural production in an increasingly globalized world, where directors are constantly in-

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 189.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault argues that the origin was never pure in the first place. See Foucault, "What Is an Author?" (In *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, pp. 101-120).

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator", p. 80.

¹⁷ Chow, *Primitive Passions*, p. 189.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 202.

volved in intercultural translations of forms and themes. To be sure, Lee's diverse intercultural oeuvre is a reflection of a personal condition, but it also embodies a cultural predicament of a globalizing world that is increasingly in flux, in translation, in which no one, no thing can truly claim to be original.¹⁹

Family Matters in China

According to Martin King Whyte, Confucian norms of family life are usually seen as offering sharp contrasts to the patterns of Western family life. The Chinese emphasis on family obligations and the use of filial piety to reinforce these obligations in the younger generation is considered overwhelming.²⁰ I will single out four conspicuous characteristics of Chinese family ideology:

1. The importance ascribed to *harmony*, which is crucial if a society is to flourish; harmony will, according to Confucius, be sustained if each individual knows his or her role.²¹
2. Consequently, a strict and transparent *hierarchy* is considered pivotal in Confucian ideology; examples include the dualistic relationships between emperor-subject, husband-wife, brother-sister, older brother-younger brother, and father-son.²²
3. Familial relations are characterized by the power of the father, which is indicative of the *patriarchy* that permeates Confucianism.²³
4. Parallel to patriarchy, the obligations of the child towards the parents are crucial. Confucianism requires the unconditional *piety* (*xiao*) of children towards their parents, particularly the father.²⁴

The four elements – harmony, hierarchy, patriarchy and piety – are closely intertwined, forming a web that strives to keep every one in place. Filial piety, for example, is just one instance of the patriarchal hierarchy of Confucianism that serves to safeguard the harmony of the Chinese family. Yet, for analytical reasons, I consider it useful to disentangle the four elements from each other, and track how they change, are contaminated to the extent of betrayal, in the process of Ang Lee's intercultural translation. My analysis follows the chronology of the movies under

¹⁹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

²⁰ Martin King Whyte, "The Fate of Filial Obligations in Urban China" (*The China Journal* vol. 38, July 1997, pp. 1-31), p. 1.

²¹ John Fuh-sheng Hsieh, "Democratizing China" (*Journal of Asian and African Studies* vol. 38, no. 4-5, 2003, pp. 377-391), p. 381.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 380.

²³ Chengyang Li, "Confucianism and Feminist Concerns: Overcoming the Confucian 'Gender Complex'" (*Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2000, pp. 187-200).

²⁴ Whyte, "The Fate of Filial Obligations", p. 1.

consideration (*THE WEDDING BANQUET* (1993), *THE ICE STORM* (1997), *CROUCHING TIGER HIDDEN DRAGON* (2000) and *HULK* (2003)) and traces possible changes in Lee's translations of the familial theme over time.

The Wedding Banquet: Masking Reality, Keeping the Family Harmony

In *THE WEDDING BANQUET*, a gay couple (Taiwan-Chinese Wai Tung and American Simon) is trying to come to terms with family ideology by staging a straight marriage for the Chinese parents. Everyone involved knows it is a performance, including the parents themselves. The girl Wei Wei, whom Wai Tung marries, is an artist from mainland China, who wants to secure her resident status in the U.S. by obtaining a green card through this marriage. One of the central crises in the narrative occurs when Wei Wei realizes she is carrying her fake husband's baby, after some real sex on the wedding night. The translation of this complex pseudo-romantic triangle, consisting of Taiwan, mainland China, and the US, profoundly politicizes the familial theme. The US provides the place while Taiwan supplies the means to rescue a mainland Chinese citizen from having to return to what the West and Taiwan consider a repressive communist regime. The politicization of the Chinese family is anything but new,²⁵ but the explicit translation in *THE WEDDING BANQUET* of the political into the familial renders it more visible.

By the end of the movie, Lee offers the audience a dramatic turn: the father, who is normally very reticent, very patriarchal, a stereotypical Chinese Head of the Family, reveals to Simon that he actually understands English and hints at his knowledge of their gay relationship. Despite this disclosure, he immediately requests secrecy from Simon: "No, not Wai Tung, not mother, not Wei Wei should know our secret." Then he continues in Chinese, "If I hadn't let them lie, I would never have gotten a grandchild." The movie can be read as a celebration of the lie that keeps the harmonious family intact and secures offspring. Here, the tactic of masquerading the real is used, a masquerade that is performed with the knowledge and consent of all the parties involved. Betrayal seeps through from the theoretical to the textual level. The characters lie, hide, and betray each other in order to sustain the required harmony of the family; in other words, they may be betraying their family members, but never the family itself.

This celebration of the lie allows Chinese family ideology to remain firmly in place. The artist and illegal migrant from mainland China, Wei Wei, not only marries Wai Tung but also becomes pregnant. The marriage and pregnancy grant

²⁵ See Jinhua Dai, "Behind Global Spectacle and National Image Making" (*Positions*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2001, pp. 161-186); and Susan L. Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State: 1915-1953* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

them the respect of his parents and guarantee the maintenance of the family. In the last scene of the movie, the parents are sitting together with Wei Wei, Wai Tung and Simon in the airport, poring over the wedding pictures. They are shot from the front: the parents sitting shoulder to shoulder, with the younger generation standing behind them, as if they were posing for a happy, perfect family portrait. When the parents have to leave for their flight back home, the farewell that the father offers Wei Wei is: "The family Gao will be grateful to you." After all, she has secured the family line. Consequently, the filial piety of the children towards the parents remains in place, like the insistence put on harmony.

When Wai Tung's father, a retired nationalist army officer, meets his former army chauffeur Chen, the latter insists on offering his former boss a wedding banquet. He insists on a "real" Chinese banquet, in which the main actors – Wai Tung and Wei Wei – must undergo the stress of excessive food, alcohol and countless games, culminating in their significant marital sexual act. Rather than a betrayal of Chinese family ideology, the insistence put on harmony, hierarchy, patriarchy, and filial piety indicates that what may at first appear to be a daring cinematic project, including an interracial gay couple in potential conflict with the Chinese parents, "fails" to spread much dirt on Chinese family ideology.

But it does stir up some dust. *THE WEDDING BANQUET* lays bare the secrecy and hypocrisy of a Chinese family while showcasing the survival tactics that keep the family intact. The theme of the Chinese family is translated into a contemporary American setting, inscribed into an interracial gay relationship. The translation into the West offers the possibility of displaying a relationship that often remains invisible in an Asian context. The dust, however, inevitably settles; the impurity caused by a Chinese man dating a Caucasian may potentially pollute family ideology – but it ultimately does not. The insistence on masquerading the real, with the consent of all, results in a betrayal on the personal level, while it safeguards the harmonious family, thereby containing the proliferation of dirt.

The Ice Storm: Harmony in Pain

Like *THE WEDDING BANQUET*, *THE ICE STORM* is set in the West, in a small town in Connecticut in the early 1970s. If the earlier work of Ang Lee is obviously about Chineseness, here it is characterized by an erasure of Chineseness (not counting the TV showing an old American series featuring the young Bruce Lee: *THE GREEN HORNET* (1966-1967)). It is my contention that this de-sinified setting paradoxically opens the space up to the betrayal of Confucian family ideology. In other words, while *THE ICE STORM* is often read as a critique of Western family ideology, I insist on reading it as a work of cultural translation, a critique of the traditional Chinese family. We see that hierarchy, patriarchy, and piety all fall out of place; yet,

somehow harmony is secured. This movie about dysfunctional suburban families features an opening scene that returns circularly towards the end of the film when the son, Paul Hood, is stuck in a train that has come to a halt due to a power outage. What he does not know – but the viewer does – is that a downed power line was the cause of the outage. This power line has just killed Mikey Carver, son of Janey Carver, the woman with whom Paul Hood's father has had an affair.

As in *THE WEDDING BANQUET*, the betrayal seeps down into the narrative of the movie itself: family members begin to betray one another. The pain of the family, magnified by the death of the son, stops their world. Outside, a violent ice storm rages across the empty Connecticut woodlands. Paul is reading *The Fantastic Four*, and states in a voice-over (*italics mine*):

In issue number 141 of the *Fantastic Four*, published in November 1973, Reed Richards has to use his anti-matter weapon on his own son who Annihilus has turned into a human atom bomb. It was a typical predicament for the *Fantastic Four* because they weren't like other superheroes; they were more like a family. And the more power they had, the more harm they could do to each other without even knowing it. That was the meaning of the *Fantastic Four*: *That a family is like your own personal anti-matter. Your family is the void you emerge from and the place you return to when you die. And that's the paradox: The closer you're drawn back in, the deeper into the void you go.*

It takes a Western family in a Western setting, apparently devoid of Chineseness, to voice the otherwise almost unspeakable burden of the Chinese family ideology: the strength of the family is parallel to the pain its members inflict upon one another, without even knowing it. They can't know it; they just bear it. A frozen turkey from the fridge that proves too heavy to carry and is dropped symbolizes this burden of the home. Frozen meat and an ice storm signify the coldness and distance between family members.

It is reminiscent of the works of Taiwanese filmmaker Tsai Ming-Liang, because water is a recurring motif in *THE ICE STORM* that symbolizes, in my view, the pervasiveness and strength of the Chinese family ideology: water is everywhere, you need it, you can't escape from it, yet its fluidity, or the mutations of it, makes it nearly untouchable, slippery, and dangerous. An empty swimming pool, seen at various times in the film, is filled with precisely this absence of water, like the void the family ultimately turns out to be. The paradox of the all-embracing family ("it is the void you emerge from and the place you return to") makes the Chinese family an inescapable entity – symbolized by water that is both fluid and frozen.

THE ICE STORM is almost an inversion of *THE WEDDING BANQUET*. In this translation of a past, suburban America, Lee betrays the ideology of the Chinese

family by showcasing its potential suffocating power. Filial piety has evaporated, along with the hierarchy and patriarchy it is supposed to support. In the final scene of the movie, the son returns to the family. They are all sitting in a car, when the father starts to cry. The scene re-establishes the harmony of the family within the safe boundaries of the car. The father's tears are tears of regret for his betrayal of his wife, tears of sadness for the boy's death, and tears of relief that his family is still intact. There is a betrayal of filial piety, of hierarchy, and of patriarchy, all elements that remained intact in *THE WEDDING BANQUET*, yet the harmony of the family is restored. It takes a fantasy world to move beyond the family, but does this also mean a betrayal of its underpinning Confucian values?

Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon: Confucian Ideals Without the Family

In swordsmen movies like *CROUCHING TIGER HIDDEN DRAGON* the fantasy world, *jianghu*, is created. It is a familiar world to Chinese readers of swordsmen novels (and later viewers of various TV series and movies). It is abundant and important enough to be considered a literary genre; it is a world where marriage is not desirable, where maternity remains invisible, and where comradeship and chivalry are on an equal footing with love, if not actually valued more highly. In the *jianghu* world, the swordsmen are invariably orphans, their families either invisible or irrelevant. In fact, they do not seem to occupy any fixed premises that could be called home in the usual sense; they are nomads, constantly on the move.

Like their family backgrounds, their occupations are also vague or irrelevant; none of them work to earn a living. Both the traditional extended family and the nuclear family are absent. There are no children in the *jianghu* world, while pregnant women are conspicuously invisible, and young girls aspire to the freedom of these swordsmen, when they choose their identities, their bonds, and even their gender. In *CROUCHING TIGER HIDDEN DRAGON*, the willful young aristocrat Jen desperately tries to escape from her arranged marriage. The minor acknowledgment of her family here provides nothing more than a dramatic ploy to launch Jen into *jianghu*. Jen assumes a secret, parallel identity as a sword fighter and pupil of the criminal Baihuri. Meanwhile, Jen enters into sisterhood through nominal, not natural, bonding with master swordswoman Yu Shu Lien. Jen also cross-dresses and appears in *jianghu* as a man.

This fantasy world, in short, is guided by a different set of logic. The swordsmen are capable of defying the basic constraints of humanity, culminating in their almost supernatural skills of overcoming the limitations of gravity: they walk across water, they glide along rooftops, they fight on tree branches, provided they are well trained in what the Chinese martial experts call *qinggong* (the skill of weightlessness). They are, one may venture to say, released from the burden of

the family, freed from its devastating weight, which enables them to literally fly.

In Ang Lee's *jianghu* world, there are comrades, but no couples; there is sex, but no procreation²⁶; there is love, but no marriage; there are swords, but no rings. This alternative world, however, is not one of chaos or anarchy. In *CROUCHING TIGER*, Ang Lee presents a regime of rules that smacks of the Confucian notions of, indeed, harmony, hierarchy, patriarchy, and piety, albeit here it is about the pupil's relation to the master rather than children to the father. In other words, if the translation of family ideology towards the world of *jianghu* implies a near-erasure of the family, its underpinning values remain firmly in place. The hero of the movie, swordsman Li Mu Bai feels obliged, out of piety for his murdered teacher, to assassinate the murderer. The notion of piety also feeds one of the movie's subplots in which Jen betrays the sisterly bonding with Yu Shu Lien. The swordsmen may occupy a world where family has ceased to function – not even as a deforming, burdensome force – but Ang Lee seems to remind us that this fantasy *jianghu* is still underpinned by a "Confucian" normative order. Life beyond the family may be weightless, but its inhabitants remain tied to the earth, by love, by loyalty, and by comradeship. This fantasy world may have blood, but it has no dirt.

Hulk: Pain and Pleasure of Breaking with the Family

Ang Lee's last translation is his most radical one yet: in *HULK* all four Confucian elements are betrayed, although the result is ambiguous. Chinese family ideology is, like in *THE ICE STORM*, translated into a Western setting. But the temporality of this translation is different: the movie is not set in the past but in a sci-fi future. The intertextuality between *THE ICE STORM* and *HULK* is significant: during one of the final, climatic scenes, the father of the Hulk is turned into an empty void that swallows the Hulk, just like the family depicted in *THE ICE STORM* is a void that one emerges from and then returns to. Yet, whereas *THE ICE STORM* displays a family subjected to the forces of nature, *HULK* presents a family mutated by the power of science.

In his appropriation, or indeed translation, of a classic American cartoon and TV series, Lee gives a significant twist to the original story. Whereas in the original version, the main character Bruce Banner is a victim of radiation, in Lee's version, Banner is the outcome of one of his father's experiments. Banner's greenish schizophrenia is caused by his father, a significant twist that can be read as symptomatic of Lee's subversion of Chinese family ideology: Confucian familial piety towards one's parents backfires or is inverted by the father who infects his child

²⁶ The rather explicit "sex scene" in *CROUCHING TIGER* is clearly at odds with generic conventions that would dictate a more sexless *jianghu*.

with a violent and unbearable abnormality. But, of course, the narrative is more complex and more ambiguous. The father, aware of the danger his child poses to society, tries to murder his son, but his mother protects him and gets killed instead, as witnessed by the four-year old Bruce. With his father sentenced to jail for 30 years, Bruce is adopted and told that both his parents died. Like in *THE WEDDING BANQUET*, a lie is required to keep a family intact. Years later, his colleague and girlfriend Betty (daughter of General Ross who once fired Bruce's father) finds it hard to believe Bruce does not want to find out about his "real" parents.

It is suggested that you need to know who your parents really are in order to discover yourself. But more often than not this knowledge is painful for the child. In Bruce's case, the pain comes from the traumatic witnessing of his father killing his mother, a memory that is pressed back into unconsciousness, only to be unleashed in his dreams or when he is transformed into the Hulk. That transformation is caused by his father's experiment. Bruce's father calls it "an alteration, genetic. A deformity, I guess you could call it that. But an amazing strength too". The green Hulk signifies the enduring pain caused by a repressed memory. The pain the father has inflicted upon his son is real enough; yet, the abnormality the son has inherited is not just painful (as Betty accuses Bruce's father: "All you've given Bruce is fear. A fear of life") it also is liberating: Bruce admits that he *likes* the transformation, that he enjoys the rage, the power, the freedom – and this pleasure of the beast inside frightens him the most.

Once again, betrayal seeps through to the textual level of the movie: the father betrays the son by killing the mother. The translation of the theme of Confucian piety towards a Western setting shows how the bond between father and son can be polluted, how patriarchy and piety are tainted by power, pain, and pleasure. The Bataille-like pleasure the Hulk eventually experiences in transgressing the boundaries of the father-and-son relationship, saturated with excess energy, underlines the ambiguous pollution of the family ideology.

Ang Lee falls back on the most basic dramatic forms and themes in one of the closing scenes of the movie. The father, infected by the same genetic alteration as his son, yet claiming to need the energy of Bruce in order to gain control over the Hulk inside him, confronts his son with his wish to merge with him, to absorb his energy. This showdown between father and son is set in a highly theatrical manner, reminiscent of a Greek tragedy. The *mise-en-scène* is simple and sober, the lighting is stark, the scene is devoid of Hollywood formulas, and the acting is verbally dramatic, as if both actors are delivering their lines on stage. The audience is temporarily drawn into a stage play, rather than a movie. The father, now contradicting his earlier resentment towards his experimenting on his own son, claims that the Hulk is the *real* Bruce, and that the deformity he inflicted on his son is a blessing in disguise, since it has enabled Bruce to become more than human. In

his own words: "I didn't come here to see you. I came here to see my son. My real son, the one inside of you. You're nothing but a superficial shell, a husk of flimsy consciousness ready to be torn off at a moment's notice." Both in form and in content, it is as if the director wants us to read the scene as an archetypical showdown between Father and Son.

The envious father reclaims the son, and not the human one made of (red) flesh and blood – the father screams at Bruce: "you weak little speck of human flesh" – but the green Hulk instead. The pain of the Chinese family, Lee appears to convey, cannot be resolved peacefully; a fierce battle is required to overcome the father. Such a battle requires a translation of the Chinese familial theme into a Western futuristic setting. What follows is a mythological fight between the father and the son. The father, able to merge with the substance that surrounds him, is transformed into lightning, then into rock, into water, into ice, and finally into an empty void. This void is greenish, glowing from the energy given by the son to his father, to be shot to pieces (and hence merge with the universe) by a nuclear device sent by General Ross. What remains is the Hulk, transformed back into Bruce, small, vulnerable and lonely, and stripped of his past as well as his present. He is forced to disappear and turn his back on Western civilization and its deformative rather than transformative technologies. Bruce ultimately retreats to the rainforests of South America to become a development worker.

The transformation of the Hulk represents the moment of truth, the moment in which the lie that keeps the family intact is finally surpassed. Towards the end of the movie, Bruce begins to desire truth more and more, which causes the further break up of the family and culminates in the final fight between father and son – leaving Bruce behind in solitude. This appears to be the price one has to pay if you move beyond the lie that keeps the harmonious family intact. In this sense, *HULK* can be read as a critical interrogation of Chinese family ideology, of the lies that are often used to keep the family intact. The once celebrated values of harmony, hierarchy, patriarchy, and piety are polluted as much as Bruce's genes, or, as it were, the American Marvel comic book series that has been translated by Ang Lee into a dramatic family saga. The translation propels the undermining of Confucian family values; the green dirt produced by this betrayal is ambiguously framed as both hurtful and liberating.

Familial Translations

The compilation CD *BORN ON THE FIRST OF JULY* offered an occasion for alternative bands from Hong Kong, Taiwan and China to reflect upon the political hand-over of Hong Kong to Beijing in 1997. The CD, just like many other commemorations during that time, has shown the pervasiveness of family ideology in China. If

even the presumably alternative Chinese voices, with the exception of Beijing rock singer Cui Jian, fail to interrogate Chinese family ideology, who will do so? Or, to put it differently, under what circumstances would it take place? I have taken my analysis from the *intracultural* to the *intercultural*. My analysis of selected works by the intercultural filmmaker Ang Lee suggests that his predicament as a Taiwanese filmmaker living in the United States for decades may provide some fertile soil to explore such contestations of (Chinese) family ideology. In other words, *intercultural* expressions – in terms of authorship, production as well as consumption – may offer a way to interrogate family ideology. They do so, I argue, since they are involved in a process of translation of both forms and themes. Such translations are crucial as they involve a betrayal of the “original”, as both Walter Benjamin and Rey Chow have pointed out earlier. New meanings that remain unspeakable in an “original” setting may emerge. Such meanings potentially pollute the original, trouble the neat and tidy thing called tradition, and result in an unsettling proliferation of dirt. It is my contention that cultural pollution and impurity are urgently needed to resist the contemporary essentializing of cultural currents, most notably nationalism and fundamentalist terrorism.

In my analyses, I consider Ang Lee to be, first and foremost, a “new ethnographer”, an intercultural translator, not only of formalistic, cinematic elements, but of themes. Such foregrounding of intercultural translation, I argue, opens up the possibilities of readings which interrogate the original, the traditional – possibilities that may simply be closed off by the closure of intracultural reading. As I have shown, Ang Lee’s translations of Chinese family ideology into different times and places involve a betrayal of its constitutive elements. Piety is not necessary, nor is patriarchy indispensable. Hierarchy can be subverted, and sometimes, the harmony of the family can be undermined. But is Bruce, the Hulk, better off knowing the truth? Is he better off moving beyond his family? The pollution of Chinese family ideology may be an important step against its reifications. I have argued that intercultural expressions in particular may have this kind of polluting power. My analysis shows that, when it comes to family ideology, the consequences of the proliferation of dirt are profoundly ambiguous. This indeed has been the main reason that I used terms like dirt, pollution and impurity. The Confucian elements may be unsettled, but whether life beyond the family is any better remains to be answered.

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Filmography

- CRUCHING TIGER HIDDEN DRAGON / WO HU CANG LONG (Asia Union Film & Entertainment, China Film, Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia, EDKO Film, Good Machine, Sony Pictures Classics, United China Visions, Zoom Hunt International Productions, Taiwan/Hong Kong/USA, China: 2000) directed by Ang Lee.
- HULK (Universal Pictures, Marvel Enterprises, Valhalla Motion Pictures, Good Machine, USA: 2003) directed by Ang Lee.

THE ICE STORM (Canal+, Fox Searchlight Pictures, Good Machine, USA: 1997) directed by Ang Lee.

THE WEDDING BANQUET / HSI YEN (Central Motion Pictures Company, Good Machine, Taiwan/USA: 1993) directed by Ang Lee.

Chapter 8

Eurydice's Diasporic Voice: Marcel Camus's BLACK ORPHEUS and the Family in Poet's Hell

Catherine M. Lord

...poetry lives only in the tension and difference between (and hence only in the virtual interference) between sound and sense, between the semiotic sphere and the semantic sphere.¹

A Briefing for Descent

In *Revolution in Poetic Language* Julia Kristeva psychoanalytically understands the myth of Orpheus to be indicative of the perilous journey of the poet in danger of losing his or her subjectivity in the process of writing.² While Kristeva's approach may offer a beginning to reading poetic practice, I will use an additional ally in my underworld journey of critique. Not entrenched in the psychoanalytic paradigm, Benedict Anderson's influential *Imagined Communities* examines how writing, in the form of print, newspapers, and novels, produces an imaginary, a set of fictional mechanisms by which community can be imagined.³ Curiously, he focuses on prose forms and novel writing as a crucial ensemble of the "imagi-nation". Anderson pays attention to neither cinema nor poetry. Yet, the case-study central to the discussion that follows, namely Marcel Camus's film *BLACK ORPHEUS* (1959), helps me to map out an unfamiliar path – where one encounters dysfunctional families and hears previously unheard voices – towards a possible future community both imagined and idealized as family.

Set in Rio de Janeiro during carnival time, *BLACK ORPHEUS* offers a site where a visually poetic discourse exposes the liminal spaces between non-Western com-

¹ Giorgio Agamben, "The End of the Poem" (In *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999, pp. 109-119).

² Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, translated by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

munity, poetic practice, and a family structure that throughout the film never entirely finds its shape.⁴ The movie is based on the Greek myths surrounding Orpheus, the poet and musician whose talents can propitiate the dead. In the myth, Orpheus ventures into the Underworld to rescue Eurydice, his newlywed. However, the Orfeu of *BLACK ORPHEUS* is an unmarried tram-driver who has earned local fame as a singer and guitarist. Engaged (not married) to the wrong woman (Mira), Orfeu falls for a visitor, Eurydice. It is her serendipitous misfortune to find herself being stalked by a man dressed up as Death. This character of uncertain credentials lures Eurydice to a desolate tram station to execute her by electrocution. Poetic excellence and its inheritance are exacted at the price of sabotaged marriages and non-existent families.

Who is Black Orpheus? Who is Eurydice and who does she become once she has been diasporically flung into the underworld? To address these questions, I will take the role of Eurydice as she moves into a hypothetical Underworld. Doing so will help me to read both *BLACK ORPHEUS* and the critical discourses which will play their part in my performative analysis of Camus's film. I will push the boundaries of the traditional discourses of scholarship, so that I can shed light on the twilight zones between the film's poetic tropes and the diasporic dimension of familial and community practice. The academic essay can journey into unfamiliar areas of discourse, "foreign" to its often prosodic practices, but open to the possibilities of story-telling.⁵ Such an approach requires experimentation with metaphor, alliteration, rhythm, and rhyme. In turn, this will enable me – the scholar – to change subject positions. I will assume the role of Eurydice, re-imagining her story into my own version, itself an extension of my critical approach. This approach entails yet another version of the myth, but this time it will come to terms with the imagination of a (failed) family that unites Orpheus and Eurydice only in the netherworld of poetic practice. The cinematic, poetic construction of this imagined family will be an expression of the entanglement of Andersonian community building and Kristevan subject positioning.

⁴ *BLACK ORPHEUS* is an adaptation of an adaptation. While directly influenced by the Greek Orpheus myths, its direct precursor work is a Brazilian play and musical drama – *Orfeu da Conceicao* by Vinicius de Moraes – written for an all black, Brazilian cast. However, the differences are substantial, details of character and mise-en-scène being critical.

⁵ For a detailed study of how academic discourses can take on the role of "theoretical fictions" and thus engage in the fundamental practices of narrative, see Catherine Lord, *The Intimacy of Influence* (Amsterdam: ASCA Press, 1999); and Catherine Lord, "Rapturing the Text: The Paraliterary between Works of Derrida, Virginia Woolf and Jeanette Winterson" (*Oxford Literary Review*, vol. 26, 2004). The latter article deploys fiction as a means of analysis, running with the underlying narrative construction of the essay structure and enabling it to become a fictional reinvention of the case study text, in this particular case, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*.

Imaginary Family Meets RAT

Like so many Orphic narratives, *BLACK ORPHEUS* provides extreme case-studies of identities that refuse to submit to familiar and fixed subject-positions, be this of the artist or critical observer, the mother, father, child, or cousin.⁶ When identities do appear to coalesce, they are allowed little time to atrophy. Particles spread outwards like missiles of colliding identities. The final scene of *BLACK ORPHEUS* finds Orpheus with the dead Eurydice in his arms, after she has been pushed off a cliff by his spurned girlfriend Mira. Shooting identity finds its correlate in shooting the concept of a solidly formed protagonist to pieces. *BLACK ORPHEUS* may feature a main character, Orfeu, but his predecessors haunt. In one scene with two small boys, one a likely successor of the poet-singer, Orfeu makes it clear that many Orpheuses before him have inherited his guitar. Whether any of these men have been fathers or precursor poets remains unclear. Orfeu would probably not be able to distance himself from what haunts him in order to reflect on the predecessors to which he belongs. But why not ask Eurydice; after all, who has ever asked her?

In the next two, main sections, I will produce my own Eurydice, who will speak in two passages: a poem and a short, poetic prose narrative. In each excerpt, she will comment on her role in history and myth; and in the second, she will also analyze the Voodoo scene in *BLACK ORPHEUS*. My fictional Eurydice can provide a critique of three theoretical approaches, all of which I shall subsequently set out. Working together with *BLACK ORPHEUS* and in mutual critique, each approach can spotlight what I shall term the “imaginary family”, a concept that can stand out from the significantly Western and Oedipal definitions of what constitutes “family”.

Shooting the Orphic family with three critical approaches will necessitate first, acknowledging how the film asserts sites of signification across which the family is de-familiarized. The film’s signature long takes and panoramic lenses often frame the main characters as the embodiment of their own obstacles to marriage and family. As Orfeu enjoys himself amidst the crowd, the camera catches his spurned girlfriend (Mira) as she attempts to mutilate the wife-to-be (Eurydice) with a double-pronged, blunt instrument. In turn, Mira’s mission to become wife-mother is hijacked by the figure of Death dressed in a carnival skeleton costume. The on-going competition for Eurydice despite the fact that no single “one” suc-

⁶ In Jean Cocteau’s *ORPHÉE* (1949), a husband becomes hostile to his wife’s homemaking projects. Being a poet is considered incompatible with the role of husband and father-to-be. Orpheus’s irritation builds and explodes into him looking at Eurydice. Thus, he risks losing her forever. Cocteau’s Eurydice has a feisty feminist friend who offers views that would throw the fifties French housewife out of her familial role.

ceeds at all, acts as an enduring mode of contraception, or contra-family. By the end of the film, the two lovers, lying dead in a womb of leaves at the bottom of the cliff, could be deemed two newlyweds awaiting their Underworld honeymoon. But in that undiscovered country from which no traveler ever returns, the diasporic fortunes of the marital couple remain unknown. Neither Greek myth nor its later interpretations give any clue as to whether the Orpheus destroyed by the Bacchante will ever reunite with Eurydice.

Death can attack bodies. Death can target identities. Identity can be constructed or imagined. Julia Kristeva articulates the poet's journey as an Underworld crossing and the poet's descent, that is, one's descent into the depths which challenges and threatens the very structure of subjectivity. In psychoanalytic theory, bringing back the imaginary into the symbolic order of language and unsettling its codes requires a journey towards the mother-wife, but also an acceptance of her (symbolic and imaginary) death.⁷ The Oedipal family of mother-father-subject is asserted but dismantled. It is both real and imaginary. In non-psychoanalytic terms, an "imaginary family", following Anderson's cue from the "imaginary community", would rely on Anderson's concept of "empty, homogenous time".⁸ For the imagined community, a sense of belonging to the same space-time configuration requires a concept of neutral, "empty" time in which the communal family can manifest its mutual history. Such time provides a site in which "simultaneity is, as it were, transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguration and fulfillment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar".⁹

In both Anderson's statement and deployment of the concept lies a striking paradox. For a mode of temporality which can transverse and connect members of a community who have never met before, doing so through a medium like a newspaper, implies an experience of time which breaks the rules of clock and calendar. The imagined feature of the time, the connection, could interface with an eternal time that Anderson implies to be part and parcel of the nation's sense of its own future. However, what is important in Anderson's concept of temporality is his understanding of the role of mourning and the language of the mother tongue.¹⁰ Time dies and is reborn cyclically, Anderson notes. Sons are lost in bat-

⁷ See in Ross Mitchell Guberman (ed.), *Julia Kristeva: Interviews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) the interview by Margaret Waller: "Intertextuality and Literary Interpretation," for a clarifying overview of Kristeva's development of the term "intertextuality" as a psychoanalytic term culled from her work on Bakhtin.

⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 24. Anderson has followed close on the heels of Walter Benjamin's concept of "shock experience". See Walter Benjamin, "Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968, pp. 155-200).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

tle, and the language of mourning has been acquired from the child's first attachments to its mother, and eventually from the adult subject's lovers. In mourning, it is the mother tongue that commemorates them and actually gathers the next sons together to die for the community. In *BLACK ORPHEUS*, the twenty-four hours of carnival links the simultaneity of the subjects' disparate activities, yet is transversed by the eternal contingencies of Death and eternity, as lovers battle to outwit Death. My analysis of Camus's film will critique Anderson's scenes of mourning and community with the help of Julia Kristeva's analysis of poetic language.

In between Anderson's and Kristeva's approaches, I will move towards Eurydice's alternative narrative, with the help of Gayatri Spivak's nifty yet uneasy assertion that all reading enacts translation.¹¹ Questioned about her experiences with the tasks of translation, Spivak asserts that she has always been a RAT, that is, a reader-as-translator. In critiquing what is for her Jon Elster's bad translation of the scene in *The Odyssey*, when Odysseus has himself strapped to the ship's mast so he can hear the Sirens, Spivak underlines how a blindly Eurocentric approach produces significant misreadings. Yet equally well, as Spivak must admit in her allegiance to Benjamin, a translation that carries on beyond the life of its "original" in ways that preserve fidelity, must paradoxically, be free and poetic.¹² There are consequences. Freeing up the original's codes will at some point incur misreadings. Spivak's unacknowledged debt to Harold Bloom's concept of "creative misreading" must be noted. What I would like to now term a "creative mis-translation" attempts to liberate otherwise suppressed meanings from the original. Bad translation is ideologically blind. Translation that both supports a responsibility to fidelity and liberates readings between the lines misreads with a mission. Such translation pushes past the Gatekeeper of the unconscious. And if Walter Benjamin is a guide here, then poetic license could be the key.

My reading of *BLACK ORPHEUS*, combining both a scholarly with a poetically narrative approach, will allow an interactive critique to occur between Kristeva's theory of the poet's descent, Anderson's work on community making and Spivak's suggestion that scholarship be conducted as creative misreading. Agamben, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, points out that the poetic can be theorized as that which moves between sound and sense, between rhythm and affect and signification. Eurydice's account, translated by me the scholar, will transverse both the critical discourses of imaginary families and a critique of the cinematic style of Camus's film. Even though my scholarly interpretation of Eury-

¹¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Questioned on Translation: Adrift" (*Public Culture*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2001, pp. 13-22).

¹² Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" (In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968, pp. 69-82).

dice's story will occur in one specific section of this chapter, her "voice" will emerge in short italicized fragments, in each of the following sections. The scholar who channels Eurydice's diasporic voice will be allowing "her" to partake in a critical discourse that emerges between sound and sense, theory and practice.

RATs from Hell

The Scholar Channels Eurydice:

*History has thought me a Muse.
 History imaged me as a wife for Orpheus to choose.
 He found only one Eurydice, for I had played too many parts
 On stages that beat to different clocks. History, afraid of long takes and lenses
 from the Underworld
 Shoots me only Greek or Spectral White, not Egyptian nor Simian, African nor
 Indian.
 I drew stones toward the Pyramids,
 Across continents, raped into print.
 I mocked the Nation they said endures;
 And that's when Hades whispered 'I cure':
 Silken reptile, bit deep
 Stopped the clock.
 Still, I can slip back between Europe and the Middle East,
 See beyond the one-eyed Capital of CNN.
 They think Orpheus the poet-thinker, not I.
 Performed against my will
 Shades that matter;
 I have crawled and scuttled;
 Spawned in the womb of time.*

In psychoanalytic terms, poetry- and fiction-making deploys the "imaginary" for the purposes of making meanings, be these personal or political. The imaginary may lend illusions and lies to the narrative process; the narrator of complex truths utilizes lies that reveal otherwise repressed visions. According to Freud's fascination with archaeology and Egyptology, the (Eurocentric?) unconscious frequently draws upon images of ancient civilization to furnish its fantasies. In the citation above, I conceived of Eurydice as a poet in her own right. The implication is that the combined sources of the mythical record, subsequent poetic and filmic versions, have suppressed her story. In contrast to popular narratives, I suggest that Eurydice has lived out many selves, hybridized through different cultural identities,

their ensemble having spanned millennia. In dropping contemporary references to CNN, my Eurydice will emerge as a ghostly product of cultural memory. She can persist in the “present” and beyond. In her poetic experiment, Eurydice plays with rhyme, rhythm, and alliteration. And as such, she provides little in the form of what Hollywood would term the “back story” to fill in the sequel of what happened to Eurydice after Orpheus made an error of judgment and looked back to double-check. Thus, her soliloquy of sounds and sense makings suppresses as much as it reveals. Eurydice has disavowed all family ties. Because the Eurydice of *BLACK ORPHEUS* also reveals little in the way of connection to family, my rereading of her and some of her precedents from myth and film might appear to be so radical that my fidelities as a RAT could indeed be questioned.

Yet it is the extreme difference between the innocent Eurydice of Camus's film and the jaundiced, globally wise and intellectually possessed Eurydice of my own translation that puts RAT-ing into action on two levels. First, my own RAT-making can critique and produce the concept of an “imaginary family”; this concept can find a juncture between Kristeva's theory of Orphic loss and Anderson's reading of mourning as a partly collective endeavor directed at strengthening representations of community.

Mourning derives from specific loss: for Kristeva, the human subject must lose the mother symbolically and psychically, before her ultimate death in reality. The penultimate chapter in Anderson's book examines how communities negotiate loss and how “pasts are restored” through the mediation of mother tongues.¹³ In Kristeva's terms, the subject becomes a poet when he (sic) makes a hazardous approach towards both the mother and her voices. Oddly, Kristeva elides any reference to the King or father Hades. Rather, the poet's descent into hell, into “musicality, rhythmicity, alliteration” is also a journey of nostalgia for the lost mother, and for the promise of the completion she can afford. The poet seeks to return to the mother and to be part of a familial structure that has regressed.¹⁴

But such a journey entails the risk of Orpheus losing his identity altogether. Indeed, the loss of Eurydice spells the loss of the mother. To continue the logic of Kristeva's argument, this dead mother fragments the family, propelling Orpheus away from the familiar, the normative, and above all, the familial. The family is shot through. Yet for Orpheus, the return journey combines the experience of the Underworld's unconscious forces harnessed by disenchantment with an uprooted family. The combination should promise a poetic product that pushes the boundaries of current practice. Kristeva's Orpheus will be capable of decoding the norms of language and of culture. As the Americans say, he/she will be on the

¹³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 154.

¹⁴ Julia Kristeva: *Interviews*, p. 193.

cutting edge. Kristeva's Eurydice, however, is painfully passive, nothing more than a reflector of the poets' heroics rather than a competitor in their game.

Presumably, once Kristeva's Orpheus has returned, he will send shock waves through familial norms, shaking the illusion of their "imaginary" as capable of completing or sustaining the subject. In a different but related move, Anderson posits a scene of mourning around "photo albums of strangers' weddings" which can summon the "Hanging Gardens of Babylon", or what is implied to be a mythical site for human affections.¹⁵ Attachment to significant others can be experienced through re-attachments to collective or mythical languages: mother tongues. Between the psychoanalytic zoom lens of Kristevan theory and the wide angles of Anderson's conceptualization of mother tongues, an imaginary mother is placed center stage.

In many respects, the Eurydice of *BLACK ORPHEUS* fulfils the role of such an imaginary mother, or more precisely, she becomes the pre-mother and wife-to-be; she does so in a film severely criticized for idealizing the black, Brazilian experience. Despite winning the award for best film at the Cannes film festival of that year, the film received the sharp end of Jean-Luc Godard's implicitly Marxist critique.¹⁶ Robert Stam has lanced the French/Brazilian production, not so much for daring the *mise-en-scène* of Carnival, but rather for failing to use the benefits of deploying such a trope.¹⁷ Eurydice is played as an innocent swept off her feet by beaming Orpheus, amidst scenes of Rio de Janeiro that fail to reveal poverty, but insist on representing the merrily clad citizens who look plump and well-fed. Eurydice is hardly portrayed as an Amazon capable of giving her light-footed stalker Death a decent whack in the balls.

To a degree, I do follow those critics who have judged the film's representation of black cultural identity as a failure of political will and, instead, the fantasy of its white French *auteur*. More daringly, however, the excessively and non-critically imagined community of happy, black carnival revelers can be read (and translated) between the visual lines. Camus's film subtly debunks the delicate imagined identity of the community. The competing women will rupture any hope of family and will further symbolically undermine community imagined through spectators who wishfully expect familial cohesion. Once Eurydice is abducted and taken to the Underworld, the mother and the inspiration for the mother tongue is likewise hijacked. The comparison between Eurydice and her rival Mira is important. Both are aspiring wives for a potential family, yet neither will stay the course of

¹⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 154.

¹⁶ Jean-Luc Godard, "Le Brésil vu de Billancourt" (*Cahiers du Cinema*, vol. 17, July 1959, p. 97).

¹⁷ Robert Stam, *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 138.

immersion in the symbolic order. Eurydice will die; Mira will probably be imprisoned. The film's *denouement* reveals a rabble of fighting women, and the boy who imagines that he is allowing the sun to rise by taking over Orpheus's guitar figures in the ensuing scene of collapsing gender relations. Bathos fuels the flames of a community in strife. Chaos lurks; no parents, no rescue.

The film's alleged idealization is undercut by its refusal to offer any representation of any one single or complete family unit. Fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters are all *in absentia*. Nor can the idealized community be read as a synecdoche of a family, be it extended or nuclear. In *BLACK ORPHEUS*, there seems to be neither family nor ideal community. What Stam overlooks is the content of the carnival. Taking place over a period of twenty-four hours, functioning rather like Anderson's newsprint that links single revelers into the image of a shared ritual, reams of carnival goers are dressed up in the costumes of late-seventeenth century France. Louis XIV's court dances before us. The imagined community, so apparently idealized, may betray something for the RAT, namely, a possible French revolution. The film never hints that such an event could occur. But then again, the potential marriage between Orpheus and Eurydice could be actualized to found a nuclear family. Therefore, as long as the family is a potential or "imaginary" family, it acts as a synecdoche for community, implying that the rupture in the future marriage will implicitly shoot through the delicate and precarious fabric of the imaginary body-politic.

The RAT in me finds many instances in *BLACK ORPHEUS* where the protagonist plays Russian roulette with Eurydice's safety, not through the use of the gun, not through lack of libidinous attachment, but through his equally strong attachment to his community, where he is a star. Caught up in performing and being glorified by the crowd, Orpheus fails to protect Eurydice from a stalker with whom he has already come to blows. Mira's attack on Eurydice, Death's scuffle with the feisty Mira, Orpheus's distraction by status anxiety, all occur simultaneously within the same wide-angle frames, music beating throughout. The framing signifies scuffles in courtship, conflicts between personal bonds, and community endeavors, meanings verging on chaos swept along on waves of sound. Sound will make no familial sense. The poetic features of the visual narrative come through strongly in repeated tropes. Orpheus fails to protect Eurydice from Mira. Orpheus fails to hear Eurydice's cries for help, as though he has only been sensitized by her physical body as image, not word. Orpheus then attempts to rescue Eurydice from the stalker Death. Here, Camus's film performs a significant creative misreading of the myth; *auteur* Camus becomes the RAT, testifying to eerie secrets that lurk in the crevices of the Greek "original". Eurydice on the edge of death, swings from an electric tram cable. Death is about to pull the switch. But he need not make any effort. Orpheus arrives in the dark, sees his beloved's peril, and in a panic attack for

light in the darkness, pulls the lever for the lights. In other words, Orpheus inadvertently kills Eurydice. Orpheus could not trust his intuitions in the dark, just as he will fail to trust voices, sounds, over the semantic surety of Eurydice's bright, bodily image. Orpheus is the guardian of the sun, of illumination. But this bright sense can collide with the intuitions of the sound, rhythm, or what Kristeva defines as the journey down to the Underworld, in quest of the elusive, longed for, but threatening mother – the one who can shoot through the delicate fabric of identity.

In one sense, Camus's cinematic interpretation has resonated with a Kristevan reading of the Orphic myth. Yet more succinctly and dramatically than Kristeva's interpretation, Camus's non-idealizing interpretation of Orpheus reveals a man who would adulate the mother-image but destroy the woman as a site of voices, calling from the Underworld and longing to be called for. The poet-musician proves weak in the face of the very signs and poetic affects from which he derives his inspiration. The poet destroys his muse. The poet's popularity with the community stages his role in being a sign of communion between the participants, a fetish in their shared community, and derives from the elevation and consequent loss of the binding Muse. Reading *BLACK ORPHEUS* by way of Anderson and Kristeva reveals the importance of politicizing the paradigm of psychic subjectivity, and argues that Anderson's scenes of mourning and consolation, their insistence on the collective agency of the mother tongue, could be more effectively read in the light of psychic events.

The victimized Eurydice of *BLACK ORPHEUS*, constantly on the run from her pursuers, a carnival skeleton with Hades inside and the competitive Bacchantes, is indeed a distant representation from the millennial memory of my own Eurydice. However, Eurydice well-versed in the legion voices of the Underworld is the logical conclusion to the innocent subject-position from which she began. As they say in Hollywood movies, between Camus's Eurydice and mine we find a "character arc", and one that is lengthy and compelling. It is not just Orpheus who will leave home and fall from innocence to disenchantment through the rites of love lost and found and then lost again. Eurydice follows a journey in which she acts as an image, one to be looked back on, rather than being heard in her polyphony and trans-textualities. Kristeva denies Eurydice a journey. Anderson makes the mother, the wife, the daughter, the witness at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. He implies that the female party of the family imagines itself to a mourning that binds the community, placing *amor patria* at the center. But the Eurydice who has transversed the Underworld will read such critical models with a radical force, misreading in the service of a translation that has as yet not emerged. The exiled and diasporic Eurydice will be the RAT from hell.

RATs That Matter

The Scholar Channels Eurydice:

For some, poetry may confuse the matter. Sounds in code that can only be translated in dreams, and not on waking. Pathways open up, and permit no exit. Here there is no system of escape, and no land that permits return. And so here is the mirror of the upper world, but there delusion permits no one to hear our music of disenchantment. This is the Kingdom of lost Imaginaries.

Though it depends

On the peremptory Hades.

We – she/he and I – dialogue from time to time

In a polyphony of frequencies that astronomers call Dark Matter.

But for now, Hades is on sabbatical

Tour of duty; Middle East.

I cannot see any of you, but hear you, wondering. Me, for a split second in eternity, a shy and poor Brazilian girl, helplessly pursued by a player in a death mask. When I play Eurydice, I contain multitudes. Every time the performance repeats, the configuration shifts. And how could I, in my Underworld dwelling, be borrowing a language from the discourse of Western scholarship. A young woman who never initiates but only reacts, an apparent damsel in distress, who could not take on Death.

I was not fleeing from Hades. I fled from a vision of myself, a palimpsest worn with knowledge. I have Greek Eurydice, translated into Graves, have lived Nerval, and that infuriating housewife in Cocteau, only to remind those stuffed shirts in his Underworld that I was plagiarized by my French husband. The Eurydice of 1959 Brazil was shot from the lies and truths of a white man's fantasy. Would the idealizing white man gain and lose his black Eurydice? Is the imaginary mother his African-Egyptian-Spanish eternal mother? I have no time for Oedipal conquistadors.

In the Underworld, families and national identities melt and molt in blood, and once intermixed, their molecules seek another state.

As they say in the middle of the dark wood, or the station's matrix of mortal voltage, this is but one place I have died and where I will die again. Who will translate me back into this world?

Now I only visit those hybrid creatures who defy their gendered matter, specters that matter, to warn them against forms of Orpheus. Mr. Single Identity in a quest to colonize his mother tongue. Beware those who profess to translate images into words.

So let me explain, with the scholar's close reading. Recall that scene in Ca-

mus's film when Orpheus goes to the Voodoo ceremony, hoping that the spirits will raise me, Eurydice, the woman with whom, in the space of one night, he imagined he had the power of vision. But I digress. The ceremony. An attempt at ethnography, long takes, a masquerade of documentary footage before a bewildered Orpheus. The clichés soak the air, as the head chief's cigar smoke whorls around the woman gone into trance, her hair thickened out, an unknown warrior of spirit. Orpheus is urged to call me, Eurydice, to sing to me, yet he does not invent his own song, but sings with the collective. Behind him, an aging woman becomes the body through which I speak.

I thought he might have sung a song of his own, but herd-like, he joins the crowd, their carnival performance of spirit. I appear behind him, in the body of an old woman. He insists on seeing me. He cannot trust the voices, the multitudes that make me, he cannot love me even though I am old, he makes himself infatuated with a single identity, a young, innocent woman, he will not love me in my contradictions, and my multitudes he could not endure – multiplicity terrifies Orpheus. His poetry is inspired by voices from below, but he can only become infatuated in an imaginary, an imaged woman, and be inspired by her absence.

I am poetry itself.

Orpheus cannot surrender to sounds without sense,

Cannot find sense without his objectification of a face

Do not trust one who falls in love within twenty-four hours.

For his family will be made of images that die with the setting of the sun.

Shall we remember her?

Concluded in Translation

Just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as from its afterlife.¹⁸

Spivak's invocation to the cultural and literary critic to RAT through our critical and creative endeavors can also be read as a means of giving an afterlife to interpretations that would otherwise be foreclosed by political bad conscience. Once the "original" has left its own home, its afterlife depends on the fulfillment of potentials from its former life while letting go of configurations and identities that cannot survive in lives to come, in cultural identities to come or in environments that can only be adopted as homes. Between the psychoanalytic work of Kristeva and the cultural and collective identity criticism of Anderson lies a site in which

¹⁸ Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator", p. 71.

works such as *BLACK ORPHEUS* can be read by using different genres and styles of writing, scholarly, narrative fictional and poetic. By using these different inroads to analysis, inherent contradictions or inviting lacunae in the chosen case-studies can be respected. In other words, Camus's film need not be investigated as either a triumph or flop of political representations; rather, it can be read as a visual text that offers opportunities to reconsider the troubled zones between political commitment and aesthetic experiment.

A scholarly reading, which adopts the techniques of poetry and narrative, can offer a freer translation. Reading-as-translation can move closer to the original texts as mythic and critical embodiments of voices in dissonant ensemble. Between sound and semantics, the scholarly article can break open its potential landscape of different registers and identities. Within such a play of discourses, the family has played a crucial role, as that which is signified and acknowledged, recognized, but also negated. The family can be read as a configuration which requires perpetual translation, as it seeks its afterlife through untold narrative futures.

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Filmography

- BLACK ORPHEUS / ORFEU NEGRO (Dispat Films, Gemma, Tupan Filmes, Brazil/France/Italy: 1959) directed by Marcel Camus.

Archiving the (Secret) Family in Egoyan's FAMILY VIEWING

Marie-Aude Baronian

Atom Egoyan's second feature film *FAMILY VIEWING* (1987) presents many different thematic issues and narrative devices, which the Canadian filmmaker has continued to elaborate on. The family always appears in his work; Egoyan always explores it, albeit in different terms, forms, and intensity, in relation to visual media. In this respect, a close reading of this particular film, relevantly entitled *FAMILY VIEWING*, will serve to display the relationship between "family" and "viewing" or, more specifically, between the Armenian family and the videographic medium. The relation between the two, as I will argue in this chapter, will be approached through the dichotomy of remembering (in the sense of recognition and inscription) and forgetting (in the sense of denial and erasure) the secret and hidden family h/History. Egoyan's *FAMILY VIEWING* is credited for its depictions of family history in relation to Armenian History. The central question is: what are the implications of *FAMILY VIEWING* as the recording of a particular family history for the History of the Armenian people? I will argue that what seems to be a clear-cut opposition, family history and a people's History, cannot hold for the Armenian Diaspora. Looking at a particular Armenian family here implies a renegotiation of the historical archive; it entails an inquiry into the necessity of "violating" the secrecy of hidden histories.

On an explicit level, *FAMILY VIEWING* is an ironic portrait of the contemporary predominance of (mass-)mediated family life (as shown in TV programs, home videos, porn videos, video surveillance). The television screen is everywhere and visible in almost every scene of the film. Egoyan appears to be examining the increasing integration of technology into the cozy atmosphere of the Canadian family home. As Jonathan Romney has noted, "Egoyan's perspective on television here appears highly moralistic, inflected with high culture's traditional suspicion of the form."¹ Egoyan's ironic, critical stance towards television, which is surely

¹ Jonathan Romney, *Atom Egoyan* (London: BFI, 2003), p. 48.

identifiable in the film, is very related to other Canadian cinematographic productions of the 1980s. For instance, the impact of visual technology (TV and video) on everyday life was a frequent theme for many English-Canadian filmmakers such as David Cronenberg, Patricia Rozema, and Peter Mettler.

On a more implicit level, *FAMILY VIEWING* underlines an awareness of origins, personal memories and a reclaiming of roots through the (re-)discovery of an Armenian heritage (although “Armenia” is never mentioned in the film). *FAMILY VIEWING* is also about the memory and the amnesia of the Armenian past, a link generated through the family and its relation to the video medium. This implicit level of Armenian History is worth focusing on, but not without observing that the explicit and the implicit levels are connected. Explicitly, Canadian identity is represented by the main character’s father (who is one hundred percent Canadian); Armenian History is implicitly represented by the main character’s re-discovery of his “secret” family background.

A detailed analysis of the protagonists in *FAMILY VIEWING* – the son (Van), the father (Stan) and the grandmother (Armen) – will disclose the type of family dynamic at stake and how and why, through a specific use or misuse of (audio-)visual media, the Armenian past must or must not be remembered. I will explain how the film proposes a rather different and new way of conceptualizing the notion of archive, of “looking” at history. I will argue that it is precisely the archive that forms the intersection between family and media.

Domestic Images

The opening shot of *FAMILY VIEWING*, before the opening credits, works as an establishing shot. We see Van switching channels on a television (we hear the sound of it in the background) in a nursing home where his grandmother Armen is lying in bed. From the very beginning, then, Armen’s condition is clearly defined: she is quiet, almost immobile, and surrounded by some family photographs. As for Van, he finds himself positioned between the TV and his grandmother, caught, as it were, between his “Canadian present” and his “Armenian past”. The two sides are permanent parts of Van’s personality.

After the credits, the film opens with a caricature image of western family “coziness”: mother (in-law), father and son watching TV together. Egoyan parodies television’s popular genres such as soap operas and melodramas, which tend to accentuate this type of family life, where the family environment is centered on TV-watching. The family house, which is only shown in interior shots, features TV screens and video-apparatuses as the only significant furniture. The house, like a sitcom set, is depicted as a constructed and artificial place. The TV screen combines images from sitcom, porn, nature documentary, home-movie, and Egoyan

cuts quickly from one type of screen image to another as though he himself was switching channels.

Television may be an essential element of family life, but video is also part of this domestic setting. "Domestic video recorders and cassettes have the function of maintaining the memory of each individual who has contributed to family life, as well as the memory of the house."² In this perspective, to put it rather schematically, video refers to a society that wants to fetishistically record everything, but remembers nothing.

Gradually, Van will leave his "Canadian TV coziness" to spend more time with his Armenian grandmother. Van is eighteen now and realizes that it is time to go back to his roots and rescue them from oblivion. Instead of staying home as a passive viewer, Van becomes an active spectator who is capable of making his own judgments and eventually becomes conscious of the meaning of his past, for instance, via the heritage of his ethnic roots.

Van's Canadian father, Stan, is depicted as a patriarchal and dominant father. The fact that Van is the offspring of a mixed couple makes recognizing his Armenian self more complex. In this sense, Van is not divided between his parents on one side and Canadian society on the other (as was the case in Egoyan's previous feature *NEXT OF KIN*, 1984) but between his grandmother (an extension of his absent mother) and his father, both of whom are placed within Canadian society. Stan is represented as an indifferent character: he refuses to understand what motivates Van's interest in his grandmother. Stan does not care for his mother-in-law, Armen; it was he who decided to put her in a nursing home. Van believes his father did this because he had no choice, but he gradually comes to realize that Stan got rid of Armen for another reason.

Van: "I feel good about myself with Armen."

Stan: "You spend too much time with her, it is not healthy."

Van: "She was happy at the house."

Stan: "That was then... You've got better things to do... getting settled."

On the one hand, Stan embodies the parents' narcissistic investment in their children (like the father in *NEXT OF KIN*) and, on the other hand, he stands for the denial of another ethnic culture. We come to understand that he tries to avoid everything that brings him into direct contact with his feelings of guilt towards his first wife, whom he used to abuse. Stan told Van that his mother left them a few years earlier, which is clearly his own version of the truth.

² Jacinto Lageira, "Le Souvenir des morceaux épars" (In *Atom Egoyan*. Paris: Disvoir, 1993, pp. 33-79), p. 60.

Stan is obsessed with videotaping his sexual games with his new wife Sandra. He erases Van's childhood images by taping sexual scenes of himself and Sandra over tapes of Stan's first family, when the Armenian mother and grandmother were still part of the home and Van was just a child.³ Family home-video scenes are replaced by family pornography.

Van: "[Stan] is taping over everything."

Sandra: "He likes to record."

Van: "He prefers to erase."

In doing so, the authoritarian father not only erases his guilt towards his former Armenian wife but also, and more profoundly, attempts to obliterate the Armenian in his son by consciously eradicating all visual evidence, all traces – physical and material – of his son's Armenian origins. By erasing video images, Stan thinks he can erase certain memories. Besides, Stan never watches what he has recorded; the act of recording in itself gives him a feeling of power. Nevertheless, some images, despite his efforts, cannot be erased from his mind, even if he erases them from the videotapes. For instance, at the end of the film, when Stan collapses on the hotel floor, we see an imaginary shot of his wife, a close-up on a television screen. Here, we notice Egoyan's cinematic device of using video in order to reflect the character's thoughts. Despite Stan's effort to erase these video images, he apparently cannot control what he has erased; indeed, Stan seems to be a victim of his own obsession for recording and erasing. Images are everywhere, taking control of him. With his new Canadian wife Sandra, Stan seems to have found a more conventional and "normal" life. Stan says: "I appreciate her simplicity. I am tired of complications. She is not a burden. I want things to be comfortable." Van reacts to this statement by saying that Armen must have been a burden. Instead of a direct answer, we see a video image with a close-up of Armen that appears to visually reproduce Stan's state of mind.

By erasing and denying Van's Armenian roots through videographic manipulations, Stan tries to maintain and consolidate a policy of "non-difference": he wants Van to be a completely complying member of the dominating ideology. Stan basks in a certain conformity that must reflect the norm in which Van no longer feels "at home". Stan's behavior expresses total control over family dynamics and values.⁴ Psychiatrist Robert Neuburger explains the need to maintain the norm in the family context:

³ Video in *FAMILY VIEWING* is related to the idea of generations, even if it is also presented as a medium that provokes dysfunctional familial relations.

⁴ *NEXT OF KIN* also depicts a family dominated by a patriarchal figure. There, however, the oppo-

What dominates is a desire for conformity: to look like a normal family, ordinary, beyond reproach, corresponding to the social myth as it is recommended by society: to be a spotless family, with clear roots, a legitimate family in all senses of the word. But words do not translate all this because words leave room for alternatives. The child is not simply told: "don't be different", because that might be dangerous, you are not allowed to show that you are different! The work of family memory will be to erase the tokens of remembrance, those differences that carry negative connotations.⁵

In public, Stan wants to affirm his position as a "perfect WASP": his house, his job, and his way of living are all examples of this. In private, in his hidden life, so to speak, his sexual fantasies and obsessions with the origins of his son and ex-wife are less ordinary. Stan and Sandra's bedroom is the room where ethnicity, symbolized by the videotapes, is manipulated and held at a distance. Hidden from the rest of the house; it is like an object of shame. Stan's control and possession of these videotapes in the intimacy of the parental bedroom reflects taboos he does not want to discuss with his son. Referring to Robert Neuburger, we could say that Stan embodies the character that controls the children's memories. The family memory is an elimination process, a message about what should be forgotten to protect the myth: the child is not only asked to "forget" his filiation, he is also asked not to discern this lack of information.⁶

Armen(ian) Images

According to Jonathan Romney, "of all his films, *FAMILY VIEWING* comes closest to an all-out condemnation of Video/TV culture and its discontents. Video appears in a positive light in *FAMILY VIEWING* when analogous with the workings of the psyche, in a negative one when it claims to represent the world, which it really caricatures and degrades."⁷ Though Romney is right to point out the condescending aspect of the film towards such visual media, I would like to add the following: the video medium does not so much give a "false" portrait of the world, as underline the fictionality of what it represents. Video, then, is not a simulacrum or

site happens; instead of glorying in the "normal" ideology, George Deryan is proud of the particularity of being different. The transmission is one of a difference that opposes itself to the normative surroundings.

⁵ Robert Neuburger, *Le Mythe familial* (Paris: ESF, 1995), pp. 43-4 (my translation, MAB).

⁶ Neuburger, *Le Mythe familial*, p. 37. Another example of the father's controlling attitude is when Stan hires a private detective who uses video surveillance to spy on Van and his friend Aline.

⁷ Romney, *Atom Egoyan*, p. 54.

caricature of our so-called postmodern society; instead, it appears to “document” what escapes inscription.

In *FAMILY VIEWING*, it is the particularity of Van’s familial history that cannot but be presented on videotape, and thus, to some extent at least, as fictional. In this way, Van’s Armenianness is not represented as the official acknowledgment of his Armenian identity, and rightly so, for what we see is of the nature of an intimate family portrait. Nevertheless, in *FAMILY VIEWING*, video is the means of revealing Armenianness. Van can only gain access to his Armenian origins and understand it through the familial home videotapes of his childhood. The Armenian family stands for the Armenian people, and the privacy (and the virtuality) of the home stands for the secrecy of the homeland. The frontier between real and fictional but also between private and collective comes to disappear. Silence, secrecy, confidentiality, privacy, intimacy, and otherness are common motifs for characterizing the Armenian diasporic experience, which is, itself, bound to the secretiveness of the past violent history.⁸

More significantly, the video medium reveals what cannot be revealed by bringing forth the unified secret family, its culture, its history, its language, and its filiation. Or, to put it differently, video does not mimetically or adequately reflect history but it stimulates it, it activates the search into the (familial) “historical truth”. Armenianness, in *FAMILY VIEWING*, is accessed through the intimacy of the family video, which, in contrast to the film medium, is ephemeral, easily erasable, and indeed fictional. And as the access to Armenian identity by way of the fictional always amounts to an intrusion into privacy, then, the intrusion, or even violation of that privacy is inevitable if the acknowledgement of Armenianness is to take any effect at all. In other words, video cannot represent the history of the world, because the world of Van’s past history is a world *in fiction*. Armenian History, *FAMILY VIEWING* appears to say, cannot be known except through the fiction of family video.

Indeed, the Armenian genocide, which stands, broadly said, at the origin of the Western Armenian diaspora, until today remains seriously unrecognized, it is still silenced from official shared history and designated as a “fictional” event. In 1915, the Committee of Union and Progress (a revolutionary organization within the Ottoman government), better known as the “Young Turks”, started a systematic and organized plan to eradicate the Armenian people in an effort to homogenize the population and to forge a new nationalism behind the front of a world war. Be-

⁸ As Robin Cohen writes: “it is noticeable that the first and much of the second generation of Armenians-Americans adopted a privatized, inward-looking world of apparent conformity to the assimilationist ethic, *together with* a strong sense of difference, which was rarely displayed in the public domain” (*Global Diasporas*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997, p. 49).

tween 1915 and 1922, approximately 1,500,000 Armenian perished as a result of the Turkish government's policy of genocide. Now, after more than 85 years, the present-day Turkish government has still not admitted that this genocide took place. This politics of denial, inherent in the essence of genocide but also to its policies, remains, and its quiet acceptance by the rest of the world has contributed to the reinforcement of the violence. The so-called work of mourning has never really taken place and "repeats" or reproduces, as it were, the (collective) trauma.

The way the tragic history of the Armenian people still remains largely unknown, overlooked and strongly (politically) denied is obliquely invoked by *FAMILY VIEWING*'s portrayal of the Armenian family, which is depicted in its secret and intimate dimensions. The significant characteristic of the Armenian genocide is thus the persistent denial and the long-standing campaign of negation it faces. It is worth keeping in mind that Canada has only very recently (April 2004) officially recognized the Catastrophe.

Video thus has an ambivalent function concerning Armenianness. On the one hand, video discloses and concretizes the Armenian memory, but on the other hand, videotapes are vulnerably exposed to the process of being erased or manipulated. The flexibility of the video medium as well as its ephemeral, transitory nature are metaphors for the selective process of memory, what must be or not be remembered, on a personal or a collective level. On the one hand, video has a revealing nature, a kind of "living trace" of a real past event, yet on the other hand, it remains largely virtual. The reliability of videographic images is by definition problematic and questionable. In *FAMILY VIEWING*, even though the Armenianness is only virtual, it still has to be masked and erased. The duality of the video medium is exposed by both the father and the son: Stan is preoccupied with maintaining the policy of forgetting and erasing, while Van is preoccupied with maintaining the values of remembering and transmitting.⁹ Through his manipulating methods, Stan acts as a negationist of the Armenian (family) history.

Even though Armenian memories are only shown on videotape, grandmother Armen can be seen as a symbolic presence of the link to Armenia. Armen is presented as the opposite of Stan. While the father tries to deny Van's Armenian past

⁹ Actually, Van has a dual attitude towards video. On the one hand, he wants to keep the tapes as visible memories. On the other hand, he is a victim of the substitutive power of the medium, and we even see that he repeats in some ways his father's manipulating techniques. "Van has come to accept the capacity of video too seriously, as he does not understand that simply to view is not to experience" (Timothy Shary, "Video as Accessible Artefact and Artificial Access: the Early Films of Atom Egoyan", *Film Criticism*, vol. 19, no. 3, Spring 1995, pp. 2-29, p. 19). Van's control and domination over certain events and experiences are also, in a way, the same as his father's. Van rejects his father's principles and values but not his methods.

with his revisionist attitude, the grandmother Armen, who does not speak, symbolizes Armenian origins. Though Armen can no longer transmit something of that culture verbally, Armen is the mirror of Van's memories. "She is a living witness of the Armenian genocide and hence a site of memory."¹⁰ Notably, Armen is a traditional Armenian first name, which refers to the name of the Armenian nation.¹¹ Armen is not only a burden for Stan, she is also the burden of History.

As Cameron Bailey argues, Armen sums up "victimization": "This image of Armenia-as-victim is central to a reading of Armen, a mostly unwanted old woman who's shut away, then given someone else's identity, then shuffled around from place to place for the rest of the film."¹² She thus represents Armenia, and she is in diaspora, in constant movement, in forced mobility. Indeed, in the film, she is constantly displaced. Just like there is no more homeland, there is also no more home for her. The "real" home, once more, is visible only indirectly on tapes.¹³

Van's preoccupation with Armen results in something close to maternal affection (as his mother has left). And, as Cameron Bailey writes, "except Armen, all of Van's "mothers" engage in submissive sex with his father, which may be why his grandmother is the only one he can hug".¹⁴ In this sense, Stan has no moral control over Armen; their distinctive differences again indicate Van's position caught between his Anglo-Celtic and his Armenian world. Van's attachment to his Armenian past is thus embodied in the female figure.¹⁵ Let's also note that the way

¹⁰ Lisa Siraganian, "'Is This My Mother's Grave?': Genocide and Diaspora in Atom Egoyan's *Family Viewing*" (*Diaspora*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1997, pp. 127-154), p. 137.

¹¹ Lisa Siraganian has deftly pointed out the many relevant meanings of the character's names in *FAMILY VIEWING*. She has, for example, argued: "The silent grandmother might be the essence of Armenianness, but such iconic density excludes her from English or Armenian. Even more ominous is Egoyan's naming of "Stan." In Armenian, the homeland is not "Armenia" but Hayastan. Quite literally, Stan illustrates the perils of ethnic cleansing: he is the embodiment of Hayastan without the Hyes. His postmodern version of memory and culture (revisionist and antiseptic) depicts a new Armenian nation: a diaspora disoriented and disconnected from its homeland, but also obsessed with a past betrayal" ("Is This My Mother's Grave?" p. 147).

¹² Cameron Bailey, "Scanning Egoyan" (*Andere Sinema*, no. 95, 1990, pp. 47-55), p. 49. The figure of the silent traumatized and victimized character is a recurrent feature in Egoyan's films. See, for example, the sister in *THE ADJUSTER* (1991), analyzed by Wim Staat in this volume.

¹³ Susan Pattie argues: "The concept of home for many is both mobile and nomadic, more synonymous with family than a particular place" ("At Home in Diapora: Armenians in America". *Diaspora*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1994, pp. 185-198, p. 186).

¹⁴ Bailey, "Scanning Egoyan", p. 49.

¹⁵ Peter Harcourt comments: "He has made connections both with the feminine and with his past. He seems to have rediscovered his ancient, ethnic soul, to have encountered his 'other,' the other that he has always felt was within him" ("Imaginary Images: An Examination of Atom Egoyan's Film". *Film Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 3, Spring 1995, pp. 2-14, p. 7). It is symptomatic that as a child Van looked very Armenian; the child together with Armen and his mother create a kind of "physical harmony". As an adult, Van is blond, and this may be seen as a sort of literal physical assimilation.

in which Van's grandmother symbolizes his connection to his roots is fairly common among Armenians of the diaspora. Egoyan himself has said that his relationship with his grandmother was essential in the concretization of his origins. Van's story might be seen as a reflection of Atom Egoyan's own experience. As the filmmaker has confessed:

I had a very complex relationship with my grandmother, who came to Canada but only spoke Armenian. She was sent to a terrible nursing home when I was a child and I never understood why she had to be there. It was a very traumatic thing for me to accept. She passed away in this nursing home, and I've never quite forgiven a lot of people close to her for having done this. Because when she left, so much of my culture left. Loss is a part of the Armenian experience, of course, thanks to the genocide of this century.¹⁶

The grandmother also has an essential meaning in traditional Armenian culture. She represents the protector of the home, she has the power to guard it as a precious place.¹⁷ The figure of the Armenian grandmother is therefore a recurring and strong element in the Armenian diaspora and in mnemonic familial representation.

In fact, each character in the film is linked to a distinctive position within the family structure and its dynamics and, as such, to the process of family memory. Robert Neuburger makes a distinction between two sorts of familial memory: one is the *mémoire familiale-entrepôt* and the other is the *mémoire familiale-processus*. The first represents every potential source about a family, such as familial symbols and values, letters, genealogic documents, photographs, videos, etc. The second represents the process by which we are permitted (or not) to release information and have access to it, which is essentially a process of selection.¹⁸ FAMILY VIEWING exposes these two aspects of family memory. Van is linked to the *mémoire familiale-entrepôt*, since in the video-recorded images he sees slices of his childhood and familial background. Stan is linked to the *mémoire familiale-processus* since he regulates Van's familial identity and chooses what should be transmitted or not, and what should be forgotten or not. As for Armen, she is perhaps involved in both. She represents the memory of the secret family history, which also exists on videotape, and her tacit presence (traumatic but also charismatic) represents, in an indirect way, access to and transmission of the origins. We could

¹⁶ See interview with Atom Egoyan on the Internet, <http://www.ifctv.com/events/98isa/egoyan>, available 1998.

¹⁷ Avétis Aharonian, *Les Anciennes croyances arméniennes* (Roquvaire: Parenthèses, 1980), p. 117.

¹⁸ Neuburger, *Le Mythe familial*, p. 31

even say that Van, by his ardent will to keep Armen and the videos “alive”, tries to regulate the possibilities of transmission.

Archival Images

In FAMILY VIEWING video, despite its unreliability paradoxically functions as an archive. We usually understand an archive in a strict historical context, archive being the historical tool par excellence. Archive is a trace of the past, material evidence that is by definition reliable. In other words, it is perceived as an official “visible” document that properly *says* something proven about the past. In *Temps et récit*, Paul Ricœur quotes the definition of archives given in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*:

The term archives designates the organized body of records produced or received by a public, semipublic, institutional business or private entity in the transaction of its affairs and preserved by it, its successors or authorized repository through extension of its original meaning as the repository for such materials.

Following this definition, Ricœur insists on its character as institution:

Archives constitute the documentary stock of an institution. It is a specific activity of this institution that produces them, gathers them, and conserves them. And the deposit thereby constituted is an authorized deposit through some stipulation added to the one that sets up the entity for which the archives are “archives”.¹⁹

Because this institutional concept of archive appears problematic in relation to the negation of the Armenian genocide, we must approach it a bit differently. It remains a record, but some of its common intrinsic aspects such as “official” and “proof” must be reconsidered. Indeed, different because of the way the 1915 event is still largely overlooked by many official institutions and is still considered as “fictional”.

If home video in FAMILY VIEWING becomes the only possibility for gaining access to (family) history, we can assert that videographic images function as an archive, even if they are constructed, fictional, virtual. Of course, those images do not depict the Catastrophe in a figurative way, but they do confirm and substanti-

¹⁹ Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative (Volume III)*, translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 117.

ate Armenianness, an ethnic identity that the “genocidal impulse” logically tends to make disappear. This point already obliquely indicates the rather complex relation Armenians have toward images in general: although very few visual pieces of evidence of the Armenian genocide exist, as the destruction of historical archives was a logical pursuit and result of the denial policy, there is a constant desire to reconstruct and legitimate the past by any “visible” means. Moreover, publicly, the Armenian Catastrophe remains highly *unrepresented*, unrecorded, and untransmitted. This is why any visual attempt to represent it stands for an act of memory, with the image functioning as a “prosthesis” for memory.²⁰ But one thing is certain: photographs are rare, and even if they do exist, their archival function, in the face of denial, is very much put into question. To put it even stronger, it is because images of the tragic past are lacking that to “(re)create” them makes them even more meaningful, that is to say, as I wish to further argue: archival. In a way, it is as if the image constitutes the event.²¹ Therefore, an archive does refer to a track of the past but, in this case, to one that is re-constructed and re-created because of the lack of “accessible” traces.

The dichotomy of recognition and denial is non-coincidentally expressed by the video medium. If the official archives are lacking, lacking not in the sense that they do not exist but in that they remain unauthorized, the only thing left is to reproduce them not as facts or pieces of evidence but as the only possible (impossible) answer to the denegation. This is why those re-created archives, in a sense, become “iconic” and not strictly documental or historical; they translate a survival process, one of marking and transmitting an obsessive and indelible past, and they simultaneously remind us of their fragility because archive has the dialectical structure of inscribing and destroying.

Indeed, if video can be considered an archival material, this is also because archive is at the heart of any denial politics. As Marc Nichanian explains:

²⁰ Additionally, I believe that the denial of the Armenian genocide invests all of Egoyan’s narratives, even when most of his films do not touch directly on Armenia’s tragic history or mimetically depict it. It is the impossibility of forgetting and the “haunting” power of the highly contested and neglected Event that pushes the filmmaker Atom Egoyan toward the (re)creation and (re)production of as many images related to it as possible. Egoyan’s latest film, *ARARAT* (2002), acutely confirms the filmmaker’s constant desire to represent the overwhelming and invasive imprint of the tragic Armenian past and present. In all of his films, Egoyan uses the videographic medium in order to highlight the (obsessive) need to preserve and remember specific events and the way in which, in a context of denial, it remains viciously fragile.

²¹ Eric Ketelaar expresses it like this: “a photograph is not just a recording: it constitutes the event” (“Tacit Narratives: The Meaning of Archives”. *Archival Science*, no. 1, 2001, pp. 131-141, p. 134).

The denial begins with the rule of the archive in history and in memory. At the very heart of his action, the genocidal executioner has already placed the denial, he has already thought of erasing all traces of his crime. He would have never done this if he had not found himself committed from the start to the archive's sphere of influence.²²

And he adds:

For eighty years, the Armenians have found themselves [the] prisoners of this unanswerable and implacable logic. They have wanted to prove and to prove again. They have transformed all the archives into so many proofs. They have dispossessed their own memory of its properties in this renewed dread of proof. Today, confronted with the denial, they are therefore condemned to repeat again the same operation.²³

Following Nichanian's idea of the Armenian dread of proof, we understand why, specifically in the context of the denegation, archive cannot be associated with (self-) explanation, justification, or the collection of material proofs. An archive is not the proof but – and I insist on this – the answer, the possible (impossible) openness to something that cannot exist. In *FAMILY VIEWING*, the home video is definitely a family archive: family because it remains private and personal, and archive because it discloses what cannot be shown and thus reminds us of the Armenian genocide's violent displacement.

Destruction is at the heart of the archival object.²⁴ There is the originary destruction that stimulates the desire to produce and to collect archives, but there is also the potential for destruction that archives are exposed to. So, destruction is the origin of the archive's existence and pertinence, but it is also what threatens it:

²² Marc Nichanian, "L'Archive et la preuve. Les procès de la visée genocidaire" (*L'Intranquille* vol. 2, no. 3, 1994, pp. 79-86), p. 79.

²³ "L'Archive et la preuve," p. 80.

²⁴ We might, in a way, bring this idea together with what Jacques Derrida calls "*le mal d'archive*." As he puts it: "The *trouble de l'archive* stems from a *mal d'archive*. We are *en mal d'archive*: in need of archives. Listening to the French idiom, and in it the attribute *en mal de*, to be *en mal d'archive* can mean something else than to suffer from a sickness, from trouble or from what the noun *mal* might mean. It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there's too much of it, right where something in it archives itself. It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of commencement. No desire, no passion, no drive, no compulsion, indeed no repetition compulsion, no "*mal-de*" can arise for a person who is not already, in one way or another, *en mal d'archive*" (*Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, translated by Eric Prenowitz, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 91).

once archives are produced, they are exposed to potential destruction. This double destructive aspect is at stake when we make an analogy with video. The Armenian family needs to collect the videotaped images as an assertive response to the destruction with which the Armenian people are “familiar”, but simultaneously the risk of destroying the family’s (historical) past is also included in the fragility and the flexibility of the medium. With video there is an idea of iteration, not only the repetition of preserving the past, but also of repeating the process of erasing that past, in this case the family history.

What Derrida writes about the means of the archive can also be easily applied to the videographic medium:

The very sophisticated archival instruments we use today have a double-edged significance (*à double tranchant*): on the one hand, they may provide us, more “authentically” than ever, more faithfully, with the reproduction of the “present as it has been”; yet, on the other hand, in this way, thanks to this very power, they offer us more sophisticated possibilities to manipulate, to edit, to recompose, to produce synthetic images.²⁵

Video recording is not only inscribing but also destroying – the (historical) past, the event, the self. The processes of preserving and erasing, both displayed through the video medium, indicate the precarious nature of Armenian history and the (im)possibility of transmitting that past.

“Sing an English Song”: The Archive and (Impossible) Translation

On one of the videotapes of Van’s childhood, we see Stan playing with Van, and we hear Armenian being spoken in the background. Van sits on his mother’s knee and sings an Armenian song. Then we hear the father: “Sing an English song.” Because at this moment Stan is recording, he is absent in the video, he is an external yet audible observer. The scene is highly significant. As spectators, we do not understand what is being said, but somehow it does not matter. The foreign language provokes in the viewer a confirmation of Van’s position as “other”. We do not understand what is said by the Armenian family members, but we visually understand that there is something that cannot be translated. On the one hand, it cannot be fully translated because the scene obviously asserts the powerful position of the English-speaking father, but on the other hand, and more profoundly,

²⁵ Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies de la télévision* (Paris: Galilée-INA, 1996), p. 111 (my translation, MAB).

the scene reflects on the impossible linguistic appropriation of the Other as Other.²⁶

The fact that the Armenian words are not translated in the film preserves the Armenian family members in their own distinctiveness, without being mastered, appropriated, or reduced to the Same. Thus, the Armenian language, which is not identifiable as such (in the film it is only spoken within the intimacy of the family and only audible on the videotapes), remains untranslatable, incomprehensible, ungraspable, *infinitely other*. There can neither be a “pulsion of translating” nor an ideal of perfect translation.²⁷

This brings us to the close relationship between archive and translation. The Armenian as the Other (*L'Étranger*) can be translated neither into a historical and mnemonic representation nor in terms of comprehensible and recognizable linguistic form.²⁸ And indeed, Van's childhood video archives the separation of languages: We see Stan at the left of the screen, watching his family in the garden through a window, and this window ensures that Stan and Van's mother are never in the same frame. The glass between them defines the separation of languages or cultures as two distinctive worlds. On one side of the window, Armenian is spoken. On the other side of the glass, Stan gives instructions to Van by miming gestures that he wants him to imitate. Finally, Van's mother brings him inside and tells him to “sing an English song for papa”. Stan congratulates his son on his English. This last moment confirms Stan's powerful patriarchal and Western position.

The end of the film is redeeming: we finally see Van, his mother and grandmother together (in a homeless shelter²⁹), they are no longer united only through

²⁶ As Derrida has argued in *Of Hospitality*: “Must we ask the foreigner to understand us, to speak our language, in all the senses of this term, in all its possible extensions, before being able and so as to be able to welcome him into our country? If he was already speaking our language, with all that that implies, if we already shared everything that is shared with a language, would the foreigner still be a foreigner and could we speak of asylum or hospitality in regard to him?” (*Of Hospitality*, translated by Rachel Bowlby. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 15 and 17).

²⁷ On this point see Paul Ricœur, *Sur la traduction* (Paris, Bayard, 2004). Let me add that what Ricœur considers “*hospitalité langagière*” is quite different from Derrida's perspective. As Ricœur puts it: “*Hospitalité langagière donc, où le plaisir d'habiter la langue de l'autre est compensé par le plaisir de recevoir chez soi, dans sa propre demeure d'accueil, la parole de l'étranger.*” (*Sur la traduction*, p. 20). For Derrida, hospitality is, simply put, the very acceptance of a non-comprehension, of a non-engulfment of the “other” language.

²⁸ Derrida has described the relation between archive and translation as follows: “The archive always holds a problem for translation. With the irreplaceable singularity of a document to interpret, to repeat, to reproduce, but each time in its original uniqueness, an archive ought to be idiomatic, and thus at once offered and unavailable for translation, open to and shielded from technical iteration and reproduction” (*Archive Fever*, p. 90).

²⁹ Note how the way the three characters are brought together in a homeless shelter is significant: it symbolically confirms that they have been *in diaspora* for three generations.

the medium of video. Van, Armen, and Van's long-lost mother are unified in cross-generational harmonious and familiar family consonance. Their existence is no longer virtual. For the first time we see Armen speaking in Armenian. Egoyan intercuts this scene with previously shown video images of Van's childhood. The film closes with the image of Stan and Van's mother, separated by a window. "As the end title "Family Viewing" appears in the window, we realize that is exactly what we have seen. This has been the viewing of and by a family, produced and received by its members, to which we as an audience are now included... Stan, forever isolated between the real life of his family and his obsession to escape it through recording it on video."³⁰

As my analysis of *FAMILY VIEWING* has shown, the double meaning of the title of this volume – *Shooting the Family* – astutely fits Atom Egoyan's film. On the one hand, "shooting" is about filming, which, as I have suggested, implicates remembering and inscribing. On the other hand, however, "shooting" is about forgetting, erasing, "killing", the Armenian generational filiation and the (im)possibility of its transmission. This double sense of shooting is precisely what is at issue in the archival dimension of video. In sum, shooting the family means archiving the family, that is to say the desire to remember it, but it also means exposing the family to its originary potential future destruction.

³⁰ Shary, "Video as Accessible Artefact and Artificial Access", p. 21.

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Filmography

- FAMILY VIEWING (Canada Council for the Arts, Ego Film Arts, Ontario Arts Council, Ontario Film Development Corporation, Canada: 1987) directed by Atom Egoyan.
- NEXT OF KIN (Ego Film Arts, Canada: 1984) directed by Atom Egoyan.

Part 4
Loving Families

Suspending the Body: Biopower and the Contradictions of Family Values

Sudeep Dasgupta

If the family is the original scene of filial belonging, and culture the general term for affilial bonding, what are the consequences of (con)fusing *la patrie* with *la nation*? If family values undergird a normative understanding of cultural identity, what is the father's place in the patrimony through which national culture is to be understood? In the context of dispersed and divided families, how might we understand family values in the recent debates around cultural values? What happens to the family when the migrant body enters the nation? If there is indeed a metonymic confusion between nation and patrimony, this must have consequences for the conception of the family as well. It is with these questions that I want to read the figuration of the immigrant body in *LES TERRES FROIDES* (Sebastian Lifshitz, 1998), in which a young second-generation Arab immigrant (a so-called *beur*), Djamel (Yasmine Belmadi), moves from St. Denis to Grenoble to find his French father.

The immigrant body provides us with one entry point through which to confront the discourses of family and cultural values within contemporary processes of displacement and mobility. How can such a body act, and move, within a material and discursive force field that is constructed through the idiom of "civilization" and "barbarism"? This is not just a metaphoric or idealistic question, for my argument engages with the figuration of the raced body and its potential for mobility through a materialist reading of value. This chapter will frame the value of the body within the social, ideological, and economic relations of migration, racism, and the discourse of national culture.

If culture and family as different fields of analysis are distinct, what combines them in much political discourse is the appendage "value". Family values are often considered to reflect national values. In a sense, "value" as a conceptual hinge is that which makes a comparison between culture/nation and family possible. However, much of this discourse that evaluates cultural values through discourses on the family erases important historical contradictions. By referring to Karl

Marx's theories about the body as labor-power and value, I will critique the conceptual contradictions that are hidden when the circulation of a discourse of value unites the family to culture. More particularly, this part of the chapter focuses on the theory of family and cultural value as developed by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire*.¹ In the second part of this chapter, I will analyze the specific discourses of family and national values by focusing on the body of the main character of *LES TERRES FROIDES*. This second part indicates that a materialist rethinking of the national and the family is necessary in order to understand the ways in which the body of the migrant is often unable to move and act because it is "suspended" between many different, sometimes contradictory values.

Marx's Labor-Power and the Contradictions of Value Inequalities

Given my concern with the body in relation to questions about value, the work of Karl Marx is particularly relevant. Marx analyzes the relationship between the labor-power of the body, the family and culture as the historically specific organization of human relations. He notes in *Capital*, for example, that the introduction of *machinofacture* has resulted in a prodigious expansion of the capacity for appropriating labor-power under capitalist economic relations.² The consequences are disastrous for the family to the extent that women's labor now was inserted within the accumulation of surplus value.³ Consequently, the value of the family as a unit of differential gender relations and socio-sexual labor power has shifted. For workers, including women and children, a shift in the mode of production (to *machinofacture*) brought about a shift in the value of their bodies, which are now coded economically through wage labor and culturally as morally and intellectually deficient. The latter coding is implicitly linked to a racial discourse in the wake of migrations of peoples. I mark out this early engagement between the value of the laboring body, family "values", and historical changes in social relations, in order to emphasize that the power of the body to act, and to move, can only be understood in the context of a specific configuration of historical, social, economic, and political relations. Further, it is important to point out that the relationship between the changing value of the body within the family and that of the body in surplus-value extraction is more than an analogy; rather, changes in family value and changes in economic value should be understood in their interdependency. For example, the changing roles of women involved in the textile industries of the

¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

² Karl Marx, *Capital: Vol. 1* (New York: Vintage), 1976, p. 517.

³ Surplus-value is the surplus produced over and above what is required to survive, which is translated into profit in capitalism (Marx, *Capital*, pp. 270-280).

nineteenth-century are preconditioned by the replacement of small-scale, in-home weaving looms by steam-driven looms in large factories; the introduction of child labor in large industries is preconditioned by the changing nature of private households.

Once such an understanding underpins a materialist analysis of the body, it becomes crucial to underline that contradiction plays a part in thinking labor-power and the body. It is precisely in the phase when expended labor is remunerated by wages that the contradiction between the interests of the laborer and the capitalist becomes apparent. Marx's point is that the capitalist owns the power of the worker's body (labor-power), which is extracted in greater measure than the wage that is paid. What is crucial for my argument concerning contradiction and inequality in understanding labor-power is the appropriation of human beings in this process. Marx explains it as follows: "[By] labor-power (*Arbeitskraft*) or capacity for labor is to be understood the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description."⁴ Both the affective and physical capabilities of the body are thus linked to its potential for producing use-value.⁵ Yet this specific use-value in the production process gets erased through the mechanisms of exchange where different commodities get equated through the mediation of money. Thus, the contradictions inherent in the worker-capitalist relationship are first concealed by wage payment and then by money as the mediator between different use-values. Important in thinking labor-power is, therefore, contradiction and the later mediation between dissimilar use-values equalized through money as the form of appearance of value, in exchange. Money hides the real equivalent: labor.⁶ Discourses of value, marked by spurious equations (such as "equal remuneration" through wages) thus conceal certain contradictions. In the same fashion, when family values and cultural values are equated, an erasure is effectuated of the complex contradictions and mediations through which such equivalences are discursively established.

The Loss of Contradiction in Discourses of "Empire"

The importance of both contradiction and mediation is lost in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's influential reformulation of labor-power in their book *Empire*.

⁴ Marx, *Capital*, p.270.

⁵ Use-value according to Marx is related to the physical properties of the commodity. For instance, iron, corn, a diamond, which is the use-value or useful thing (Marx, *Capital*, p. 126). A commodity is an object or thing which through its qualities satisfies a human need (p. 125).

⁶ The exchange relation of commodities is characterized precisely by its abstraction from their use-value (Marx, *Capital*, pp. 126-128).

Here we are presented with an argument for the “*the profound economic power of the cultural movements*, or really the increasing indistinguishability of economic and cultural phenomena”.⁷ Apparently, for them, economics and culture as related but distinct spheres have now collapsed into each other. The warrant for this claim is based on their argument that in the contemporary, post-Fordist, global, capitalist world, which Hardt and Negri call “Empire”, “immaterial labor” has acquired a prominence it did not possess earlier.⁸ Information processing, technologically mediated production processes and work which includes caring and affective labor (such as health-care services) has resulted, we are led to believe, in labor-power being expended increasingly in mental and affective rather than crudely physical terms. Value occupies a central place in their formulation; yet, given the complexity of Empire and the importance of “immaterial labor”, value appears beyond calculation. We can no longer grasp labor-power in terms of value considerations, Hardt and Negri contend, given the complex processes of mediation in our contemporary world; rather, “a new paradigm of power is realized which is defined by the technologies that recognize society as the realm of biopower”.⁹ The mechanisms of control under capitalism have been interiorized, Hardt and Negri argue, to such an extent that “when power becomes entirely biopolitical, the whole social body is comprised by power’s machine... This relationship is open, qualitative and affective. Society, subsumed within a power that reaches down to the ganglia of the social structure and its processes of development, reacts like a single body. Power is thus expressed as a control that extends throughout the depths of consciousness and bodies of the population – and at the same time across the entirety of social relations.”¹⁰

What such an account suggests is that the operations of power suffuse down to the very depths of our mental capacities and physical abilities, the latter being of course what Marx already understood as crucial to understanding labor-power, before Empire but entirely concomitant to capitalism. At this point, however, Hardt and Negri’s argument sounds relentlessly pessimistic. They distance themselves from arguments by Marx, and argue that the “real subsumption” of labor under capital “disrupts the linear and totalitarian figure of capitalist development”.¹¹ Indeed, this incredibly complete suffusion of power under imperial

⁷ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 275, emphasis in original.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 291-294.

⁹ Inspired by Foucault, Hardt and Negri see biopower as “a form of power that regulates social life from its interior. It is the vital function that every individual reactivates in his or own accord that is empowering” (*Empire*, pp. 23-4). Mental and affective “immaterial-labor” is a large part of biopower.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

capitalism results in “an explosion of the elements that were previously coordinated and mediated in civil society. Resistances are no longer marginal but active in the center of a society that opens up in networks.” This is a consequence of the “paradox of a power that, while it unifies and envelops within itself every element of social life (*thus losing its capacity to mediate different social forces*), at that very moment reveals a new context, a new milieu of maximum plurality and uncontrollable singularization”.¹²

A number of points are worth emphasizing here. The historical argument that Hardt and Negri make here is that given the passage from Foucault’s society of discipline to the realm of biopower, resistances to capitalism are no longer staged through the spatially divided sectors of the state and civil society, but through an unmediated, direct exercise of the brains and bodies of individuals against the operations of power. Here affect, understood as the “power to act”, is crucial to understanding biopower, for the affective potential of the individual to resist power can be pluralized in uncontrollable fashion. We have thus moved from a historically specific understanding of labor power and value, with all its inherent contradictions and mediations, to a notion of biopower which is unmediated and capable of resisting power, given that power has penetrated right into the very “ganglia of the social structure”.

It is at this point that it is worth asking whether the capacity of the body to move can indeed be conceptualized outside the questions of contradiction and mediation that Marx proposed. What are the promises of this power-suffused social body called Empire, theorized along the lines of affect and “immaterial labor”? The importance that Hardt and Negri ascribe to immaterial labor and the body and the brain as *unmediated* sites of resistance is utopian. Neil Lazarus and Gayatri Spivak have argued that ignorance of the international division of labor underlies many of the arguments of the “information economy”, “postmodernism” and the like, to which Hardt and Negri’s argument is deeply indebted.¹³ Lazarus has argued that one can claim to live in a radically different economic order, only if one remains blind to the continuing reliance on not just Fordist, but also Taylorist modes of production within contemporary capitalism.¹⁴ Needless to say, the laboring-body, caught within the contradictions engendered by capitalism, remains central to Lazarus’s argument. Spivak, in her reading of the value-form in Marx, warns against an over-valuation of the affective side of consumption, because of its tendency to ignore that, on the other side of the international division

¹² Ibid., p. 25, emphasis added.

¹³ Hardt and Negri, interestingly, do acknowledge the international division of labor, but only *within* immaterial labor rather than between immaterial and physical labor (*Empire*, pp. 291-2).

¹⁴ Neil Lazarus, “Doubting the New World Order: Marxism, Realism and the Claims of Post-modern Theory” (*differences*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 94-138).

of labor, these very mental and physical pleasures are structurally denied.¹⁵ In as much as the labor theory of value emphasizes contradictions and mediation, the theory of biopower figures the body as an autonomously driven, affectively charged location for action without contradiction and mediation. However, as my reading of *LES TERRES FROIDES* will elaborate, the potential of movement (as one kind of exercise of biopower) is deeply mediated and caught within a nexus of contradictions and ambivalences.

If the Third World is the geographical space where material labor as opposed to immaterial labor recalibrates surplus-value, where does the labor of numerous working-class immigrants in the First World figure in Hardt and Negri's resistant potential of biopower? How historical or "sociological" is their analysis of the "international order" when the specific and differentiated value of immigrant labor-power is ignored in this spurious spatial divide between First and Third World? It is precisely their re-reading of labor-power as biopower, the primacy they thus grant affect and cultural autonomy, and their myopic vision of the complexities of the international division of labor, which will be elaborated in the next part of this chapter. By framing Marx's concept of labor-power through the "cultural text" of *LES TERRES FROIDES*, I will argue that ambivalences generated by *contradiction* will suspend the main character Djamel's mobility. Rather than interpreting Djamel's travels as the result of an "autonomous" creative and mobilizing (bio)power of affect, the next part of this chapter shows that, by the continual recoding of Djamel's body and the two-way mediation of cultural and family values, Djamel's mobility is actually suspended between the ghettos of the *banlieue* and bourgeois respectability. In this sense, *LES TERRES FROIDES* can be understood as demonstrating that equating family values and cultural and national values erases contradictions which are evidenced in Djamel's inability to move.

LES TERRES FROIDES: The Immigrant's Desire for Residence

Any human movement, whether it springs from an intellectual or even a natural impulse, is impeded in its unfolding by the boundless resistance of the outside world. Few things will further the ominous spread of rambling as much as the strangulation of freedom of residence, and never has freedom of movement stood in greater disproportion to the abundance of means of travel. *Walter Benjamin*¹⁶

¹⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value" (In *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. London and New York: Routledge, 1988, pp. 154-175), p. 162.

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, "One-Way Street" (In *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*. New York, Schocken, 1986, pp. 61-94), p. 75.

How does Djamel in *LES TERRES FROIDES* get framed in the historical construction of the second-generation Arab immigrants in contemporary France? What possibilities and constraints structure his body's physical and affective desire for mobility? These questions must be answered by situating the figuration of Djamel's body in the diegetic world of *LES TERRES FROIDES* within the historical circumstances it constellates. Benjamin observes the panoramic expanse of imperial Germany in the inter-war period as a dialectic of movement and restriction, a dialectic between freedom ("rambling") through its obverse, "the strangulation of freedom of residence". Framing my discussion of Djamel's body within these concerns, how might we understand the possibilities of Djamel's obsessive desire for "residence", in his father's home within the dialectic of enclosure and openings? How does this body's potentiality for movement get framed? A word or two on the film are in order here before answering these questions.

The written re-presentation here importantly departs from the narrative structure *and* content of the film, for the viewer's engagement with Djamel's motivations will be directed by a game of hide-and-seek by Lifshitz, who shows without telling and tells without showing. We are not privy to the motivations of Djamel at the beginning of the film, as he moves from St. Denis to Grenoble, even though we know that he has been fired from his job. It is only towards the end of the film that the true reasons of his moving to Grenoble become apparent. This structure of postponement, deliberate psychological blankness in the midst of visual plenitude, however, will not lead to an "ending" that performs an infinite deferral. In terms of Djamel and his body, there will be no finality to his desire for residence, for rest and for love within the heart of the family. It is for this reason that the relationship between the mode of presentation in the film and the content, playing on our expectations and assumptions, can only be marked here, and addressed later in the analysis.

Djamel takes up work in a factory in Grenoble, and while he lives in the temporary "home" of a hostel of sorts, it is another home, that of the factory boss, Monsieur Chamblasse (Bernard Verley), that largely occupies his "free time". While work might be the ostensible reason for his move, Chamblasse's home is revealed as the obsessive object of Djamel's gaze. He subjects this other home to surveillance over the wall that encloses its gardens, and sometimes through the trees, yet we are offered no initial explanation for these actions. Towards the end of the film, in a confrontation with Chamblasse, we realize that Djamel suspects the latter of being his father. This revelation late in the film is met by an immediate, though ambivalent, rejection (Djamel *could* be his son, Chamblasse responds, but he does not accept it), upon which Djamel immediately sets his sights on Chamblasse's son, Laurent (Sébastien Charles), who till now has remained largely absent. Following Laurent to a skating rink where he observes him

kissing a man in a stairwell, Djamel meets him one night in a bar after a violent encounter with Chamblasse, and later they go together to a hill in Grenoble, where they sit and talk. Not disclosing the ongoing familial drama occurring elsewhere, this meeting of “strangers” (Laurent has forgotten he has met Djamel before, after the latter had just moved to the city) results in an incestuous sexual encounter in Laurent’s bed, in the Chamblasse home, and in a dramatic clash between Chamblasse and his two sons the following morning. The sequence ends with Djamel’s naked body motionless on the floor after a violent blow from his father. The film ends a few seconds later as Mme. Chamblasse (Florence Giorgetti) questions her dazed husband, who sits speechless at the breakfast table.

Framing Djamel’s Body

If the film sets Djamel’s body in stasis at the end, it keeps it in motion throughout its unfolding. This mobility, slowly revealed as Djamel’s desire for belonging to the family and the home of his father, Chamblasse, is framed within a constellation of different orientation points and codes. St. Denis, from where Djamel begins his journey, is overdetermined at least in French political discourse as one of the worst Parisian *banlieues*, an ominous signifier of a suburban ghetto with all the implications of racial violence and cultural/religious alterity from which French culture sets itself apart. Along with La Courneuve, St. Denis’s reputation as an urban hell of gang violence and immigrants among whom the police are afraid to act is briefly hinted at in a conversation between a factory employee Bouvier (Daniel Isoppo) and Djamel. To the former’s concerned enquiry about life in St. Denis as “a depressed area”, Djamel will respond with irritation that it also has some decent houses – end of conversation. Djamel rejects being framed as the unfortunate immigrant from a troubled area in the French cultural imaginary. Later in the film, he will reject this framing again when he is addressed as a worker who must strike. His refusal there, we will learn only later, has to do with his feelings for Chamblasse, whom he does not want to disappoint as a son (even if Chamblasse does not know it when Djamel refuses to strike). These multiple framings of Djamel’s movements, as a former inhabitant of St. Denis and as a worker, contradict what propels him to Grenoble, his desire for an affective and material residence in the warmth of the family home. The framing of Djamel within a marginal place within French national culture is set against his desire to belong to the hearth of the nation: to be seen as the son of a French father.

Djamel seems to find some place of rest, of being at home, in the emotional and sexual bond he establishes with Isabelle (Valérie Donzelli), Chamblasse’s secretary. It is with her that Djamel is able to express the emotional and physical exhaustion he experiences, the intensity of which paradoxically obstructs his abil-

ity to cry. Yet, even this openness towards Isabelle is counterbalanced by secrecy – for example, when he withholds his motivations for refusing to strike against Chamblasse’s interests, even though she tries to convince him of the righteousness of this strike. Unaware of Djamel’s familial bonds, she cannot but frame him as a worker. In one of the few scenes of sexual and emotional intensity in the film, Djamel cradles Isabelle in his arms and caresses her breast. The camera moves slowly over his fingers and her body. Yet the visual intimacy is broken by Djamel’s words, as he comments: “You have such soft skin... so white... *vrais Française*.” To which she snaps back that *she* does not give a damn about skin color. While Djamel frames himself here as a racial other (expressing his admiration for the French whiteness of her skin), he cannot see her color-blindness (which his brother will later fetishize). His ability to perform sexually with her is framed within his inability to cry, a form of “ejaculation” whose impetus is pain rather than pleasure.

The contradictions which Djamel encounters in the one (non-familial) “home” that Isabelle represents, where his perspective on her body colors their relationship in a manner that she refuses to acknowledge, are indicative of ambivalence and suspended resolution. Given that he loves her, it is the underlying contradictions between them in terms of the cultural coding of skin color that trigger an ambivalence missing in the much less intense relationship with Bouvier, who represents Djamel’s rights as a worker. This relationship between contradiction and ambivalence in Djamel’s love for Isabelle is intensified even further in the to-and-fro between admiration for Chamblasse and resentment towards his father for rejecting him.

French Father and Beur Son: A Dialectic of Desire and Disgust

The ambivalence related to contradiction is most starkly shown in Djamel’s relationship with Chamblasse. In his conversations with Bouvier and Isabelle, Djamel’s defense of Chamblasse confounds our expectations that a worker would be willing to strike against a clearly authoritarian boss. As the film progresses and the reasons for this protective attitude of the worker towards his boss gets refigured as one of love for father by son, the moment of recognition is revealed once more as an encounter marked by ambivalence and contradiction. In the privacy of Chamblasse’s office, Djamel informs his employer that there are plans for a strike. Chamblasse shows his gratitude for Djamel’s initiative, even though he is already aware of it, and paradoxically acknowledges the workers’ interests. The camera focuses closely on Djamel’s face as he mutters nervously that there is something else he needs to say. “I think you are my father,” he blurts out to Chamblasse, whose perplexed response leads Djamel to pull out a photograph of

his mother to show Chamblasse. The close-up of Chamblasse's face reveals a look of recognition as he chuckles and shakes his head knowingly. "Ah yes... I remember now... I wasn't her only client." The hurt and anger in Djamel's eyes reveal that his mother's past in Aubervilliers, 1978, where Chamblasse met her is a blank to him. "She loved you," is Djamel's angry response. Chamblasse's response has reconfigured love, between mother and son, woman and man, into ignorance and disavowal, and sex as commerce. Chamblasse's almost affectionate recollection of Yasmina Tali, and the admission that Djamel *could* be his son, however, is immediately followed by a hardening of the eyes, and the immediate firing of Djamel from his position in the factory – "I am your boss. Get out!" The possible father becomes authoritative employer. The roles of father and employer, which might not necessarily be contradictory, here become incommensurable. There is no equivalence for the value of the family residing precisely in love on the one hand, and filial bonds established through sex as commerce on the other; there can only be ambivalence when gender, race, and sex intersect in Chamblasse's encounters with Djamel's mother.

After this rejection, Djamel nevertheless again tries to get in touch with his father. He follows Chamblasse's forays into the town's bars and meets him on the street. Attempting to physically support his stumbling, inebriated father who has already rejected him, Djamel is repeatedly repulsed. The aggression against Djamel's attempts at establishing physical communication is underlined by the sounds of his father throwing his body against the metal doors of a shop. "Filthy foreigner, son of a whore", Chamblasse shouts. Djamel does not respond, but continues trying to help his father who can barely stand from drunkenness. "You and your mother should never have existed," Chamblasse shouts again, adding: "I wish I didn't exist either." By these words, and in spite of himself, Chamblasse establishes a bond, albeit a negative one, between his *beur* son and himself. Once more, in a contrapuntal movement between sound and image, the violence of the father's rejection is coded as contradiction and ambivalence. His words to Djamel underline the ambivalence, while his physical actions manifest rejection. To his credit, Lifshitz, while hardly romanticizing the nuclear family (Chamblasse repeatedly assaults his wife and we later learn is violently homophobic), is not tempted by the predictable alternative of the father's outright rejection of the *beur* son. The ambivalence between father and son, and the to-and-fro of desire and aggression from *both sides* is repeatedly staged in their encounters. The family is shot in the film, and shot through within a dialectic of attraction and repulsion, desire and disgust between the father and the son, emulating the relationship between the nation and the immigrant.

The Impossibility of *Jouissance*

It is necessary at this point to postpone an analysis of the climactic end to the film in order to underline how contradiction, which is crucial to ambivalence, marks the *suspension* of the body's potential to act. I will briefly turn to *jouissance* as bliss, *plaisir* and loss of self, in order to explore how the figuration of Djamel's body signals his incapacity to move despite his desire to find rest. In three consecutive sequences, Djamel's body and his desire – sexual and affective – are suspended through contradiction. Scene 1: We see him eating in a fast-food restaurant in the city, observing two young women at another table. Noticing his gaze, one of the women whispers something to the other who then coldly returns the gaze before verbally dismissing his attention, at which point both women break out into derisive laughter. Scene 2: The shot immediately following this failed attempt at making a connection is a close-up of an arcade game screen, of a skier flying down the slopes of a snow-covered mountain. The camera shifts to Djamel's face while he twists and turns his body, mimicking the moves of his counterpart on screen. The cold dismissal of his desiring look in the restaurant is, without pause, linked to an ecstatically smiling Djamel as he negotiates the joys of movement in a virtual space (the ski slope). This segment is followed in scene 3 by the shiny image of creamy white breasts and a neck ringed by twin rows of pearls, a photograph from a porn magazine, and the rhythmic sounds of a man breathing hard. The suggested intimacy set up by the close-up of a reproduction of sexual desirability (porn magazine) is opposed to the real breast of Isabelle, which Djamel had earlier caressed. Intimacy and distance cross each other in a reconfiguration of desire. Suddenly, at the precise moment of orgasm, when Djamel comes while looking at the picture of the woman's breasts, the camera shifts perspective. At that moment of auto-affectation where the photographed body in the magazine stimulates Djamel's body, the moment of *jouissance* and loss of self, we are presented with a medium shot, a coldly symmetrical view of Djamel's body, his come spurting onto his stomach and raised T-shirt. He curses.

The possibility of real human contact between two bodies that was negated in scene 1, is followed by two scenes of bliss. However, both are mediated, one by the cold surface of the game-machine in the arcade, the second by a porn magazine which triggers Djamel's orgasm. The possibility of identification for the audience is foreclosed in the clinical composition of the orgasmic shot, figuring it as an empty come-shot, where Djamel is alone in his cheap hotel room framed by a nondescript tapestry above his head, a cheap rug at his feet. As *jouissance* is here followed by a painfully rendered public rejection, it is neither the culmination of a fulfilling act between bodies nor a temporary moment of escape. The non-joyous rendering of this orgasm is immediately followed by a shot of Djamel walking

along the freezing pavement, suddenly stopping and bending over to vomit. One scene of ejaculation immediately follows another. We do not know the reasons for his vomiting, though one wonders retrospectively whether it is not triggered by nervousness. For Djamel is walking to the factory to confront Chamblasse with the aforementioned issue of paternity. Sperm and vomit are thus framed within two scenes of rejection – the sexual rejection of his desiring gaze in the restaurant, and the filial rejection of father for son. Both directions of desire are thwarted, with ejaculation providing a hinge. If ejaculation is framed within a normative discourse of heterosexual emotional intimacy, the series of ejaculations we witness are either cold and impersonal (the masturbation episode), or tense and anxiety-ridden (the vomit).

The status of these ejaculations, therefore, is not that of a celebratory figuration of the loss of self (*jouissance*) from bourgeois subjectivity. Djamel's possibility for movement in either direction is not so much blocked as mediated by alternate framings that circumscribe his body's potential for either finding a familial home or sexual fulfillment. Djamel's body is suspended between different possibilities and irreconcilable framings, where the laboring body's desire for mobility, familial belonging and sexual union is thwarted. What Djamel experiences is not an imprisoning enclosure where movement is impossible. Rather, if St. Denis and the collapse of his potential of finding a familial home has triggered a break-out to Grenoble, what he has left will haunt what he will encounter. His encounters and his desire for mobility are thus continually framed, and mediated, by a nexus of social, sexual, and racially coded discourses. In the mess-hall of his hotel, a fellow *beur* resident reminds him that whatever his claims to Frenchness, he will always *look* different – "Look at your hair?! Could you be from Normandy?" Remarkably, these continuing contradictions do not physically limit Djamel's mobility; indeed, these very contradictions spur a desire that sets his body in motion in different directions. Yet, the encounters he experiences will remind him (and us) that the only constant remains a suspension of his body within a racial, cultural, and familiar discourse of exclusion.

Penetrating the Home

It is in the closing section of the film that Djamel's desire for familial residence and rest in a broad, affective and physical sense will find an unexpected and suspended *dénouement*. The last family figure he pursues (the mother remains enclosed in the space of the familial home as prison throughout the film) is his half-brother, Laurent. During their meeting on one of the hills overlooking Grenoble, irreconcilable framings of the outsider to white fantasies of selfhood emerge once again. As the camera pans over the panoramic view of the glittering city in

the night-light, we hear Laurent comment outside the frame: "What is fascinating about blacks and the *beur* is that they are always strong. No matter how deep in shit, they stay firm." Djamel softly responds: "In my neighborhood, there are people who drink themselves to death...." To which Laurent concedes: "Ah yes... but they have beautiful bodies... I always wanted to be like them." This contradiction between the image-of-Other and the Other's self-image, of the virile, animal-like, sportive *beur* on the one hand and Djamel's description of his uncle (a pathetic figure who is addicted to drugs) is preceded by the emptiness of Djamel's solitary ejaculation in his tatty room. But, more explicitly than with the father, there is also a bond between the two, in that they both desire (to be) the racial other.

If racial alterity is here coded culturally and sexually, class difference is humorously and affectionately crossed from different directions. Earlier, Laurent had affectionately run his hand through Djamel's gel-covered hair joking: "Did you fall into gel?" To which Djamel enquires, "Why? Don't you like it?" "A bit bourgeois", mutters his middle-class half-brother. Class difference too switches racial positions where one's rejection of his class position (Laurent) is sartorially mirrored in the other's embrace of it (Djamel). Both positionings of disavowal nevertheless enable the surpassing of contradiction through desire – Laurent clearly desires Djamel's body, while Djamel must take the initiative by urgently whispering "I want to be in your ass," and a little later repeating, "I really need to be in you." His desire for home is here translated into the bodily space of the rectum. Later, as he penetrates his half-brother in Chamblasse's home, Djamel's face remains hidden from view, as we witness the grimacing pleasure of Laurent. His ignorance of Djamel's motivations cannot be lifted by the facial intimacy of the missionary position though we know by now that Djamel's sudden turn to his half-brother is not (necessarily) motivated by a desire for him, but by what Laurent physically and affectively represents. Djamel finally has the possibility of penetrating the home denied to him, by penetrating his brother.¹⁷

That a purely sexual desire for Laurent is not Djamel's main drive becomes evident the following morning when, contrary to his half-brother being concerned about being discovered by his homophobic father, Djamel takes a long shower and walks through the house, inspecting family photographs on the refrigerator and his sleeping father's face. Leaving a trail of wet footprints through the house he lies back in bed next to Laurent, waiting for Chamblasse. Following the wet footprints, Chamblasse knocks on his son's bedroom door, to be called in by his *other* son in bed. In a fit of rage, Chamblasse attacks *Laurent* rather than Djamel, whose desperate desire for movement throughout the film is frozen into utter

¹⁷ And perhaps, inversely, being penetrated for Laurent signifies precisely an escape from the family, a (secret) rebellion against the father.

passivity. He only breaks into motion in defense of his brother, attempting to shield him from Chamblasse's blows. And it is precisely at this point that the violent father's homophobia is circuited through the possibility of incest within the family home, that Djamel's journey for acceptance suddenly ends. His naked body crashes into a table and falls, motionless, onto the floor; close-up shots of his brother and father's faces register their shock. The narrative of Djamel's desire for family ends here – not in finality, but in suspension. For neither the looks on the two men's faces nor what follows for Djamel (is he dead? injured?) will be explained to us any further.

Suspending the Body

The current political climate in France is framed by a heated debate between secular French republicanism and a curious coding of *ancien régime* clericalism. Post-religious animosity in tri-colored France *now* reads the headscarf as the unacceptable visual signifier of a past that civilized France threw off under very different historical circumstances. This visibility is the domain where alterity in all its dimensions gets narrowly coded into subservience to Islamic clericalism. It is one example of how the body, visibility and immigrant family values get coded into cultural value. What is partly at issue here is a European fantasy of female subservience to religious patriarchy. Lifshitz will not allow this culturally coded national discourse of family value – because the Chamblasse family can hardly be considered the model of the perfect family as a metonym of “French culture”.

Hardt and Negri's claim that biopower is the unmediated potential of the brain and body to resist is refuted in my reading of the film. For in *LES TERRES FROIDES*, displacement and mobility and the value of Djamel's body are continually coded into different discourses of love, work, family and culture. His desire for movement, his body's capacity to establish connections, is continually mediated through discourses that highlight irresolvable contradictions. The sustained codings of the value of Djamel's body are calculated in contradiction to Djamel's own desire, thus suspending his possibility for movement and action. His desire for place of residence, or rather its denial to him, is dialectically contradicted by the possibilities of his body's ability to move. *LES TERRES FROIDES* interrupts any easy coding of family value into cultural value by figuring gendered, homophobic, and racial violence within and across the two “cultures” it sets into motion. This interruption in the easy transferability of value from family to culture is registered at one level, in the figure of Djamel, and his body. The power of Djamel's body to act, to work through his desire for belonging to his family, is met by a multiplicity of codings of the value of his body (by Isabelle and Laurent), his blood relations (by Chamblasse), his labor (by Bouvier and Isabelle). These codings do not enable a potential for smooth movement. Rather, they set up a series of contradictions,

whose irreconcilability results in the suspension of his body. Since labor-power can only be understood within the circuit of exchange-value and surplus-value accumulation, the question of mobility and the postcolonial body cannot be displaced into the arguments of Hardt and Negri's biopower. For contradiction in exchange, this differential in mobility, is erased away by Hardt and Negri into the celebration of unmediated possibilities of escaping the power of Empire.

The suspension of Djamel's possibility for movement into the family home is not unrelated to his status as a visible marker of alterity. And precisely for this reason, his relationship to the family cannot afford the luxury of rejection. His desire for family is lived through class and racial alterity. "Shooting the family" is not an option since he has been denied one in the first place. Hardt and Negri's own universalist diagnoses of mobility under Empire fail to recognize that the particularity of certain forms of subjectivity preclude the possibility of movement. Lifshitz in *LES TERRES FROIDES* places racial alterity at the center of his critique of the family, thus exposing its hypocrisies *without denying its necessity*. Like an indissoluble object in the compounded fluid of cultural and family values, Djamel remains suspended in that suspect solution, settling down to the bottom in the suspension of the film's narrative. If culture is indeed, in its biological meaning, the proliferation of life, then the petri dish of multiculturalism cannot dissolve that foreign body. It remains, as a physical and cultural rem(a)inder of the ideological short circuit by which family and cultural value is discursively fused.

No amount of ontologizing of the body's power-to-act (affect) can through sheer force of assertion and repetition escape the historical specificity of the present. Marx's reading of the form of appearance of value introduces contradiction as the very condition of possibility for exchange. Read in terms of the film, mobility in the sense of the possibility for Djamel to exchange one family in St. Denis for another in Grenoble is continually mediated by a set of social discourses that block the possibility of movement. The mediation of different *things* through unequal *social relations* is not only allegorized but made physically manifest through and in Djamel's body as an object and subject which circulates and gets suspended between familial and cultural relations. It is the inability to transcend the ambivalences triggered by contradiction that suspend Djamel between *banlieu* and bourgeois respectability.

My reading of the film emphasizes that difference and ambivalence must be thought in relation to contradiction. Not an ahistorical, ontological assertion of pure contradiction but a historically specific setting into relation of Self and Other. Lifshitz's credible highlighting of ambivalence in *all* of Djamel's relationships stages irreconcilable contradictions of Djamel's value through the coding of his body. Biopower as the infinite, unmediated power of the body to act must be rethought as the contradictory, historically specific potential of the laboring body.

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Filmography

- LES TERRES FROIDES (Agat Films & Cie, La Septe-Arte, France: 1998) directed by Sébastien Lifshitz.

Unfamiliar Film: Sisters Unsettling Family Habits

Wim Staat

This chapter will take its cue from the recent debate on the renewed attention being paid to political engagement in contemporary art. In a reaction to fragmentary, self-reflexive, self-involved art, *Documenta 11* (2002), the international contemporary art exhibition in Kassel,¹ has replaced “post-modern” art with political art from Latin America, Asia, and Africa. *Documenta 11* showed a special interest in the audiovisual arts, referring explicitly to Hamid Naficy’s work on “Accented Cinema”, i.e., exilic and diasporic filmmaking. However, according to the *Documenta 11* curators and to Hamid Naficy, contemporary political art has not put politics back into art by making global and/or local political issues an explicit theme for art. Political art is not necessarily about politics. In this chapter, Hamid Naficy’s work on Accented Cinema will be used to answer the question: How can this otherwise-than-through-politics type of art be considered political? How does the distinction between politics and the political relate to Naficy’s Accented Cinema? In this chapter, claiming political relevance for film, that is, not in terms of film as politics but rather in terms of film as political, implies a critical description of the political belonging to what will be called the home of familiar habits. Naficy has demonstrated how an inquiry into accented cinema entails an inquiry into the significance of diasporic family relationships; similarly, this chapter will explore the home life of the diasporic family. When this chapter describes how the family features in contemporary political film art, it understands the family as the

¹ Every five years, Kassel, Germany, hosts an international showcase of modern, contemporary art. Each *Documenta* has a new artistic director. *Documenta 11*, as led by Okwui Enwezor, consisted of five so-called Platforms for art and discussions about art, held in Vienna and Berlin (Platform 1: *Democracy Unrealized*), New Delhi (Platform 2: *Experiments with Truth*), St. Lucia (Platform 3: *Créolité and Creolization*), Lagos (Platform 4: *Under Siege: Four African Cities*), and finally in Kassel in 2002. Platform 5, the final exhibit in Kassel (June 8–September 15), was intended as the culmination of all the preparatory debate and works-in-progress. For information on *Documenta 11* (and *Documenta 12*, scheduled for 2007): <http://www.documenta12.de/data/english/index.html>, available October 21, 2004.

medium in and through which an accented cinema explores the relation between the public and the private.

Bringing together the contemporary political engagement of *Documenta 11* and Naficy's Accented Cinema, a close reading of particular scenes in the work of three diasporic filmmakers: Dominique Cabrera (France/Algeria), Clara Law (Hong Kong/Australia) and Atom Egoyan (Canada/Armenia) will provide the main thesis of this chapter. It acknowledges that there is a safeguarding tendency in the family, which protects its members from a dangerous outside world. Yet, within the family there is a specific role that mediates the outside world of public responsibilities for the private family, albeit a role different from the father as the head of the family household. In *L'AUTRE CÔTÉ DE LA MER* (Cabrera, 1997), *FLOATING LIFE* (Law, 1996) and *THE ADJUSTER* (EGOYAN, 1991), the possibly conflicting realms of the public and the private are negotiated by a specific family member: the older sister. This sisterly mediator between the public and private comes to the fore in films that function as political art (first section of this chapter), in films that describe the home not as a physical dwelling but in terms of inhabitable habits (second section: habitual home), and in films that even break down the walls of the house to create room for new habits (third section: the house that is not a home). Any understanding of the family in these films as coinciding exclusively with the realm of private life is proven a serious underestimation of precisely the mediating role of the older sister (concluding section: the adjusting sister). These films suggest that the habitual family, as intimated by the marital family tradition, will always work in obscure and un-acknowledged ways, unless the sister appears "to call the shots". In other words, what is concealed in the natural family can only become visible by the appearance of the sister, who proves the habitual workings of the nuclear family wrong.

Political Art

In *L'AUTRE CÔTÉ DE LA MER*, an older Frenchman, who has always lived in Algeria, meets friends and family who have been living in France since the Algerian war of independence. The older man has traveled from Oran, Algeria, to the other shore for what he considers a practical combination of a business transaction and an eye operation. Of course, he will get more than what he bargains for: new friendships, disappointments in old ones, and a confrontation with the political aspects of his past. Dominique Cabrera, a French filmmaker with Algerian roots, has carefully portrayed contemporary France's migrant Algerians. Cabrera calls attention to the Algerian war as the main reason for the diaspora of the older man's family in a remarkable way. Apparently, in the aftermath of the Algerian political upheaval of the 1960s, the protagonist decided to stay in Algeria, while his

sisters moved to France. In welcoming her brother, the younger sister makes no mention of the past and lets her affection overwhelm the protagonist. She would not dare remind him of their earlier painful separation. However, the older sister, in the *mise-en-scène* of an emotional family picnic, is able to combine her warm welcome with the question no one has thus far dared to ask: What role exactly did her brother play in the war? Cabrera neither opts for grainy newsreels, nor institutional settings in which politics could be made an explicit issue for her film; alternatively, she prefers to use the older sister to mediate between the private family and the political background of their family history. Remarkably, Cabrera's 1997 film is a fine example of what *Documenta 11*, five years later, would present as political art.

Platform 1 of *Documenta 11*, entitled *Democracy Unrealized*, was scheduled as a series of conferences and lectures in March/April 2001 in Vienna and in October 2001 in Berlin, remarkably circumscribing the eventful day of September 11 of that same year. Already politicized by its agenda, *Democracy Unrealized* became an even more urgent appeal to research the potential of art in times of political upheaval, in the sense that "unrealized" would not necessarily express a sense of defeat or lost hope, but at least also refer to an argument about art in a process of democratic becoming, never finalized and always underway.²

Meanwhile, Platform 5 included a film program that *Documenta 11*'s co-curator Mark Nash reprised in the Harvard Film Archive as "An Accented Cinema".³ Hamid Naficy's *An Accented Cinema* was used here to address the specific role of film in the process of "democracy unrealized". In Naficy's book, however, it is only in the final chapter that he claims a political relevance for accented cinema, when he explicitly describes the performed identity of exilic and diasporic filmmakers. Prior to that final chapter, politics was also an issue for Naficy, but only provisionally, and only in so far as exilic and diasporic filmmakers themselves explicitly addressed politics or subscribed to political expressions. For Naficy it is important that recognizing *accented cinema* is less a question of subject matter than of style; even *Third Cinema* filmmakers, defined by their explicit references to politics, are considered to be interesting by Naficy for their style because they prefigure the accented style of contemporary exilic and diasporic filmmakers.⁴

² In the Introduction to Platform 1, Okwui Enwezor and his team describe democracy as "a fundamentally unrealizable project – or, put another way, a work in progress" (*Democracy Unrealized: Documenta 11 Platform 1*, edited by Okwui Enwezor et al. Kassel: Hatje Cantz, 2002, p. 14).

³ <http://www.harvardfilmarchive.org/calendars/02novdec/documenta.htm>, available October 21, 2004.

⁴ Referring to *Third Cinema*'s paradigmatic *THE HOUR OF THE FURNACES* (1968), Naficy writes: "Like *The Hour of the Furnaces*, accented films are hybridized in their use of forms that cut across the national, typological, generic and stylistic boundaries. Similarly, many of them are driven by

To be sure, just because accented cinema does not have politics as its subject matter does not mean that accented cinema is not political; indeed, “no other cinema is so intimately political, even though it may not be about politics.”⁵ Apparently, Claude Lefort’s distinction between politics (*la politique*) and the political (*le politique*) is relevant for Naficy, even if the latter does not theorize it as such. Naficy does not come back to his remarks on Accented Cinema being political in contradistinction to the politics of Third Cinema. He does not explicitly think through how cinematic style can be – or in fact has already been – political, although possibly rewarding venues in this respect can be found at a metaphorical level, particularly when he writes about accented cinema’s focus on homeland and houses and its explorations in terms of border crossing as identity crossing. In political theory, Lefort has presented the distinction between the political and politics as follows:

The political is... revealed, not in what we call political activity, but in the double movement whereby the mode of institution of society appears and is obscured. It appears in the sense that the process whereby society is ordered and unified across its divisions becomes visible. It is obscured in the sense that the locus of politics (the locus in which parties compete and in which a general agency of power takes shape and is reproduced) becomes defined as particular, while the principle which generates the overall configuration is concealed.⁶

Lefort’s dialectical distinction calls attention to a paradoxical feature of contemporary, democratic politics. Political parties, campaigning, elections appear to be clear indications of democracy; yet, understanding these clear signs of politics as the essence of democracy runs the risk of obscuring the political culture that is a precondition of democracy. This is why commentators have warned that merely installing the politics of democracy in nation-states without a democratic, political tradition will almost always fail, the only exceptions being Germany and Japan after World War II.

For a film theorist like Naficy, acknowledging the difference between politics and the political entails a cinematic inquiry into the nature of political culture, suggesting at least that film, obviously, cannot install the politics of democracy,

the aesthetics of provisionality, experimentation, and imperfection – even amateurism – and they are made in the artisanal, low-cost mode of ‘cinema of hunger’” (*An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 31).

⁵ *An Accented Cinema*, p. 94.

⁶ Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, translated by David Macey (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), p.11.

but can be imperative for understanding the culture that allows it. Hence, even though Naficy provocatively refers to *auteur* theory by putting “the historicity of the author back into authorship”,⁷ he would not make the accented filmmaker an active agent of politics on the platform of party democracy. Alternatively, a political platform for accented filmmakers would be the one that would let them share the political in *Documenta 11*. On this stage we would find both Lefort’s apparition and obscuration, not of political power and inequality, respectively, but of realizing and un-realizing democracy as an ongoing process. To relate film to the political, therefore, should amount to other descriptions than the old and well-known relations between film and education, documentation, and propaganda. These expressions of film politics are less interesting, from a political perspective, than the medium’s implication in the *modus* of society, i.e., what Lefort calls “the mode of institution of society”.

In *L’AUTRE CÔTÉ DE LA MER*, what is the *modus* of society that both appears and is obscured when the older sister combines both her familial responsibilities of welcoming her brother back into the privacy of sibling relationships and her responsibilities for setting the record straight? The older sister, in *L’AUTRE CÔTÉ DE LA MER*, appears to embody the combination of both private and public responsibilities. This, then, implies the particularization of the general question of where and how the political becomes visible in accented cinema. We may now ask a question about the older sister in accented cinema: can we trace, through the sister’s ways, the hidden principle whereby, according to Lefort, society is ordered?

Habitual Home

Of all the contributors to *Democracy Unrealized*, Iain Chambers is the one who most explicitly investigates the relation between art and contemporary society. Chambers’s essay is about art in the age of what he calls “posthumanism”. Renaissance humanism, with its occidental, unique point of view – also the modern subject’s point of view – is challenged by subjects “besides and beyond... the patriarchal universalism that humanism once proposed”.⁸ In the terms of *Documenta 11*, globalization has brought the previously untouchable universalism of human rights into conflict with non-Western subjects, the latter claiming that universal humanism is almost always Western humanism. As a result, a democratic constituency and the evaluation of economic prospects and promises re-

⁷ Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, p. 34.

⁸ Iain Chambers, “Unrealized Democracy and a Posthumanist Art” (In *Democracy Unrealized*, pp. 169-176), p. 173.

quire a re-negotiation and historicization of what it means to be a world citizen.⁹

The citizen of a nation-state is the subject of a national narration. Chambers refers to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* to emphasize the constructedness of national identity. Thence the need for what Chambers calls "pedagogical languages of institutional identity, busily seeking to legitimate the narration of nation".¹⁰ These languages describe or, more accurately, prescribe the state of the nation. And it is in reference to this prescription that Chambers lauds the interruptive promise of art: "The art of the interruption, art as interruption, both brings to light our prescribed state... while also opening out on the possibility of revisiting... those languages elsewhere."¹¹ Hence, the nation is actively constructed in and through language, and it is this representational activity that constitutes the political organizational form that is the state, which then can be questioned by art anew. Thus, art can and will be used to both represent and question the nation-state.

Focusing on this power of questioning, Chambers describes the art of interruption as "the disturbance that uproots the *domus*",¹² the unsettling of that to which we belong – our home. In thirteen lines of text dealing with the terms "habitat", "inhabit" and "habit", Chambers revives the connection, found in German philosophy, between *Gewohnheit* and *Wohnung*,¹³ intimating that the intrusion of art into our homes will be experienced as an unsettling of the habits of our everyday lives.¹⁴ In other words, in our attempt to understand Unrealized Democracy in terms of the political, we have entered the living space closest to us. However, the political, in which we live, is not so much a physical dwelling as a range of habits. The habitual is the expression of familiarity.

Remarkably, this presentation of dwelling in and through the habits most familiar to us does not necessarily make the metaphor of the political habitat less relevant or any stranger. This would have perhaps been the case were *domus* to

⁹ Not surprisingly, the posthumanism that Chambers envisions is not so much anti-human, but paradoxically "*more human* in recognizing its own specific limits and location" (Ibid., p. 173). Chambers's book *Culture after Humanism* (London: Routledge, 2001) goes into more detail.

¹⁰ "Unrealized Democracy", p. 173.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 173-4.

¹² Ibid., p. 175.

¹³ Chambers, for example, writes: "'home' is rendered an altogether more open-ended and vulnerable habitat. The latter provides less comfort and consolation of an eventual homecoming and more the perpetual point of departure for a journey destined to render uninhabitable previous understandings" (Ibid., p. 175).

¹⁴ In his reading of certain sections in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, Rodolphe Gasché points out Hegel's indebtedness to an even older tradition: "Indeed, what may look like a mere play on words, Hegel's juxtaposition of *Gewohnheit* (habit) and *Wohnung* (habitation)... is based on the original meaning of the Greek notion of *ethos*" (*Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 174).

represent *politics* (and not the political). Instead, a familiar character enters the realm of the political, if we present it as the realm of habit: it is the Greek *ethos*, mostly translated as “custom” or “character”. Indeed, to inquire into the customs, i.e., the habits that comprise a person’s or group’s moral character, can be quite a familiar practice when analyzing the identity of individuals or cultures.

Clara Law’s film *FLOATING LIFE* appears to be making precisely this point. Her film about the Chinese diaspora is told from the perspective of a Hong Kong family emigrating to Australia and shows how the strange new surroundings of their Australian house away from home is domesticated by the customary, almost ceremonial tea drinking tradition. This tradition is at first marginalized in Australia, but is later re-installed as the means by which the Chinese can inhabit their new surroundings.

Characterizing the political by using the metaphor of dwelling, and interpreting this metaphor as actualizing not the physical building but rather the habits in which we live, implies an inquiry into *ethos*. Thus, art is political in its settling and unsettling of moral character, which we come to “know” through its habits. The knowledge art provides, therefore, will be an ethical insight into the everyday process of the political. Clara Law’s *mise-en-scène* in the opening scenes shows this brilliantly: the film opens within the confines of a Hong Kong restaurant in which the grandfather is revered for his knowledge and tasting skills. His expertise in tasting tea serves as the center of the scene, with bustling family members and Hong Kong street sounds surrounding the grandfather, which emphasizes even more that his tea tasting and the attention others pay to him as he offers his opinion characterize him as the *paterfamilias* amidst his family. In the next scene, aptly called “a house in Australia”, the grandfather and the grandmother are welcomed into the house of one of their daughters. In this scene, the grandfather is also shown drinking tea. However, the grandfather is not at home, and this is expressed by Law’s *mise-en-scène* that utilizes bright lights to contrast with the Hong Kong chiaroscuro, odd costuming, but most poignantly, it is expressed through a marginalizing of the grandfather’s activity of drinking tea – he uses Australian kitchen ware, letting the apparent success of the daughter’s complete integration take center stage. Complementing this *mise-en-scène* is Law’s use of the camera, which effectively frames the grandfather at the outer edge of the screen. It is only much later in the film that drinking tea lets the grandfather take center stage again. Not surprisingly, it is only then that the grandfather finally feels at home in his Australian house.

What Law makes clear here is that the character’s house must be inhabited by his customs before it can be his home. Yet, we must first see these customs fail in their matter-of-course-like way to understand that these customs are really the issue. The art of interruption, to use Chambers’s terms again, means understanding

that a habit has gone wrong. Art will show, through a peculiar form of hindsight based on unsettling the habitual, how habits determine our day-to-day lives. Differently put, we need art to understand our habits in retrospect. Art interrupts our habits, and that is why we notice them. Moreover, as we come to know our habits retrospectively, and as we understand that habits are necessary for our feeling at home, for “dwelling”, we may presume that new habits will take effect based on the factual interruption of former habits. The art of interruption can be understood as a reiterative process that simultaneously unsettles habits and produces new ones.

Returning to the double movement that Lefort identified as characteristic of the political, i.e., apparition and obsuration, we can now begin to understand what art lets us see. If Chambers is right about art unsettling habits, then what we will see is that the habitual effectively obscures its own workings; moreover, there is no way of knowing this, unless the habitual is interrupted to make its workings obvious. This is how the political – or democracy – works according to Lefort, and this is why art has political relevance. Democracy appears to work politically only if its habitual character is recognized; yet, the recognition of the habit can only occur after it has been interrupted and new habits have replaced the old.

The House That Is Not a Home

Hamid Naficy is less abstract than Chambers when it comes to evaluating the insights offered by art or accented cinema. In fact, Naficy’s book focuses on these insights: it contains 49 more or less lengthy, written closeups, which are case studies of specific accented filmmakers and their work. Naficy’s closeups of filmmakers are very generous towards Atom Egoyan, because he features in seven. But there are other reasons why Egoyan is a paradigmatic accented filmmaker. His work is important, not for its politics, but more precisely for its unsettling of Western customs. This is what makes Egoyan politically relevant. His work always explores the post-humanist landscape. It is thus not surprising to see Egoyan featured prominently in Naficy’s concluding paragraph: “The Ethics and Politics of Performed Identity”. Naficy seems to incorporate Chambers’s description of unsettling art in claiming a unique position for the exilic filmmaker:

Because in exile the familiar becomes unfamiliar and the natural denaturalized, one is forced to face, perhaps more than at any other time, the essential constructedness of one’s own structures of belonging. Distanced from familial and familiar structures, the exiles are in an enviable position of being able to remake themselves.¹⁵

¹⁵ Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, p. 269.

For Naficy, retrospective distance from familiar habits – a precondition for understanding them – is typical for exilic filmmakers. Note that Naficy’s title here contains the word “ethics”, which is obviously appropriate when discussing *ethos*. But this is not at all clear at the outset of discussions on the relation between ethics and politics. Naficy, in accordance with Chambers, appears to claim that we shouldn’t be discussing the kind of politics which in a certain understanding of ethics is a politics guided by a codex of norms; rather, we should become more interested in an ethics that concerns lived political practices of an everyday nature, taking shape as habits obscuring their own functions.¹⁶

After having established, via Lefort and Chambers, the political relevance of inquiring into the familiar with the specific purpose of unsettling it, we should respond to Naficy’s description of exilic film as making the *familiar* unfamiliar precisely through *familial* distance. We should focus on the exilic family in accented cinema. Another look at Clara Law’s *FLOATING LIFE* can make this more clear. As we have already noted via the custom of tea drinking in the Australian house, it is the familiarity of habits that inhabits a house to make it a home. Moreover, it is the failure of the habitual that first makes it possible to retrospectively acknowledge the importance of the particular habit. In the film, family traditions are finally restored, which effectively allows the Australian house to become a home; yet, the grandfather cannot take credit for this. Instead, a particular “house in Germany” that interrupts the difficulties inherent in migrating from Hong Kong to Australia, appears to be a necessary sidestep in the trajectory towards the eventual settlement of this Chinese family. It is from this house in Germany, where the oldest daughter lives but never feels at home, that the first attempts are made to mediate between family members, old traditions, new surroundings, and public demands. After the younger sister suffers a mental breakdown, because she was unable to cope with the demands of her completely integrated Australian life on the one hand, and her familial loyalties on the other, the oldest sister intervenes to make it possible to observe both social norms and familial responsibilities in the same house in Australia.

Our sense of belonging to the family’s familiarity pertains to the habitual. It obscures its own functions, even though it may be the principle preconditioning our sense of self-identity. The intervention by the older sister in *FLOATING LIFE* makes visible for us what the importance of family habits is for being at home in a house. According to Naficy, the revelation of how the family obscures its own functioning

¹⁶ The identity politics Naficy alludes to in his suggestion that exilic filmmakers are enviable because they can “remake themselves” appears to be a flirtation with *auteurism*. In this chapter, we are more interested in Naficy’s claims concerning our structures of belonging than in his analysis of Egoyan’s reinvented identity.

will eventually be performed most authoritatively by exilic filmmakers themselves. Unfortunately, Naficy is less attentive to the actual characters in exilic film, because perhaps he has all too quickly tried to establish the exilic filmmaker as a contemporary *auteur*. The politics of the exilic *auteur* do warrant Naficy's description of the exilic, diasporic filmmaker as being in an enviable position to remake himself. And indeed, there is something enviable about Atom Egoyan, as a successful, independent filmmaker who, even in his larger-budgeted films, finds ways not only to develop a recognizable, accented style, but also to reflect his "own increasing awareness of his tripartite identity as Egyptian, Canadian, and Armenian".¹⁷ But we do not necessarily have to follow Egoyan's autobiographical performance of his identity to understand the political relevance of the exilic family. Habitat and habit are unsettled in many of Egoyan's films, but perhaps most significantly in *THE ADJUSTER* (1991), which is less charged by Egoyan's Armenian ethnicity and still explicitly addresses both dwelling and family. The film unsettles the securities engendered by the private home and the nuclear family.¹⁸

The Adjusting Sister

The adjuster is an insurance company employee who compensates the damages suffered by families whose private homes have been destroyed by fire. Noah, the adjuster in this film, takes his job too seriously because he understands his responsibility for his victims to entail entering their private lives. At first, the victims are thankful for his concern and allow him to come unusually close to them. He helps provide for new, temporary dwellings (mostly motel rooms), which makes him seem almost like a family member; eventually, he shares their tables and their beds. Noah's wife Hera is also an adjuster, although she doesn't adjust damages, but censors pornographic films instead. Noah and Hera live in a comfortable house, with their son and Hera's sister, Seta.

Towards the end of the film, this comfortable home turns out to be just a tem-

¹⁷ Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, pp. 183-4. Naficy has elsewhere pointed out that this reflection is not just a mirroring, but an active construction of identity: "Egoyan became aware of the idea of national identity not as a fixed edifice but as a shifting, performing strategy" (p. 284). Egoyan's films stand as an example of Naficy's general statements concerning accented cinema. He expresses it in the title of his final closeup: "Atom Egoyan's Films as Performance of Identity" (pp. 283-287).

¹⁸ To wit, Naficy's closeup of *THE ADJUSTER* is not included in the ethics and politics section, because in that particular section Naficy considers Egoyan's reinvention of himself to be more important than what the characters do in Egoyan's films. Because *THE ADJUSTER* explicitly addresses the loss of homes, and thus "the dialectics of displacement and emplacement" (*An Accented Cinema*, p. 152), it rather features in a closeup (pp. 178-181) in Naficy's chapter on "Chronotopes of Imagined Homeland" (pp. 152-187).

porary dwelling, not unlike the motel rooms for the fire victims. The house is the model home in a luxury real-estate project, and therefore not the locus of family traditions. Egoyan, in this film, even sets the house ablaze, as if to emphasize that this house cannot be the home of this family. The family will have to move yet again. But it is not just the security of one's private house that is unsettled by this film. The final sequence is a montage of Noah standing in front of the burning model home and Noah's first encounter with Hera and Seta standing in front of what appears to be Hera and Seta's burning house. Noah's hand reaches out to Hera's shoulder. Final shot: back to Noah alone, holding up his hand against a background of flames. The sequence invokes a chronological ambiguity: perhaps this is not the end of the film, but rather the beginning of its story, presenting Noah's hand as the hand that secures the first agreement between the adjuster and the victim. The final sequence provides no closure, but rather unsettles our ideas of the nuclear family. We surmise that Noah is probably not the father of Hera's son, and Noah, Hera and their son are not a "natural" nuclear family. As Naficy notes: "(T)he family structure undergoes a transformation from being based on descent and blood to one that is almost entirely derived from consent and contract."¹⁹

Regarding the shift from habitat to habit, *THE ADJUSTER* confirms that the home does not need to be a house or physical dwelling. Put more provocatively, *THE ADJUSTER* states the home *cannot* be a house. All private houses burn down, with the only remaining dwellings being unfamiliar ones with no family tradition. Houses burn down; what remains is rubble. This kind of interruption of home security Chambers would interpret via the aesthetic of the fragment or bricolage. Chambers concludes his article by noting that post-humanist, interruptive art literally breaks down securities and creates new formations out of the fragments. However, this kind of aesthetic remains perhaps too close to the earlier meaning of habitat as the house of politics and does not accord well with the interpretation of habit as the home of the political. Is there an alternative kind of unsettling aesthetic to the fragmentary unsettling of familiarity, an alternative that explores the unsettling of politically relevant habits, which as Naficy suggests, concerns the habits of family?

For this alternative, we should observe that while the nuclear family is unsettled, there still remains the relationship between Hera and her sister. Here we have a different family relationship based on blood and descent. It is the stable, sibling relationship that we have seen earlier in *L'AUTRE CÔTÉ DE LA MER* and *FLOATING LIFE*.²⁰ The relationship between the siblings in *THE ADJUSTER* does

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 178.

²⁰ To be sure, the sisterhood explored here is not the sisterhood of feminist solidarity.

change, if only against the background of the disillusionment between the husband and the wife, but in effect, the sibling relationship of Hera and Seta is not unsettled. The film shapes the relationship between the sisters in an unfragmented, albeit, at first, mysterious way. Does the film here explore the habitual, or, more specifically, does it unsettle any political habits?

In the film, Hera is shown secretly videotaping the uncut versions of the pornographic films about to be censored by, among others, Hera herself. The audience would normally never know what has been censored and what has not. And so, even though Hera's decisions have public significance, they remain hidden from public view. Seta is an exception, however, because Hera shows her sister the uncut videos. Yet, Hera's colleagues fail to comprehend the intimacy of this relationship. Their misunderstanding is the subject of an unsettling scene, which features Hera, a young co-worker, and their manager. The *mise-en-scène* presents the two males face-to-face with Hera, who is sitting with her back to the work floor, where the work goes on, shown out of focus but well-lit. The scene is comprised of a series of closeups: one shows the younger co-worker and the older boss tightly framed. Hera also is shot in closeup, but to the extreme left of the frame, causing compositional asymmetry not only in comparison to the framing of the two men, but also within the closeup itself. It is an indication of imbalance. Moreover, even the compositionally well-balanced shot of the two men is tilted, because only the older man speaks.

Two misunderstandings occur in this scene. The first is immediately resolved by the fatherly manager, leaving little room for Hera to even question that there was a misunderstanding in the first place. He attempts to reassure Hera that it is not a problem that Hera was caught taping the uncensored films. He calls it Hera's misunderstanding to think that she is going to be chided. In fact, he goes so far as to confess that he himself has been tempted by the material, thus equating Hera's taping activities with his own "sinful but normal" inclinations. This generous invitation to a conspiracy of pleasure, however, appears to be based on another, more important misunderstanding, which involves the relationship of the two siblings. Hera points out that she does not make the tapes to satisfy her own lusts; no, she tapes the films to provide information for her sister.

For Hera and Seta, family tradition dictates that the elder sister stays home, while the younger sister informs her about the world outside. Seta is confined to the family home, not by any physical constraints, but by the family's traditional habits. This tradition allows the younger sisters to have mobility outside the home, but conceptually, it implies a negation of the private family. The younger sister, however, does acknowledge the curiosities of the older sister to know more about life outside the home. In the diegetic present of the film, Hera feels obliged to show Seta the kinds of decisions she is asked to make in the outside world.

Thus, what Seta witnesses has no private sexual relevance; for Seta, Hera's tapes are more relevant as a way of mediating public life with her own private life. Hera's tapes are certainly intended for private purposes, but the tapes are brought into the private sphere of the family, which is not so much the privacy of the sisters' house, but the privacy of the sibling relationship determined by familial habits. In this relationship, Seta learns more about Hera's public decisions. Pornography is thus used ambiguously, as it is in other Egoyan films. There is a reference to the privacy of the family; yet, in a peculiar sense, pornography has a more public significance. Seta ends up embodying both the public and the private, with pornography as the medium. But Seta herself can also be seen as the medium. In fact, in *THE ADJUSTER* she decides what the viewer can see of the extended family – shown in photographs of the family back in the homeland. Seta is depicted with matches, an ashtray and a pile of family snapshots, deciding which family pictures to burn or save. The trope of fire consuming the *habitus* becomes literal: not only what is familiar goes up in smoke, but even the familial does not escape the final, adjusting settlement. It is through the character of Seta, then, that we, the viewers, learn about both the public significance of the younger sister's work and the private sphere of the family at home, which obviously is not the adjuster's house.

The men in *THE ADJUSTER* – the co-worker, the manager, but also the husband – never come to understand Hera and Seta's family traditions. Although the aforementioned scene with the co-worker and the manager does reveal their awareness of the situation's awkwardness, Hera's references to her family traditions interrupt and upset their assumptions. In this moment of awkwardness, we come to see not the firm control that a censorship institution might have over society, but a more subtle, often ignored, ordering of every day life. The siblings' family traditions continue as the older sister mediates between the familiar and the unfamiliar, revealing the obscuration of the seclusion within the family's confines. The diasporic family, which is an enviable position in Naficy's terms, here unsettles Western habits. However, this insight into the habitual does not come without its costs, because the familial is unsettled as well. We can assume the emergence of new habits, although the insight into these habits will have to be unsettling again.

The second part of Lefort's description of the political as a double movement of revelation and obscuration still requires a response to the question of whether there is a general principle concealed in all this. Would the general principle be that of the demarcation of the home as habit? Or should we note that habit *change* is the very principle that reveals old habits yet (re)establishes others. For now, we can conclude that there is a specific, familial principle that generates the configuration of the political. Celebrated performances of identity by authorial selves (ac-

cented filmmakers) may paradigmatically and enviably break out of the strict anonymity of the habitual. Within film, however, this break out of the habitual is performed when the family appears in the shape of the sister. As the unsettling of the nuclear family takes effect, sisterhood comes to the fore.²¹

²¹ Of course, Egoyan's Seta resembles Hegel's favorite sister, Antigone. In *Glas*, Derrida commented on Hegel's preferences: "Sister, she holds herself suspended between a desire she does not experience... and a universal law (nonfamilial: human, political, etc.) that stays foreign to her" (*Glas*, translated by John Leavey and Richard Rand. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986, p. 149). This suspension can be interpreted as a mediation, in this case, between the natural laws of the family and of politics, which determines the modern state. For Hegel, the sister is crucial because she offers her ethical guidance in civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*).

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Micropolitics of the Migrant Family in Accented Cinema: Love and Creativity in Empire

Patricia Pisters

In their seminal work about contemporary transnational society, *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri give a special place to the body of the migrant.¹ Because the migrant refuses the local constraints of his human condition and searches for a new life and a new identity, he is positively labeled a “new barbarian” who opposes any form of normalization, one of which is the family. While Hardt and Negri are optimistic about the dissolution of the family through migration, Hamid Naficy seems more cautious in this respect. In his book on transnational migratory, exilic and diasporic cinema, *An Accented Cinema*, Naficy argues that many films that deal with migration demonstrate how difficult and even impossible it is to really leave everything behind.² The role of the camera is in this respect very significant. Through the camera, Naficy argues, the filmmaker can create a new identity indeed. He calls this a performative or discursive identity that is established by the use of the camera. However, to what extent these new identities are free from (family) constraints is more ambiguous.

In this chapter, I want to read some of the general and abstract ideas about the migrant body that have been developed by Hardt and Negri in dialogue with the more concrete images of “accented” migratory films as developed by Naficy. I will look at three films considered to be accented films, in that they deal with issues of migration: *BOUJAD, A NEST IN THE HEAT* (Bellabes, Morocco/Canada, 1992-1995), *DES VACANCES MALGRÉ TOUT* (Malek Bensmail, Algeria/France, 2000), and *MILLE ET UN JOURS* (Mieke Bal et al., Netherlands/France/Tunisia, 2003).³ By analyzing these films and the way in which they relate to contemporary society, and by going back to some of the Deleuzian and Spinozist inspirations of Hardt

¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

² Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

³ I would like to thank the directors and distributors of these three films for sending me viewing cassettes.

and Negri's thoughts on Empire, I will argue that the family is not as easily, happily, or necessarily "shot" as Hardt and Negri seem to suggest. Or perhaps that, contrary to Hardt and Negri, one of the ways of resisting in Empire is precisely by shooting the family – with a camera.

Empire: Society of Control and Biopower

Hardt and Negri propose a total theory of the twenty-first century which they call Empire. Empire is governed by a series of national and transnational "organisms" united under the single "logic of rule" of the global market, global circuits of production, and cultural exchange. They carefully distinguish Empire from imperialism, in that the power of Empire is not centralized and does not rely on territorial boundaries. Empire is a "decentered and deterritorializing apparatus that manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies and plural exchanges through modulating networks".⁴ Proposing Empire as the framework in which new subjects have to be understood, the ambitions of Hardt and Negri are high. Within the powers of Empire, which is a system without any outside (like the global market that constantly refers to itself), Hardt and Negri want to reorganize and redirect the forces that are present in the system in such a way that an alternative political model of global flows and exchanges comes into being, which they call counter-Empire.

Two aspects of Empire are important to understand the way in which this global system functions: the society of control and biopower. The society of control is a concept that has been developed by Gilles Deleuze. Starting from Foucault's idea of the society of discipline that exercises power by disciplining bodies in institutional practices and discourses (the family, school, factory, and prison), Deleuze argued that at the end of the second millennium we have entered a society of control.⁵ In a society of control, the power of the institutions has weakened because its boundaries have become less stable: electronic house arrest "opens" the prison, the factory is stretching out into the home via home-work, the school is losing its authority in favor of interactive self-learning, and the family seems to be undermined either by the internal collapse of the Western bourgeois family, combined with a boundary crossing between public and private via the media, or by the dissolution of the non-Western family by external forces like (forced) migrations. On the other hand, the power of all these institutions is even stronger, precisely because they are less tangible. Control is everywhere, although we are

⁴ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. xii.

⁵ Gilles Deleuze, "Post-script on Control Societies" (In *Negotiations*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, pp. 177-182).

no longer just controlled by a gaze but by codes that contain all kinds of information about us. The moles' tunnels of the society of discipline (recognizable institutions and discourses of power), says Deleuze, have been replaced by the undulations of the snake (less recognizable forms of control that "crawl" everywhere). Perhaps the family, as a modulating, moving concept, might still be very powerful as well, but I will return to this point at the end of this chapter.

Biopower in *Empire* is related to the society of control in the sense that "only the society of control is able to adopt the biopolitical context as its *exclusive* frame of reference."⁶ According to Hardt and Negri, biopower refers to a situation in which what is directly at stake in power is the production and reproduction of life itself. One might think of the medical discourse, birth control, in-vitro fertilization, and even cloning. We can watch films like *GATTACA* and television programs like *EXTREME MAKE-OVER* to see what they mean by that.⁷ Hardt and Negri give the (still rather general) example of corporate business, which symbolically and literally incorporates biopolitical forces into its functioning by seducing us into consumption. This goes for all bodies, "majoritarian" and "minoritarian", because global capitalism is constantly seeking new bodies to absorb, and marketing is an inclusive and expanding strategy. Another aspect related to the biopolitical that Hardt and Negri emphasize as important is specifically related to minoritarian bodies, namely the mobility of "living labor" of the migrant and migratory movements that are extraordinarily diffuse and difficult to grasp. "A specter haunts the world and it is the specter of migration," they argue.⁸ According to Hardt and Negri, the migrants of the world are the "new barbarians": migrants who have to begin anew, construct a new body, create a new life, which also implies the destruction of older ways of life. The new barbarians see nothing permanent, "[they] destroy with an affirmative violence and trace new paths of life through their own material existence".⁹ The new barbarians seem to be in a privileged position to create a new form of life. And all they need to do is just to be completely against the "normal" modes of life. As Hardt and Negri argue:

⁶ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 24.

⁷ *GATTACA* (Directed by Andrew Niccol, USA:1997) presents a world in which genetic manipulation has become the norm and children who are born without all the perfect matches are deviant and marginalized. In *EXTREME MAKE-OVER* people who are unhappy with their looks are given plastic surgery, teeth, and eye operations and new clothes, to present themselves after six or eight weeks as completely new people.

⁸ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 213. In his chapter in this volume, Sudeep Dasgupta also discusses Hardt and Negri's biopower. While he focuses specifically on the body of the migrant, I will refer to the migrant as "multitude" and to the role of the family in migration and the political concept of love.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 215, 216.

The will to be against really needs a body that is completely incapable of adapting to family life, to factory discipline, to the regulations of a traditional sex life and so forth. (If you find your body refusing these ‘normal’ modes of life, don’t despair – realize your gift!)¹⁰

Paradoxically however, in spite of this negative attitude, the body of the “new barbarian” is a “powerful body produced by the highest consciousness that is infused with love”.¹¹ Here Hardt and Negri are inspired by Spinoza, and this concept of love seems to be very important for the positive creation of a “counter-Empire”. But one wonders how exactly this love can manifest itself. Hardt and Negri speak of the “creative forces of the multitude”, but they remain rather abstract in explaining this creative force of love; or they become very programmatic by the end of their book, which does not seem very creative.¹² Therefore, I would like to look at some concrete “new barbarians” as presented in films that explicitly deal with migration in what Naficy calls “accented cinema”, and ask in what ways these bodies are (in)capable of committing to family life and other traditional structures of discipline and in what ways they deal with “love”. The choice for these examples of accented cinema, as an exilic filmmaking practice and a creative act, in itself is not a coincidence since it may very well belong to the possible counter-strategies within Empire.

Accented Cinema in the Society of Control

The society of control, Hardt and Negri state, is glued together by what Guy Debord called the society of spectacle in which the media seem to control and manipulate public opinion and political action. And although there is no single locus of control that dictates the spectacle, it generally functions as if there were such a point of central control that especially regulates our fears.¹³ One need only think of the polarized uses of media in the Western and Arab world after 9/11 to see the truth of these observations. But resistance within this society of spectacle is also possible.

In *An Accented Cinema*, Hamid Naficy describes a growing number of transnational films that are made by migrants about diasporic and exilic subjects. Although the variations in accented cinemas are enormous, Naficy argues that a growing number of films have an “accent” compared to the dominant main-

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 216.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 216.

¹² See, e.g., Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, pp. vx, 66, and pp. 393-413.

¹³ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, pp. 321-323.

stream cinema. This accent can be understood as a transnational film movement which is “simultaneously global and local, and it exists in chaotic semiautonomous pockets in symbiosis with the dominant and other alternative cinemas”.¹⁴ The accents emanate not so much from the accented speech (which in itself is already an indication of movement) of the films’ characters, as from the displacement of the filmmakers themselves. Naficy emphasizes the notion that the filmmaker is not only an author, but also an empirical subject, who with his films performs certain aspects of his individual and collective identity (I will return to this point at the end of this chapter). Accented filmmakers usually work with small budgets, in artisanal and often collective production modes. Aesthetically, certain features recur in accented films such as the epistolary narrative, in which exilic subjects seek contact with their loved ones via letter, telephone, or other technological means. Furthermore, Naficy distinguishes certain Bakhtinian chronotopes (time-space configurations) that are striking: chronotopes of the (imagined) homeland, chronotopes of a life in exile, and chronotopes of transitional zones and border crossing, such as airports, tunnels, seaports, hotels – but also in the means and symbols of transport themselves such as trains, buses, and suitcases.

The three films I discuss here can be considered accented films. *BOUJAD, DES VACANCES* and *MILLE ET UN JOURS* are all made in an artisanal mode with small budgets, and many tasks, ranging from direction and production to, in some cases, “acting” and editing, are performed by the mostly exilic filmmakers themselves. Furthermore, they are all films that feature some of the chronotopes of accented filmmaking, and they all explicitly deal with migration. *BOUJAD, A NEST IN THE HEAT* is about a young Moroccan man who returns home. The film starts with images of a train that leads to an airport in Canada, and ends with his arrival in Casablanca. Then alternately we see the filmmaker with his family and images of his Moroccan hometown Boujad. While the town is getting ready for the annual harvest celebrations, it seems to welcome the filmmaker and wants him to stay as does his family. But his voice-over immediately infuses the images with regret and a kind of guilty “future directed” nostalgia, because he does not really want to return home. During the film he struggles with the idea of telling his family about his choice.

In *DES VACANCES MALGRÉ TOUT*, the filmmaker, often referred to in the film as Malek, and who is apparently a friend of the people he films, follows the Kabouche family to Algeria, where they are visiting their extended family for the first time in fifteen years. The film starts with archival material about the arrival of immigrant workers in France. Father Kabouche arrived in 1964, and his five children were all

¹⁴ Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, p. 19.

born in France, have French nationality, and do not (or hardly) speak Arabic. We see the preparations for the trip, the traveling itself, and the events that occur in Ain Benen, a small village near Algiers, where the father has been building a house together with his brother since 1980. Here too, the chronotopes of transition are frequent. We follow part of the family traveling by car to the south, and the film ends up at the airport just when the children have returned to France earlier than planned. The images of the father's hometown are, as in *BOUJAD*, full of regret. This time not because the father does not want to return home, but because he would desperately like to return if everything hadn't so terribly deteriorated in the time since he left. The beach he remembers from his youth has turned into a dump, his house was never completed, and a general lack of infrastructure, basic supplies, even water, can be sensed everywhere.

Unlike the other two films, *MILLE ET UN JOURS* is not made by a migrant filmmaker, and as such, it does not officially classify as an accented film. In other respects, however, it can clearly be considered an accented film. Or, it is an accented film that seeks a dialogue between the settled subject (the filmmakers) and the exilic subject. It is made by a collective of filmmakers who film Tarek Mehdi, a young Tunisian man, whose father has worked most of his life in France and who was raised by his mother in a small Tunisian village. In 1998 he came to Paris to study and find work. In 2001 his uncle found him a bride. Ilhem Ben Ali is a French girl from Tunisian descent. But before they get married, the French authorities arrest him on suspicion of a marriage of convenience. In the film we see Tarek, Ilhem and her family discussing the marriage which had already been postponed once, almost cancelled a second time (the civil marriage), and finally took place in June 2003. The film is told in a fragmentary way, sometimes using archival material and home movies, and is structured around the marriages and the preparations. The images of the homeland are far less nostalgic or filled with regret, presumably because the filmmakers of this film are not migrants themselves. The homeland as presented by the archival material serves as a historical backdrop of the family histories. But this film does not deal with the literal return home, instead with a "returning" of certain traditions, here exemplified by those surrounding the marriage. During the film's end credits, we see a fourth wedding ceremony taking place in Tunisia for the people there, like Tarek's mother, who couldn't get a visa to come to France for her son's marriage. Here we have the traditional marriage which all along has served as an important reference, and which could perhaps be called a chronotope of tradition.

So, in spite of their difference, these films all speak about migration, have an "accent" and are not part of the dominant society of the spectacle. As such they can be considered counter-images of Hardt and Negri's Empire. In all of these films, the family is clearly an issue, but not as something to (possibly) escape

from. In order to understand this more profoundly, I find it useful to look at Deleuze's concept of micropolitics.

Micropolitics and Family Matters in Accented Films

When Hardt and Negri talk about the family, they discuss it in a negative way. The traditional nuclear family, for instance, is discussed in the context of fundamentalism. Every fundamentalism, Hardt and Negri argue, proposes a "return to tradition" which really is a new invention that serves as a political project against contemporary social order.¹⁵ The image of the "traditional family" that is important for Christian fundamentalists has actually never existed but is derived "more from television programs than from any historical experiences within the institution of the family".¹⁶ Transnational media technologies help to reconstruct such apparently fixed constructions like the traditional nuclear family. This media family is produced within Empire but as a reaction against its floating and global powers: the fundamentalists' traditional (family) values are considered to be "safe havens" with fixed patterns and the conservative roles of its members. Hardt and Negri consider this reinforcement of family values (as one possible reaction against the globalizing powers of Empire) to be imprisoning.

However, is the family always merely a negative and imprisoning institution? How do we situate the family in contemporary global society? Deleuze's concept of politics might provide some answers. Deleuze distinguishes three "political lines" that are always entangled in what at first seems a set of metaphors: the molar line, the molecular line, and the line of flight.¹⁷ The entanglement of these lines constitutes a real "micropolitics". On the one hand, Hardt and Negri are right to assume that the family is part of the "molar" or "segmental political line" that segments every individual and group "molecules" into molar aggregates. These

¹⁵ See Laura Copier's chapter in this volume for a discussion of fundamentalism in the family home as seen in *MY SON THE FANATIC*.

¹⁶ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 148.

¹⁷ I am referring here to how Deleuze explains politics (Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, "Politics". In *On the Line*. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983, pp. 69-114). When Deleuze talks about the different "political lines", he does not use the word "line" metaphorically. Instead, it should be read more like a vector, a dynamic line on a map that indicates certain force fields (they are always multiple) and which can be distinguished on three "planes": the molar line is the plane of organization; the molecular line is the plane of immanence ("From forms it tears away particles, among which there are now only relationships of speed or slowness, and from subjects it tears away affects", p. 81); the line of flight ruptures more radically what is happening on the plane of immanence and the plane of organization. If there are connections to physics and biology in the choice of these terms, they are real connections: molar blocks, molecular movements that are almost imperceptible and "lines of flight". Mapping these different forces is what Deleuze and Guattari call "rhizomatics" in their *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: The Athlone Press, 1987).

clear-cut segments function in binary oppositions: family-profession; holidays-work; man-woman, etc. Everybody is part of many of these molar aggregates, and they can indeed be imprisoning. The flight from the family, which could be described as a “line of flight” in Deleuzian political terms, is then considered to be the positive political option. Hardt and Negri attribute this line of flight to the migrant who is able to resist the powers of Empire in a different way than the fundamentalists: not by reinforcing the segmental, conservative institutions but by escaping from them.

According to this logic, one might expect that accented films present such lines of flight as well. However, this does not appear to be entirely true. Looking at accented films – the three films I discuss here are examples of a much wider range – it is striking to see how important the family seems to remain precisely after one migrates. As Naficy argues:

Discursive identities create sedimentations at individual, group or national levels that cannot with impunity be erased, ignored, discarded, or replaced with new improved ones.... Even in the most radical of exilically accented films, there are always moments of sedimentation...¹⁸

Naficy clearly acknowledges that it is practically impossible to actually or completely escape without keeping some sediment that could be considered as segmental. Returning to Deleuze’s conception of politics, Hardt and Negri seem to miss two important points, particularly in relation to the family but perhaps also in their greater view. First of all, they have missed the political line that Deleuze situates in between the molar line and the line of flight, which is the “molecular line” in which both individuals and groups are loosened up very slightly, mostly imperceptibly, without breaking out of the system, but where the rules are very slightly changed, mainly through affects. A profession or a family is a hard line, but what happens underneath, what affects, attractions, repulsions, and craziness pass through the segment, Deleuze asks. At some points he even begins to call this line the “migrant line”; although he does not explain this shift, and migration, molecular movements, and affects all appear to be connected.¹⁹ Furthermore, Hardt and Negri seem to create a segmental binary opposition themselves: between Empire (imprisoning) and counter-Empire (liberating; as long as it is not fundamentalist). Deleuze’s analysis of the three political lines (micropolitics) which are always in a state of interplay, however, is much more complex and

¹⁸ Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, p. 286.

¹⁹ Deleuze, *On the Line*, p. 93.

much more a process of silent “negotiation”, best exemplified by the molecular line that Hardt and Negri do not take into consideration.²⁰

This micropolitics, and especially the politics of the molecular line, seems to be very important in the accented films that I discuss. The issue in these films is: how to relate to the family? Should we track the migrant’s flight away from family (Hardt and Negri’s option), or should we trace the migrant at least along molecular lines as well, where sedimentations of family can still be felt (Naficy’s option)? And what indeed are the consequences of accepting the latter option for Hardt and Negri’s more general analysis of Empire?

Hakim in *BOUJAD, A NEST IN THE HEAT* clearly suffers from his relationships with his family, and his decision to migrate to Canada could be seen as a way of escaping these traditional structures. However, what the film presents is his struggle with the hybrid conditions of contemporary life: how to deal with this opportunity of freedom and “new communities” that migration offers, with the longing for love and blessing from the “old community”? At the end of his film, after having gone through many emotional scenes with his family, Hakim explains why he keeps coming back to Boujad: he somehow needs his family’s consent, especially that of his father, to feel accepted as an adult man, to be able to move on. The last scene expresses this beautifully. We see Hakim with his father walking in the medina, while in voice-over we hear his thoughts about how he still needs his family. Then Hakim turns around and moves to the foreground, while his father continues to walk away from the camera. When Hakim has walked out of the frame – and has thus left the scene of his home(town) – his father turns around and looks toward his son/the camera. The son is still there. During the film, we never see Hakim actually break with his family. The only way he can express his “molecular feelings” is by actually making this film, which allows him to express his attachment to his family while very subtly presenting his more negative feelings of suffocation at the same time. It is this struggle between loyalty and responsibility at home and new opportunities that make *BOUJAD* a painful account of how family still matters in the life of the migrant. This is what Hardt and Negri describe optimistically as circulating freely and breaking away happily. Very often, blocks of “sedimentation”, mostly situated within family relations, cannot be ignored on the road to new beginnings.

The family plays a different role in *DES VACANCES MALGRÉ TOUT*. The entire Kabouche family lives in France, and they return to their “home” country for a holiday. *DES VACANCES* is a story of different generations of migrants and their feel-

²⁰ Each of these lines also realizes its specific dangers: over-codification (or imprisonment) of the segmental line, micro-fascism or micro-codification on the molecular line, and (self)destruction on the line of flight.

ings about their various attachments. Instead of the tears and sadness in *BOUJAD*, the general tone of *DES VACANCES* is one of disarming passionate concern and excitement. Here the mother is more dominant. She expresses herself with a loud voice and wide flailing arm movements, and most of the children seem to have inherited this expressive trait from her. Only the father and one of the sons, Amar, are quieter. Because of the outspoken expressiveness of the family and their sharp and honest observations, the way in which they deal with the absurd situations they are confronted with is often witty. Only the father, as I already mentioned, is nostalgic and longs for his home country which no longer exists as they appear in his memories.

The filmmaker shifts between the perspectives of all of the family members and demonstrates how they deal with micropolitical movements as individuals and as a family. The oldest brother, Yousef, is frustrated by the bureaucracy involved in trying to get visas. These are problems of the segmental line that are generally huge obstacles in the ability to move around freely. In the end, he decides not to leave, and he ends up remaining in France. On a terrace in Ain Benen, Amar discusses the impossible situation in Algeria and the need for migration with some other young Algerian men. What is striking about this discussion is the fact that the Algerians emphasize the need for migrants to return home *as migrants* with new experiences that can help improve the home situation. This is a discussion about lines of flight and their effects back home (to which I will return in the last section). The main focus of the film, however, is the women. The mother wonders why the people do not protest against the fact that they often do not have clean water during the summer, and she expresses her dismay directly to Malek off-camera. The two sisters, Myriam and Soraya, are particularly furious because they are not allowed to go out. As they confront their uncle with the imprisonment of their cousins, they are horrified when they hear the imam declaring through the mosque's speakers that women must stay inside. Myriam and Soraya express their feelings of suffocation directly to the camera. All this can be seen as the molecular movements of protest, albeit expressed in a very straightforward and combative Algerian fashion. In the end, the children decide to return to France on an earlier plane – a very direct line of flight indeed. The parents stay behind in their unfinished house, regretting the fact that they have never been able to travel to Algeria before and offer their children some affinity with their home country. But they will no doubt follow their children back to France. The film ends with the very “accented” images of a suitcase on a conveyer belt, and the family's passports, which show that the nationalities of the children are different from those of their parents. They are truly a family of mixed origins and mixed feelings. Despite all of their furious arguments, or perhaps even because of them, the family remains central but is permeated by all kinds of micropolitical feelings that

are caused by transnational movements and intercultural encounters.

The last film I would like to discuss presents the concrete hybrid situation of migrant families living in France. Although the film as described is centered around Tarek and the wedding(s) of Tarek and Ilhem, many other characters are presented to give an impression of the role of the family in the movements of Empire. As with the Kabouche family, the children of the Ben Ali family were born in France. Ilhem is the oldest daughter, and this is emphasized several times. Her father talks about how difficult it is for him to “lose” his daughter the moment she has walked away with her husband; she is a symbol of passing time, generations that move on. Her brother declares that his father will surely cry at the wedding, and he just might. Her mother tells the filmmakers that they are going to have a traditional wedding because Ilhem had requested it. Although the parents have never emphasized any tradition and have taken their kids to Tunisia purely on vacation, Ilhem was curious to find out more about her parents’ homeland.

Ilhem expresses a double sense of belonging.²¹ On the one hand, she clearly refuses traditional roles (“I will certainly not stay home after my marriage,” she declares while driving her car). But on the other hand, she emphasizes the importance of certain traditions. Tarek is proposed as a possible husband by her parents. She eventually concurs because she finds him physically attractive *and* reliable because her parents obviously agree with this choice. Ilhem seems to embody a very conscious choice of intercultural values of second-generation girls who seem to easily master the molecular line of sometimes contradictory feelings. The wedding ceremony illustrates her negotiation between cultures in several ways. Ilhem’s girlfriends and cousins are all dressed in a very French manner; yet, they sing traditional wedding songs and perform all the traditional rituals involved. Several touching moments make it clear that Ilhem does not exactly know what to do when it comes to the traditions, such as sharing a glass of milk with her husband-to-be. In a white dress, the bride throws away her wedding bouquet for the next bride as is done in the West, but she also wears a traditional outfit from Tarek’s village. Men and women each occupy one side of the party room, but in the middle they also dance together. *MILLE ET UN JOURS* addresses many levels of migration, but one of its most striking aspects is this way of dealing with cultural hybridity in which the family, again, remains a very central institution, as something necessary in dealing with all this cultural hybridity, which is again a form of molecular movement and affect between cultures.

These three films present ways in which the family still matters in a micropolitical analysis that is more complex than the simple power of migrants to say “no”.

²¹ See Wim Staat’s chapter in this volume for a discussion of the special role of the oldest sister in dealing with intercultural values.

Although lines of flight are often desirable, these films also recognize the attachments to family relations that have become more important than the homeland's chronotope. In migration, the family often appears to become a site for molecular negotiations between cultural values with the camera as witness.

Love and Creativity in Empire: From Manifesto to Fabulation

Besides the power to say "no", the power of love is the other resisting force that Hardt and Negri emphasize in *Empire*. They argue that "love" should be the guiding principle for a counter-Empire. They interpret love in a Spinozist way. Love, according to Spinoza, has nothing to do with a desire based on a feeling of wanting something we lack, but is related to a striving to survive and create the likelihood of joyous encounters that make it possible to act and grow. In *The Ethics*, Spinoza analyzes a whole range of emotions which are all related to either sad and passive affects or joyous and active affects.²² Hardt and Negri refer to Spinoza in *Empire* as follows:

The desire (cupiditas) that rules the course of the existence and action of nature and humans is made love (amor) – which invests at once both the natural and the divine. And yet, in this final part of *The Ethics* [Spinoza], this utopia has only an abstract and indefinite relation to reality.²³

While Hardt and Negri argue that Spinoza's ethical and political models are only abstractly related to reality, they hint at the turning of the utopia of the Empire of love into a more concrete political model. And so, they turn Spinoza's ideas into a political manifesto: "Today a manifesto, a political discourse, should aspire to fulfill a Spinozist prophetic function, the function of an immanent desire [i.e., "love," P.P.] that organizes the multitude."²⁴ And although they state that this is not a utopian project, nevertheless they end up calling it a materialist teleology. Hardt and Negri try to be less abstract than Spinoza by relating their ideas to contemporary global society. In the end, however, their discussions and conceptions always remain very general, so that it is hard to imagine what exactly they mean by "the activity of the multitude, its creation, production, and power."²⁵ They even present a sort of "political party program" at the end of *Empire*, which consists of three undeniably wonderful points: the demand for global citizenship, a social wage, and a guaranteed income for all, and the right to reappropriate the means

²² Benedict de Spinoza, *The Ethics* (Toronto: Dover Publications, 1955).

²³ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 186.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

of production. To me, this sounds even more utopian than Spinoza's ethical-philosophical concepts, with all of their possible dystopian side effects involving totalitarian systems. Because, if we ask how this program of the creative multitude is to function, and Negri in a television interview²⁶ responds that we need a Machiavellian Prince in order to realize this dream, these dangers become very clear indeed. In this respect, I fully agree with Slavoj Žižek's criticism of *Empire* that the danger of the "multitude in power necessarily actualizes itself in the guise of an authoritarian leader".²⁷

Fully recognizing the Spinozist "striving to persist" which is indeed the main drive for migration, I would like to argue that in order to make this Spinozist concept more concrete, it might be more useful to look for creativity and love at the micropolitical level as it is expressed in accented films. In an interview in 1990, in Deleuze's response to Negri's question of how minorities can become empowered, he referred to the creativity of the minority. Contrary to Hardt and Negri's notion, Deleuze immediately relates this to art:

Art is resistance: it resists death, slavery, infamy, shame. But a people can't worry about art. How is a people created, through what terrible suffering? When a people's created, it's through resources, but in a way that links up with something in art... Utopia isn't the right concept: it's more a question of a "fabulation" in which a people and art both share.²⁸

Looking at the accented films discussed in this chapter, we can understand how these films can be seen as acts of "fabulation" that create new subjects, call for "a people" that deals with all the micropolitical lines that permeate life. Might this not be a better option instead of proclaiming a party program with all its dangers of lines of flights turning into segmental dogmas (the "prince" that rules in the name of the "new barbarian")? These films are truly creative acts that show how love can be found on all of the aforementioned micropolitical lines. Most clearly, this seems to be the case in *MILLE ET UN JOURS*. A note before the film actually starts states: "In December 2001 two people who wished to marry were barred from this ordinary act by the French police. For the authorities it became an issue of love." And the film demonstrates that love can become a molar issue (the authorities want to make sure Ilhem is neither being forced into marriage, nor mar-

²⁶ The Dutch broadcasting network VPRO broadcast this interview, entitled "Vogelvrij," on Sunday 7 May 2001, in a series that focused on the new world (DNW, DE NIEUWE WERELD).

²⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 198.

²⁸ Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 174.

rying to provide her husband with a residence permit). The film does not say that this is not why they are marrying, but demonstrates the many layers of signification that surround this marriage that comprises molar aggregates of Western law; Arab tradition and custom; molecular movements of affects (Ilhem's choice because of her physical attraction to Tarek, and her love and respect for her family) and lines of flight (Tarek does, after all, need a residence permit) that are all genuine. The wedding ceremony is a performative event that effectively changes the real-life situations of Ilhem and Tarek. The filming of these events is yet another speech act with creative and performative power.

As Deleuze argues, political cinema today is a cinema that produces "speech-acts" in which the film character and the filmmaker constantly cross the boundaries between private business and politics. It produces collective utterances that are "neither impersonal myths nor purely personal fictions".²⁹ Hamid Naficy says something similar when he argues that accented films are a performance of identity, which is a constitutive act that exceeds the individual identity of the filmmaker. *BOUJAD*, *DES VACANCES* and *MILLE ET UN JOURS* are performative speech-acts that demonstrate that the "new barbarians" of today are not simply producing lines of flight. By filming the family, they are very political in that they are creating fabulations that are enactments of Spinozist love, without any of the utopian connotations. As Genevieve Lloyd explains:

[The] interweaving of imaginings and affects does not stop at our own bodily borders. We strive to affirm, not only concerning ourselves, but also concerning those we love – those whose existence gives us joy – whatever we imagine to affect them with joy; and to "exclude the existence" of what will affect them with sadness. This concern for others is for Spinoza not an altruism, which would make sense to contrast with any egotistic concern for ourselves. Spinoza sees it as following from the nature of imagination that, if we imagine someone like us to be affected with some affect, we will necessarily be affected with a like affect.³⁰

The accented films I have discussed in this chapter show in various ways how the family still affects us, and even more so, how the family is also needed in migration situations in order to find a new and necessarily hybrid place, in which values and traditions are constantly negotiated. The family appears to have indeed become a snake-like undulating force that might be stronger than ever before, precisely because it is influenced by movements of migration. Accented films are

²⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (London: The Athlone Press, 1989), p. 222.

³⁰ Genevieve Lloyd, *Spinoza and the Ethics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 76.

part of the growing “collective utterances” and creative acts that call for a new people, even though they do not create the revolutions that Hardt and Negri call for in their manifesto. Moreover, they demonstrate that there is a constant movement between migrants and settled people, both in the new countries and in their home countries, and the people they leave behind. Hakim in *BOUJAD* feels a responsibility for and attachment to the family he leaves behind; the Kabouche family in *DES VACANCES* brings new perspectives to the community back home in Algeria (a perspective emphasized by the men on the terrace); Ilhem in *MILLE ET UN JOURS* shows how homeland traditions and customs in the new country can be combined into a new cultural practice. Moreover, the filmmakers of this film enter into dialogue with their “characters” and are thus confronted with their own Western customs, like bureaucracy and preconceived notions of gender divisions in Arab culture.

The dialogic spirit in these films is a necessary part of the love and creativity of the exilic subject. In a wonderful collection on migration and nationalism, *The Freedom of the Migrant*, Vilem Flusser also refers to the creativity of the migrant. He recognizes the suffering that is part of the migration experience, but he argues that the creativity of the migrant is due to a dialogue that develops and that “consists of an exchange between the information that he brought with him and the ocean waves of information that wash him in exile”.³¹ Rather than simply escaping, it is a matter of dealing with responsibilities and affects for others left behind (including family). As Flusser argues, the migrant becomes free not when he denies his lost *heimat* but rather when he comes to terms with it and holds it in his memory.³² Furthermore, not only the migrant but also the settled inhabitants are transformed creatively: “Exile, no matter the form, is the incubator of creativity in the service of the new.”³³ This is done in a dialogic spirit that is not always smooth, but can be polemical and confront many obstacles. As I hope to have demonstrated, transnational accented films are important examples of the kind of creative power that, in dealing with all of the micropolitical lines, present “speech acts” and fabulations of new and intercultural subjects. This may help, very modestly and almost imperceptibly, to creatively renew both migrants and settlers. And this is more like a revolutionary emergence of all kinds of subjects than merely some proclamation of the revolution of the new barbarian.

³¹ Vilem Flusser, *The Freedom of the Migrant: Objections to Nationalism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 86.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

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Filmography

- BOUJAD, A NEST IN THE HEAT (Bullet Proof Film, Morocco/Canada: 1992-1995) directed by Hakim Belabbès.
- DES VACANCES MALGRÉ TOUT (Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, Algeria/France; 2000) directed by Malek Bensmail.
- MILLE ET UN JOURS. (Cinema Suitcase, the Netherlands/Tunisia/France: 2003) directed by Mieke Bal, Zen Marie, Thomas Sykora, Gary Ward, and Michelle Williams.

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Index

- 3 rd Rock From the Sun 81
 8 mm camera 27-28
- aboriginal 61
 accented cinema 11, 181-185, 188, 197, 200
Accented Cinema, An 200
 accented films 197, 201, 204-205, 209-211
 ADJUSTER, THE 19, 182, 190-191, 193
 ADVENTURES OF OZZIE AND HARRIET, THE 27
 aesthetic 32, 145, 191
 affects 33, 54, 96, 142, 204, 208, 210-211
 African-American 81-82
 Agamben, Giorgio 137
 Algeria 182, 197, 201, 206
 ALL IN THE FAMILY 29, 31, 81
 ALL THAT HEAVEN ALLOWS 82
 alternative family 16, 80, 84
 amateur film 27
 ambivalence 97, 173-175, 179
 AMERICAN BEAUTY 79
 AMERICAN FAMILY, AN 29-31, 38
 amnesia 148
 Anderson, Benedict 11, 17, 133, 136-137, 139-142, 144, 186
 animation 15, 48-49, 51, 53
 appropriation 85, 127, 160, 167
 Arab 165, 171, 200, 210-211
 Arau, Alfonso 103
 archaeology 138
 archive 37, 147-148, 156-160
 archiving the family 18
 Armenia 45, 48, 148, 153-154, 182
 Armenian diaspora 152, 155
 Armenian genocide 18, 152-154, 156-157
 Armenian History 147-148
 Armenianness 152-153, 157
 art 181-188, 191, 209
 assimilation 60
 asylum seeker 48-49
 audiovisual technologies 14
 Australia 182, 187, 189
 auteur 75, 140-141, 185, 190
 authentic 12, 35, 39, 111-112
 authenticity 111, 119
 authorship 119, 130, 185
 AUTRE CÔTÉ DE LA MER, L' 19, 182, 185
 Axel, Gabriel 103
- BAANTJER 15, 57-69
 BABETTE 'S FEAST 103
 Bailey, Cameron 154
 Bakhtin, Mikhail 113, 201
 Bal, Bal 19, 197
banlieu 179
 barbarian 19, 197, 199-200, 209-211
 Baumann, Gerd 42, 51
 Beattie, Keith 33
 Bellabes 19, 197
 Belmadi, Yasmine 165
 Benjamin, Walter 17, 119-121, 130, 137, 170-171
 Bensmail, Malek 19, 197
 Betti, Laura 76
beur 18-20, 165, 174, 176-177
 BIG BROTHER 34, 38
 Binoche, Juliet 103
 biopower 18, 168-170, 178-179, 198-199

- BLACK ORPHEUS 17, 133-135, 137, 139-142, 145
 Bloom, Harold 137
 BLOSSOM 81
 BLUE BLUE (BLAUW BLAUW) 65
 body 18, 110, 112, 141, 144, 156, 165-179, 197,
 199-200
Book of Mencius, The 106
 Bordwell, David 92
 BORN ON THE FIRST OF JULY 117-119, 129
 BOUJAD, A NEST IN THE HEAT 19, 197, 201-
 202, 205, 210-211
 bourgeois family 9, 16, 19, 73, 78, 85, 198
 BRADY BUNCH, THE 29, 80
 Brazil 143
 bricolage 191
 Bromley (London) 89

 Cabrera, Dominique 19, 182-183
 CAGNEY AND LACEY 58, 62
 camcorder 14, 25-26, 32-33
 Campbell, Neil and Alasdair Kean 79
 Camus, Marcel 17, 133-134, 137, 139-142, 145
 Canada 153, 155, 182, 197, 201, 205
 cannibalism 95
Capital 138, 166
 capitalism 168-169, 199
 capitalist economy 10, 13
 CAPTURING THE FRIEDMANS 14, 34, 37-39
 carnival 133, 135, 137, 140-142, 144
 carnivalesque 103
 Chalfen, Richard 27
 Chambers, Iain 185-189, 191
 Chang, Sylvia 108
 Charles, Sébastien 171
Children in Communication about Migration
 (CHICAM) 15, 41, 48, 50, 52-53
 China 103, 105, 118-123, 129
 Chineseness 118, 121, 124-125
 CHOCOLAT 103
 Chow, Rey 17, 119-121, 130
 Christianity 105
 chronotopes 201-202
 cinema vérité 29-30
 citizenship 208
 civil society 169
 civilization 83, 129, 138, 165
 cocooning 27
 collective memory 38
 comedy 58, 65, 73
 community 28, 44, 49, 53, 59, 63, 103, 133-
 134, 136-137, 139-142, 205, 211
 Confucian 17, 104, 109, 119, 122, 124, 126-130
 Confucianism 122
 Confucius 106, 122
 Congo, The 45-47
 consumerism 81
 contradiction 167, 169-170, 173-175, 177-179
 conventions of realism 30
 Corner, John 39
 COSBY SHOW, THE 81, 83
 Cronenberg, David 148
 cross-editing 37
 CROUCHING TIGER HIDDEN DRAGON 17,
 119, 123, 126-127
 Cruz Soubllette, Andrés José 76
 Cubitt, Sean 28
 cultural conventions 53
 cultural crisis 10, 12
 cultural history 10
 cultural imagination 59
 cultural knowledge 63, 110-112
 cultural memory 139
 cultural practice 27, 211
 cyberspace 34

 Dandry, Évelyne 76
 Dean, James 80
 Debord, Guy 200
 deep-focus 92
 definition of the family 8, 85
 Deleuze, Gilles 198-199, 203-204, 209-210
 democracy 183-185, 188
Democracy Unrealized 183, 185
 Derrida, Jacques 159
 DES VACANCES MALGRÉ TOUT 19, 197, 201,
 205-206, 210-211
 deviancy 69, 78
 diaspora 19, 41-44, 46-48, 52, 54, 147, 154-155,
 182, 187
 diaspora communities 41, 43
 diasporic cinema 197
 diasporic culture 121
 diasporic filmmakers 19, 182-183
 dichotomy 91, 93, 96, 147, 157
 Dickinson, Angie 94
 Didion, Joan 30
 digital communication 26
 digital infrastructure 32

- digital mode 33
 digital video 32, 44
 direct-cinema style 30
 discursive competence 15, 42, 50
 displacement 43, 158, 165, 178, 201
 disposable camera 41
 diversity 8, 28, 60
Documenta 11 181-183, 185
 documentary 14, 28-29, 31, 34-39, 52, 144, 148, 156
 documentary evidence 36-37
 domestic group 45-46, 49
 domestic space 33, 52-53, 93
 domestic sphere 81
 Donzelli, Valérie 172
 DRESSED TO KILL 94-95, 97
 Dutch colonial history 61
 Dyer, Richard 64, 69

 East 105, 113, 138, 143
 EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN 16, 104-106, 108-111, 113
 economy 9, 90, 169
 Egoyan, Atom 18-19, 147-150, 155, 161, 182, 188, 190-191, 193
 Elsaesser, Thomas 9
 Elster, Jon 137
 emancipation 28, 65
 embodiment 69, 107, 135
Empire 13, 18-19, 89, 166-169, 179, 197-200, 202-205, 208-209
Encyclopaedia Britannica 156
 Enlightenment 11
 ethical 8, 10, 187, 208-209
 ethics 14, 189
Ethics, The 188, 208
 ethnic difference 60-61, 64, 67-68
 ethnic minorities 43
 ethnic other 60, 62-63
 ethnic representation 69
 ethnicity 42-43, 62, 64-66, 151, 190
 ethnographic analysis 53
 ethnography 44, 109, 121, 144
ethos 187, 189
 Eurocentric 137-138
 Eurydice 17, 133-144
 EVERYBODY LOVES RAYMOND 81
 exchange-value 179
 exile 99, 188, 201, 211

 exilic filmmakers 189-190, 201
 exilic subject 202, 211
 exotic 75-77, 84, 104, 110-112
 exotic other 110
 extended families 20, 45
 extended family 7, 49, 58, 95, 107, 126, 193, 201
 EXTREME MAKE-OVER 199
 Eyoum Deido, Jules-Emmanuel 76

 familial discourse 105-106
Families in Multicultural Perspectives 8
 family history 46-48, 89, 147, 155, 159, 183
 family home 9, 16, 18, 91, 97, 172, 178-179, 192
 family ideology 17, 27, 118-119, 121-125, 127-130
 family in film and television studies 9
 FAMILY MATTERS 81
 family pictures 35, 41
 family portrait 29, 74-75, 84-85, 124, 152
 FAMILY TIES 81
 family tradition 35, 46, 182, 191-192
 family tree 46
 FAMILY VIDEO SHOW 46, 48, 50-51
 FAMILY VIEWING 18, 147-148, 151-153, 155-156, 158, 161
 fanaticism 90
Fantastic Four, The 125
 FAR FROM HEAVEN 79, 82
 Farquhar, Judith 109
 father figure 16-17, 62, 117
 FATHER KNOWS BEST 80
 fatherhood 65
 fatherless society 100
 femininity 61, 63
 feminism 58-59, 65, 69
 feminist 66-67, 81
 feminization 64
 fiction film 51
 fictionality 151
 Fifth-Generation filmmakers 121
 filial piety 106, 108, 119, 122, 124, 126
 film noir 80
 First World 170
 FLOATING LIFE 19, 182, 187, 189, 191
 Flusser, Vilem 10-11, 211
 fly-on-the-wall 28, 32
 food envy 17, 104, 111-112

- food imagery 103
 Foucault, Michel 169, 198
 France 78, 171, 178, 182-183, 197, 201-202, 205-207
Freedom of the Migrant, The 10, 211
 Freud, Sigmund 138
 FULL HOUSE 81
 fundamentalism 16, 89-90, 93, 100, 203
 Fuss, Diana 75
- GATTACA 199
 gender 28-29, 57, 60, 65-69, 106, 126, 141, 166, 174, 211
 generosity 95
 Genty, François 75
 Germany 38, 44, 171, 184, 189
 Gillespie, Marie 53
 Giorgetti, Florence 172
 Girotti, Massimo 76
 Gledhill, Christine 9
 globalization 7-8, 12, 14, 185
 Godard, Jean-Luc 140
 Gonzalez, Ed 85
 GOTTSCHALK ZIEHT EIN 38
 GRACE UNDER FIRE 81
 Gray, Herman 60, 63
 Great Britain 44
 Greece 44-45
 GREEN HORNET, THE 124
- habits 10, 19, 181-182, 186-189, 191-193
 Hall, Stuart 43
 Hallström, Lasse 103
 HAPPINESS 79
 Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri 12-13, 18-19, 89-90, 166-170, 178-179, 197-200, 202-205, 208-209, 211
 Harper, Philip Brian 94
 Hartley, John 81
 Haybert, Dennis 82
 Haynes, Todd 82
heimat 10, 211
 Heldke, Lisa 111
 hermeneutics of suspicion 66
 heterosexuality 75-77
 Hollywood cinema 11
 Hollywood movies 80, 142
 home editing 32
 HOME IMPROVEMENT 81
Home Is Where the Heart Is 9
 home mode 14-16, 25-34, 38-39
 home movie 7, 14, 25-28, 30-31, 33-39, 43, 202
 home video 19, 25, 28-30, 33-37, 150, 156, 158
 homeland 10, 51, 119, 152, 154, 184, 193, 201-202, 207-208, 211
 homosexuality 75, 77, 79
 Hong Kong 117-118, 120, 129, 182, 187, 189
 hospitality 95-97, 99
 host country 15, 48
 household 9, 10, 13, 29, 98-99, 182
 Hudson, Rock 82
 HULK 17, 119, 123, 127-129
 humanism 185
 humanities 8
 humanity 126
 hybridity 43, 49, 120, 207
 hyper-reality 79, 83
 hypertext 37-38
- I LOVE LUCY 80
 I REMEMBER MAMA 80
 ICE STORM, THE 17, 119, 123-125, 127
 identity 8, 12, 15, 17-18, 25, 28-29, 31, 42-43, 46-51, 53, 57, 59, 61, 75, 80, 95, 106, 111-112, 117-118, 126, 135, 139-140, 142, 144, 148, 152, 154-155, 157, 165, 183-184, 186-187, 189-190, 193, 197, 201, 210
 imaginary family 135-136, 139
Imagine IC (Imagine Identity and Culture) 7-8
 imagined communities 17, 49
Imagined Communities 11, 133, 186
 imagined family 58, 134
 immigrant 18, 29, 45, 95, 165, 170, 172, 174, 178, 201
 imperialism 198
 impurity 17, 120, 124, 130
 individualization 107
 Ingoldsby, Bron and Suzanna Smith 8
Inside/Out 75
 integration 53, 91, 113, 147, 187
 intercultural 7-8, 10, 13-14, 17-19, 104, 110, 112-113, 119-122, 130, 207, 211
 intercultural cinema 17, 104, 110, 112-113
 intercultural encounters 19, 207
 intercultural knowledge 17, 104
 intercultural values 7-8, 13-14, 207

- interculturality 8, 14
 Internet 11, 32, 34, 44
 intertextuality 127
 intracultural 119
 Iraq 45, 47
 Islamic 16, 89-90, 178
 Isoppo, Daniel 172
 Italy 44
- Jarecki, Andrew 14, 34-39
 JEFFERSONS, THE 81
 Jian, Ciu 118, 130
jianghu 126-127
jouissance 175-176
- KILL BILL 120
Koran, The 99
 Kristeva, Julia 17, 133, 136-137, 139-140, 142, 144
 Kroes, Rob 78
kungfu cinema 120
 KWIK, KWEEK EN KWAK 49
- labor-power 166-170, 179
 language 49, 51, 63, 109, 120, 136-137, 139, 143, 152, 160, 186
 Law, Clara 19, 182, 187, 189
 Lazarus, Neil 169
 Lear, Norman 29
 LEAVE IT TO THE BEAVER 27, 80
 Lee, Ang 17, 104-105, 117, 119, 120-125, 127-130
 Lee, Bruce 124
 Lefort, Claude 19, 184-185, 188-189, 193
 Lifshitz, Sebastian 18, 165, 171, 174, 178-179
 LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE 103
 liminal space 26, 133
 line of flight 203-204, 206
 Lloyd, Genevieve 210
 Loud (the Loud family) 29-31
 love 20, 69, 82, 89, 105-106, 108-109, 118, 126-127, 142, 144, 171, 173-174, 178, 200, 205, 208-211
 Lung, Sihung 105
 Lupton, Deborah 107
- MAIGRET 58
 Mangano, Silvana 76
 Marks, Laura 110, 112
- marriage 8, 29, 92-93, 99, 123, 126-127, 135, 141, 202, 207, 209-210
 MARRIED WITH CHILDREN 81
 Marthouret, François 73
 Marx, Karl 18, 166-170, 179
 MATRIX, THE 120
 MAUDE 81
 media club 41, 44-45, 51
 media landscape 25
 media literacy 44
 media practices 7, 26
 media productions 34, 44-45, 52
 media space 54
 media studies 8, 10
 media texts 8
 media theory 7-8
 mediated families 12, 19
 mediated family 10, 47, 147
 mediation 25, 39, 42, 139, 167, 170, 179
 mediator 7, 49, 54, 167, 182
 melodrama 9-10, 82, 148
 Mencius 106
 metaphysics of presence 28
 Mettler, Peter 148
 micropolitical 206, 209, 211
 micropolitics 203-205
 migrant 10, 12-13, 15-16, 18, 20, 41, 44, 49-50, 52, 123, 165-166, 182, 197, 199, 202, 204-205, 207, 211
 migration 7-8, 10-11, 19, 44-45, 48, 51, 54, 165, 197, 199, 201-202, 205-211
 MILLE ET UN JOURS 19, 197, 201-202, 207, 209-211
 Minelli, Vincente 9
 Mineo, Sal 80
 mise-en-scène 16, 52, 82, 91-92, 97-98, 128, 140, 183, 187, 192
 misrepresentation 43
 mobility 51, 94, 154, 165, 170-172, 176, 178-179, 192, 199
 modernity 12, 43
 Mol, Linda de 62
 molar line 203-204
 molecular line 203-205, 207
 molecular movements 204, 206, 210
 Moore, Julianne 82
 Moran, James 25-26, 29, 32-33
 Morocco 45, 197
 mother tongue 51, 137, 140, 142-143

- motherhood 65
 mourning 136-137, 139-140, 142, 153
 multicultural 8, 42-43, 54, 60, 67-68, 109
 multicultural society 54, 68
 multicultural triangle 42-43
 multiculturalism 8, 59-60, 63, 68-69, 179
 multiculturalism 64, 67
 multimedia document 38-39
 multimedia productions 32-33
 MURPHY BROWN 81
 Muslim 50, 89, 96
 mutual illumination 113
 MY FAMILY 41
 MY SON THE FANATIC 16, 90-91, 93-94, 99-100
 myth 17, 133-136, 139, 141-142, 151

 Naficy, Hamid 11, 19, 181-185, 188-191, 193, 197, 200-201, 204-205, 210
 nation 11-13, 18-19, 42-43, 51, 57, 117, 133, 136, 165, 172, 174, 184, 186
 national 11, 59-60, 69, 143, 165-166, 170, 172, 178, 186, 198, 204
 national historical imagination 60
 national imaginary 69
 nationality 42-43, 51, 202
 nation-state 11-13, 186
 NATURAL BORN KILLERS 79
 natural family 10, 12-13, 182
 negotiator 97
 Netherlands, The 15, 41, 44-45, 50, 57-59, 61, 197
 Neuburger, Robert 150-151, 155
 NEXT OF KIN 149
 Nichanian, Marc 157-158
 non-whites 64-65
 normative family 75-76, 85
 nostalgia 53, 139, 201
 nuclear family 7, 9-10, 12, 16, 20, 27-28, 34, 49, 57, 65-67, 74, 76-85, 113, 126, 141, 174, 182, 190-191, 194, 203

 Odysseus 137
Odyssey, The 137
 Oedipal family 9, 136
 oral storytelling 47
 Orfeu 134-135
 orientalism 121
 Orpheus 17, 133-136, 138-144

 OSBOURNES, THE 38
 Other, the 160, 177
 otherness 61, 77, 152
 Ozon, François 16, 73-76, 78, 82, 84-85
 Ozon, Guillaume 74
 Ozon, Julie 74
 Ozon, René 74

 Palma, Brian de 94
 particularist media 11, 14
 particularistic media 44, 54
 PARTRIDGE FAMILY, THE 29
 Pasolini, Pier Paolo 76
 patriarch 67, 83-84
 patriarchal authority 58, 66
 patriarchal family 11
 patriarchy 17, 122, 124, 126-130, 178
 patrimony 165
 patriotism 28, 118
 Pattynama, Pamela 61
 performative 19, 134, 197, 210
 PHOTO DE FAMILLE / FAMILY PORTRAIT 74-75, 83
 photography 26, 44, 92
 pluralism 60, 63
 poetic practice 133-134
 police series 15-16, 57-59, 64-65, 67-69
 political 12-13, 19, 28-29, 31, 64-65, 81, 118, 123, 129, 138, 140, 144-145, 165, 172, 178, 181-193, 200, 203-204, 208, 210
 political correctness 64-65
 politics 19, 29, 59, 117, 153, 157, 181, 183-185, 187-191, 203-205
 pop culture 78-79
 pornography 150, 193
 Portapak 30
 postcolonial 20, 95, 121, 179
Postcolonial Hospitality 95
 postdocumentary 39
 posthumanism 185
 postmodern society 152
 postmodernism 169
 prejudice 64
Prime-Time Families 58
 privacy 16, 41, 93, 152, 173, 185, 193
 private family 9, 14, 16-17, 182-183
 private home 16, 96, 190
 private realm 81, 104
 private space 93-94, 97-100

- private sphere 44, 193
 private vs. public 16
 privateness 14, 27-28
 psychoanalysis 9
 psychoanalytic theory 136
 public and the private, the 13, 16, 19, 85, 91, 99, 182, 193
 public domain 52, 93
 public eye 31, 34, 97
 public media 14-16, 54
 public space 16, 41, 52, 94-97
 public sphere 43, 50, 52
 publicness 14, 27-28, 95
 PUSHING HANDS 105
- qinggong* 126
 Quaid, Dennis 82
 queer family 73, 84-85
 queering 16, 74, 82
 queerness 75, 85
- Rabinovitz, Lauren 81
 racism 65, 79, 165
 radicalism 16
 real families 67
 real family 29, 33-34, 39
 reality programming 33
 reality show 38
 reality TV 25, 31, 34, 38-39
 REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE 80, 84, 93
 reconciliation 100
 reel families 13
 reflexivity 25-26
 refugee 41, 43-44, 49, 52
 Reid, Richard 89-90, 100
 relationships 15, 33, 42, 44, 52, 58, 62, 64, 68, 84, 107, 109, 122, 181, 185, 205
 religion 42-43, 51
 religious culture 50
 remediation 34
 repressive tolerance 68
 republicanism 178
 responsibility 18-20, 89, 95, 137
 reunification 48, 118
Revolution in Poetic Language 133
 Ricœur, Paul 156
 Rideau, Stéphane 76, 85
 Romanticism 11
 Romney, Jonathan 75, 147, 151
- ROSEANNE 81
 Rosello, Mireille 95
 Rozema, Patricia 148
 Ruoff, Jeffrey 30
- same-frame heuristic 92, 99
 Sanchez, Lucia 76
 satellite TV 53
 self-representation 15, 42, 44
 semiotic 133
 senses 17, 62, 85, 104, 109-110, 112-113
 SERIAL MOM 79
 sexual perversion 76-77, 83-84
 sexuality 31, 63
 shoe bomber 89
 Shohat, Ella and Robert Stam 113
 significant others 140
 SIMPSONS, THE 81
 Sirk, Douglas 9, 82
 sitcom 73-74, 78-83, 85, 148
 SITCOM 16, 73, 75-79, 82-85
Slant Magazine 85
 SOAP 81
 soap opera 10, 58, 65, 148
 society of control 198-200
 society of spectacle 200, 202
 sociological studies 8
 Somalia 45, 47
 Spangen 15, 58, 60, 62-69
 spectator 17, 78, 85, 95, 104, 109-110, 113, 149
 spectators 95, 104, 110, 112-113, 140, 159
 Spinoza, Benedict de 200, 208-210
 Spivak, Gayatri 18, 117, 137, 144, 169
 Stam, Robert 140-141
 Stamp, Terence 76
 stereotypes 61, 64
 subjectivity 107, 133, 136, 142, 176, 179
 suburban family 27, 73, 79-80
 Surinamese 15, 60, 62, 64-66
 surplus-value 170, 179
 surveillance 32-34, 147, 171
 Susman, Warren 73, 79-80
 suspense 64
 suspension 175-176, 178-179
 Sweden 44
 symbolic order 136, 141
 synecdoche 141
 synesthetic 110
 Syria 45

- Taiwan 104, 109, 118, 123, 129
 Tang, Yu-Chien 108
 Tarantino, Quentin 120
 Taylor, Ella 58-59
 television culture 38
 television drama 57, 59
 temporality 127, 136
Temps et récit 156
 TEOREMA / THEOREM 76-77, 84
 TERRES FROIDES, LES 18-19, 165-166, 170-171, 178-179
 terrorism 100, 130
 Third Cinema 183-184
 third space 104, 110
 Third World 170
 traditional family 7-8, 15, 53, 58, 107, 203
 tragedy 82, 128
 transformation of technologies 26
 transgression 68, 75
 transition 13, 100, 202
 translation 14, 17-18, 78, 110, 117, 119-125, 127-130, 137, 139, 142, 144-145, 160
 translator 66, 119, 130, 137
 transnational 11, 113, 197, 198, 200-201, 203, 207, 211
 transnational media 7, 14
 TRUMAN SHOW, THE 79
 Tsai Ming-Liang 125
 Tunisia 197, 202, 207
 Turkey 45
 TV talk 53
- underworld 62, 133-134, 136, 138-140, 142-143
 UNHAPPILY EVER AFTER 81
 United States 38, 59, 79, 89, 103, 120-121, 123, 130
 universal 17, 111, 185
 use-value 167
 utopia 59, 208-209
- values 7, 12-14, 17-20, 28, 33, 48, 81, 105, 108-112, 126-127, 129, 150, 153, 155, 165-167, 170, 178-179, 203, 208, 210
 Van, Adrien de 76
 Van, Marina de 76
 Ven, Monique van de 62
 vérité-style 28
 Verley, Bernard 171
 VICTOR 74-75
 video camera 28, 35-36, 47
 video culture 28
 VIDEO DIARY 50
 video essay 52
 virtue 104, 106
 visual culture 38
 visual representation 26, 44
- Wang, Yu-Wen 105
 Wayman, Jeanne 82
 webcams 14, 32-34
 webpages 33
 WEDDING BANQUET, THE 17, 105, 119, 123-126, 128
 West 105, 113, 123-124, 207
 Western 7, 13, 17, 26, 38, 42, 78, 83, 90, 103-107, 109, 112-113, 121-122, 124-125, 127-129, 133, 135, 143, 152, 160, 185, 193, 198, 200, 210-211
 white culture 61, 111
 white masculinity 15-16, 20, 58, 68-69
 whiteness 64, 69, 77, 173
 Whyte, Martin King 122
 Wiazemsky, Anne 76
 WILL & GRACE 81
 Wood, Natalie 80
 work families 58-59
 work family 62, 65-66, 69
 workplace 9, 59
 World Wide Web 32-33, 38
 Wu, Chien-Lien 105
wuxia 119
- Yang, Kuei-Mei 105
 Yimou, Zhang 121
 yin and yang 109
- Zimmerman, Patricia 27
 Žižek, Slavoj 209