



real location,
fantasy space,
performative
place

f o u r

double occupancy
and mutual interference
in european cinema



t h o m a s e l s a e s s e r

introduction

The new Europe is the old Europe of geopolitics. It once more matters—as it hardly did in the time of the Cold War, when two power-blocks divided the continent and dominated its peripheries, and “international” was the natural adjective of dissidence and counter-culture—where you are from (as an individual) and what your geographical location is (as a country, a nation, a people). Europe is rediscovering its roots, its regions, its local customs, ethnic identities, religious, cultural and culinary specifics. The first point to note about this new Europe is to beware of hyphenation, whether it is the “old” political hyphenation of the two founding nations of the European Union, whose stability and prosperity, it is said, still rests on the “entente Franco-Allemande,” or the now politically correct hyphenation of more recent nationals in Europe, such as French-Arab, Dutch-Moroccan or German-Turkish. In both cases, it may turn out that hyphenation is a mis-attribution and when considered as the solution to Europe’s current identity crisis, merely compounding the problem it is supposed to solve.



The filmmaker Fatih Akin, for instance, apparently detests the hyphenated label Turkish-German. If he cannot be Fatih Akin, he is supposed to have said, he'd rather be known as the German Martin Scorsese.

The second point I want to make is that we should welcome hyphenation, or rather, the idea of an “always-already” state of (semantic) occupation, as a kind of counter-metaphor to the metaphor of “identity,” whether individual, cultural or national. Such an “always-already” occupation (which includes as its crucial dimension an over-determined, that is to say, non-binary, a-symmetrical “self-other” relation) suggests that there may be no space in the “fortress” of selfhood and identity, and especially no space in the Fortress Europe, which can be defended against an “outside” of which “I” or “we” are the “inside.” There is no-one in Europe who is not diasporic or displaced, I would argue, in relation to some marker of difference—be it ethnic, regional, religious, linguistic—and whose identity is not always already split or hyphenated. I am thinking of the many European sites where the fiction of the fortress, the paranoid dream of a tabula rasa, of cleansing, of purity and exclusion has led, or still continues to lead to bloody conflict, such as in Bosnia, Kosovo, Northern Ireland, the Basque country, Cyprus, and further afield, in Israel and Palestine. But I am also thinking of the fact that even outside the internationally notorious territories of overlapping identity-claims and inter-ethnic war-zones just mentioned, it is clear that Europe—however one wants to draw either the geographical reach (south: the Mediterranean, east: the Urals) or the historical boundaries (encompassing, colonized and self-colonized by the Mesopotamian, the Phoenician, the Greek, the Roman, the Ottoman or the Holy Roman empires)—has always been a continent settled and traversed by very disparate and mostly feuding ethnic entities. We tend to forget how relatively recent are the nation-states of Europe, and how many of them are the result of forcibly tethering together a patchwork quilt of tribes, of clans, of culturally and linguistically distinct groupings. Those identified with a specific region have seen a belated acknowledgment of their distinctiveness within the European Union under the slogan of “the Europe of the regions,” but even this opening up of different spaces of identity (Catalan, Brittany, Lombard, Bavarian or Cumbrian) does not cover the current layered-ness of ethnic Europe. One need only think of the Sinti and Romas, the perpetual “others” of Europe, who because they have neither territory nor do they claim one, resist any of the conventional classifications, being inside the territorial boundaries of a dozen or so European countries, but finding themselves outside all of these countries’ national imaginaries.

To these histories of contested territories, the European Union—founded, let us remember, initially to ensure that France and Germany would never again go to war with each other over Alsace-Lorraine—has in some cases provided a shift in the frames of reference, at first economic and

then political, by which the conflicting demands of nationality, sovereignty, ethnic identity, victimhood and statehood, solidarity and self-determination could be renegotiated. This at least has been the declared aim of the political elites in the European Union, often enough repeated: that these conflicts can eventually be solved, by being given different frameworks of articulation and expression (as well as lots of tax-payers' money), in the hope that it will lead to an eventual political settlement, where residual antagonisms can be neutralized, or at least channelled into the sort of festival-ritual nationalism we see at the Eurovision song contest or in the over-heated, but otherwise harmless, because largely commodified European Cup football nationalism. Indeed, I imagine, these discursive and "culturalist" re-articulations of so-called "ancient conflicts" are also the hope of those who in a country such as Turkey currently do their utmost to maintain the secular state and are willing to change national laws, in order to make their nation acceptable for accession-talks with the European Union.

cultural identity

But how useful in these processes is the insistence on the idea of identity? And what can it tell us about the current state of European cinema? Over the past twenty years, perhaps as a consequence of the decline of auteurism and national cinemas, we have become used to discussing European cinema and media in terms of cultural identity, made up of the various struggles over representation—of ethnicity, gender, religion—and less frequently, class-identity. Even within the mainstream political discourse identity-politics has given way to concerns with multi-culturalism, a term favored by UNESCO and by other international or transnational organizations. Yet as most of us are only too aware, multi-culturalism has also come under scrutiny and attack. The endless debates over "integration" and "assimilation" versus "cultural autonomy" and "separate development" regarding ethnic or religious minorities within the nation-states in Western Europe seem mostly to have ended in intellectual stalemate, while sapping the energies of the public debates as well as the political decision making processes: fatigue, helplessness and frustration have become difficult to distinguish from each other, with the result that political apathy and populist demagogy are now the two extremes that touch each other in the debates on minorities in virtually every country of Western Europe.

The European Union, for its part, has practically banned both the terms cultural identity and multi-culturalism from its vocabulary, preferring to speak of "multi-cultural competence" as the desirable goal, when trying to renew the social contract, while progressive cultural institutions in the member-states now re-label themselves as promoting (and institutionalizing) "diversity." At the same time, the academic discourses of cultural

studies and post-colonialism have introduced locutions such as hybridization, in-between-ness and Creolization, but one may wonder whether and for how long these concepts, too, can withstand the deconstructive criticism applied to identity and multi-culturalism. In other words, if the insistence on cultural identity, as that which can most peacefully replace the older, more bloody and divisive nationalisms in Europe, has given way to a range of alternative terms, such labels suffer from either metaphoric blandness (diversity) or metaphoric exoticism (Creolization), while it is not quite clear what sort of traction they can have on the problems they seek to address (xenophobia, racism, overt and covert forms of exclusion and discrimination). For instance, “diversity”—the European equivalent of the “rainbow coalition” in questions of race in the United States—does not signal either the power-structures in play, or the imbrication of inside and out, self and other that makes inter-ethnic communication and joint community action often so intractably difficult and painful.

Hence my choice of the term “double occupancy,” rather than diversity or multi-culturalism, to signal our discursive as well as geopolitical territories as “always already occupied.” It can, I hope, convey right away a concrete European history as well as the need to reflect the reality of competing claims in the identity- and diversity-wars, while also keeping alive the political and philosophical associations that the term may carry. As far as history is concerned, we cannot overlook the fact that there may be good reasons why in some parts of Europe and especially on its current geopolitical borders, the struggle for and recognition of national and cultural identity is still a prerequisite to being able to talk about belonging to a wider community at all, as a consequence of having had to suffer political occupation and cultural colonization either directly or by proxy—especially when this new community comes in as bureaucratic, hierarchical and remote a guise as the *Communauté européenne*, or EU.

This retrenchment to identity is particularly noticeable in parts of the former Soviet Empire, such as the Ukraine or Belarus, now claimed as their spheres of influence by Russia, the US, as well as by the European Union. But other newly re-emerging nations of Central and Eastern Europe, such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia or the Baltic States that have recently joined the EU, show an almost equally obsessive preoccupation with their long-lost, reconstructed or in some cases “invented” national identities. I think the demands of these peoples and groups to be given space to express this identity must be taken seriously. To expect diversity and multi-cultural competence, as we lecture them, from our stable political identities, our stable legal systems, our stable currencies and stable welfare systems, on the virtues of hybridity and in-between-ness, would be perceived as either naïve or hypocritical, but in any case insensitive to their long memories of oppression and their fears of new, more subtle forms of occupation and control.

double occupancy as a political category

Hyphenation or “double occupancy” should be regarded as the condition of possibility, as the conditions of entry, even, into the European political space. The term is not the solution. It is merely a place holder, a sort of provocative stumbling block, forcing a reflection on power and politics even in the field of culture, and it may serve as a historical reminder that Europe is a continent, whose two- or three-thousand year history has been, until very recently, a relentless catalogue of migrations, invasions, occupations, conquests, pogroms, expulsion and exterminations.

More precisely, Europe today is doubly occupied, indeed haunted: first by its recent history and historical catastrophes still not worked through or laid to rest (Nazism, the Holocaust and the failure of Socialism), and secondly, Europe is pre-occupied with the consequences of colonialism—reluctantly reminded of economic exploitation, colonialism and slavery, precisely by the hyphenated Europeans mentioned earlier. These doubly occupied communities could be said to divide into sub-cultures and sub-nations. The sub-nation formation is made up of those who do not feel allegiance to the nation-state in the first place, because they are immigrants, refugees or asylum seekers, and who live within their own diasporic communities and closed family or faith circles, cut off from the social fabric at large through lack of familiarity with either language or culture or both.

More like sub-cultures, but also under double occupancy in their allegiance, are those sections of the second-generation diaspora who, while sharing the language and possessing the skills to navigate their society’s rules, rhetoric and institutions, nonetheless do not feel they have a stake in maintaining the social fabric, sensing themselves to be excluded or knowing themselves to be discriminated against, while also having become estranged from the nation and country of their parents or grandparents. In the best of cases, where they have found the spaces that allow them to negotiate difference, they are hyphenated nationals, whose identity comes from a double occupancy which here functions as a linked but constantly and sometimes violently tested allegiance: to the nation-state into which they were born, and to the homeland from which (one or both of) their parents came. In this context, it is remarkable that the cinema (along with music) appears to have become the most prominent medium of self-representation and symbolic action that the hyphenated citizens of Europe’s nation-states have made their own. Films by Turkish-German directors, by French beur directors, by Asian directors in Britain have regularly won major prizes and come to prominence within Europe, crossing borders where other more conventionally indigenous films have failed to do so. It marks a decisive shift, when one thinks that their parent generation’s contribution to the mainstream culture was likely to have been

more culinary than cinematic, more entrepreneurial-artisanal than intellectual-artistic.

Besides these political and historical dimensions, at the level above and below the nation-state and its subjects, the term “double occupancy” can also be understood to carry a more general philosophical interpretation, reminding us that most “continental,” that is European, philosophers of modernity define the subject across his or her divided, negative and occupied identity: in Lacanian psychoanalysis it is language that speaks us, rather than the other way round; for Foucault, religion and social institutions inscribe themselves as discursive regimes and micro-politics on our bodies and senses. Yet the term also wants to call to mind Jacques Derrida’s practice of putting certain words “under erasure,” in order to indicate the provisional nature of a text’s authority, and the capacity of textual space to let us see both itself and its opposite.¹ One can even gloss it with Wittgenstein’s double figure of the duck-rabbit, the co-extensiveness of two perceptions in a single representational space.

double occupancy as an aesthetic strategy

However, what I want to focus on here are above all the aesthetic implications and artistic strategies that may fall under the rubric of double occupancy, if seen as significant “conditions of entry” into the European media space. First of all, in terms of genre or mode, the state of double occupancy should be understood as at once tragic, comic and utopian. Tragic, because the reality of feeling oneself invaded, imposed upon, deprived of the space or the security one thinks one needs, is—whatever one’s race, creed or gender, but also whatever one’s objective reason or justification—a state of pathos, disempowerment, of self-abasement or even abjection. But also comic, in the way we consider mistaken identities as comic: that is, revealing ironies and contradictions in the fabric of language and material signifiers. And utopian, insofar as under certain conditions, double occupancy can open up ways of sharing the same space while not infringing on the other’s claims, allowing for exchanges which enrich our lives, and making self-interest benefit the common good, rather than oppose it.

In my book on *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood*,² where I deal with some of these issues at greater length, I give three examples, taken from the Dutch film and media landscape, of what I mean by this, referring to the tragic version by analyzing the murder of Theo van Gogh, killed ostensibly for making a film, but to me indicating how the same symbolic space of media reality can be doubly occupied by radically different positions, with fatal consequences. The comic version of double occupancy I find in a popular film, *Shouf Shouf Habibi*, about a dysfunctional Moroccan family living in the Netherlands, in which equal opportunity racism and a complicity of ineptitude balance the scales between native Dutch and

second-generation North-Africans, who invariably direct their best jokes at themselves. The utopian version I find in Johan van der Keuken's *Amsterdam Global Village*, a film that documents the delicate coexistence of so many layers of exile and belonging among his casually connected characters, but in one episode between a Jewish lady and a Surinamese mother gives us a glimpse of how two very different lives can legitimately lay claim to the same space, in a literal double occupancy of an apartment, across history, memory and shared (mis)understanding, without either history competing with the other, but each complementing the other as the "veritable" history of the Netherlands, told across its so-called "foreigners."

But the general question I want to put is this: what can cinema contribute to an understanding of the present crisis in the European Union? This may seem an absurd question, but let me try and specify what such a question could entail. We are all aware that the European Union, especially since its enlargement, but also well before that, has been suffering from several kinds of crisis. First of all, it has a problem of communication between its official institutions and its citizens. Europeans don't talk to their elected bodies—they hardly bother to vote—and they do not talk to each other—there is hardly any "bonding" going on between, say, the British and the French, the Dutch and the Germans, or the Germans and the Austrians. Some Spaniards like the Germans, but mainly in order to spite the French, and the French collect the admiration of the Germans not in order to return the favor, but the better to be able to look down on them. Europe cannot talk to its own others, that is, its Muslim minorities, or speak on their behalf, but neither does it communicate with those who seek refuge or a better life, now that the "boat" is said to be "full" and anti-immigrant sentiment is on the rise. Equally critical, when Europe wants to give itself a constitution, and puts it to the vote, the effort is rewarded with a resounding no, by France and the Netherlands, two of the most generally pro-European countries in the Union. In other words, the EU suffers from a crisis of representation and legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens, however successful it has been in maintaining the welfare provisions and in improving the living standards of its less prosperous regions.

The debacle around the EU Constitution is particularly telling when we contrast it with the US Constitution. What makes the latter such an extraordinary document is not only the division of powers between the executive, the legislative and the judiciary (European democracies have these checks and balances as well), but the singularly powerful performative act enshrined in its: "We, the People hereby Declare" It is this speech act authority, making sovereignty real by performing it, which the European Constitution could not and did not manage, however hard Giscard d'Estaing and his team may have tried. What once made this performativity possible were moments of decisive rupture: the secession from the British Crown in the case of America, the decapitation of the king in

the France of the Revolution. Even though the EU is the consequence of Germany's disastrous wars and France's decline as a "great power," no such moment of rupture has preceded the transfer of authority and the grounding of sovereignty in the case of the European Union, and perhaps that is all to the good.

For what we have instead is a new principle of trans-national sovereignty.³ It can be argued that one of the most important and yet least recognized political changes which the existence of the European Union has brought about are fresh ways of thinking about nationhood, the first such conceptual effort since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 and the Congress of Vienna in 1812: this uniquely EU principle has been called "the right of mutual interference in the internal affairs of the other" and it allows for the Community to tell a member state (or a state seeking to become a member) how they may have to change typically national practices or uniquely national values: no more unprocessed milk in French cheeses made for export, a ban on certain additives in German sausages, the adoption of the metric system in Britain, or the abolition of the death penalty in Turkey. The principle is contested and often messy, it is poorly understood, and cursed and detested by those adversely affected by it, but it has its merits. At a time when the uneven distribution of power in world affairs we call globalization, the realities of bloody civil wars and the frequent violations by heads of state of their own citizens' rights no longer make absolute non-interference morally acceptable, the EU principle of mutual interference seems to provide a preferable alternative to the US model of unilateral or pre-emptive interference in the internal affairs of others. But the principle remains transgressive, and that, too, is probably how it should be, especially given the uneven and asymmetrical power relations which obtain, when it is being applied by those on the inside, telling those on the outside: either you do as told, or else you stay outside. On the other hand, it does allow individual citizens of a nation-state to take their own government to court if national laws appear to infringe rights granted by the laws of the Community. In other words, the right of mutual interference could be seen as the beginning of a new social contract, by which parties with grievances against each other, can seek redress, justice and negotiate a consensus, as well as establish a mutually confirming sovereignty based neither on divine right nor on a performative speech act.

54

How then might cinema play a role in such a different arrangement of conflict management and communication, and how can it contribute to what I would now call post-identity thinking? My first answer is: it can contribute its own crisis of representation. Cinema's current crisis of representation is usually located in the so-called loss of indexicality of the photographic image, by the transition to the post-photographic or digital image. I see digitization more as a way of thinking productively about rupture than as the determining factor of rupture. And when I suggest that

cinema should contribute its crisis of representation, it is in the sense of rupture as indicated above: maybe the digital revolution is contemporary cinema's equivalent of the Boston Tea Party and the "off-with-his-head" moment in the history of visual representation!

More specifically, what could be the consequences of European cinema—defined by Italian neo-realism and French *cinéma vérité*, by Ingmar Bergman's uncompromising psychological realism and the New German Cinema's historical testimony—giving up its realist ontology, its Mummy Complex, as Andre Bazin called it, or, as I would now put it, its "sovereignty"? Some would argue that cinema never did have such a realist ontology, and that the digital revolution merely did away with an old superstition, finally revealing the groundlessness of our belief in it. Others have tried to shore up this indexical ontology, by arguing that indexicality contains both the notion of index as "pointing to" and "trace as material inscription," and while the latter may be "lost" in the digital image, the former, being an enunciative act, remains unaffected and intact. I agree with all of the above, but I want to suggest a third possibility, which is to re-assert or re-assess cinema's performativity. By this I mean a shift from realism versus illusionism towards a different pair of alternatives: from *claiming* the real to *performing presence*. This does not have to entail that extreme form of constructivism we know as the post-modern "anything goes"; instead it requires a new spectatorial contract, a renegotiation of belief and the suspension of disbelief, which is to say, a different way of thinking about cinema's relation to fiction, to the mode of "as if."

The crisis of representation would thus have several dimensions: on the political plane the dimension of sovereignty, democracy and the social contract, on the aesthetic plane that of trace, referentiality and the truth of the image, while on the plane of communication, it is the roles of belief, trust and good faith that are at issue. In each case, we seem to be confronted with a groundless ground, a situation where the conditions of possibility, or more prosaically, the rules of the game, have to be established in the absence of ontological certitude or transcendental validation. In other words, this crisis of representation has its origins neither in a change of technical standard of storage, reproduction and transmission such as digitization, nor in the ethnically mixed populations of post-colonial and post-Cold War Europe. Rather, it names different aspects of a change in episteme, to use Foucault's term, for which we may not yet have the appropriate name, but in whose general direction much of our thinking seems to gesture.

My use of the term double occupancy in this context is thus perhaps no more than a way of not being tempted into assuming either a metaphysical void or an equally metaphysical clean slate, with respect to such a change of episteme. That cinema is a privileged mode of communication and intersubjectivity, tracking the always already given-ness of a historically and politically situated (and thus occupied) state of affairs, is due precisely

to the fact that it has no ontological ground, if by that we mean the truthful representation or unmediated “disclosure” of reality.

How, then, can one bring these rather general and abstract observations to bear on my initial question, namely cinema’s role in the transformation of public space and public affairs, the *res publica*, if we grant the premise—widely assumed—that this public sphere has become a media space, and if, as I am arguing, this media space cannot be grasped in terms of either realism or the simulacrum but only by way of analyzing the different modes of performativity and presence it makes possible, and the contracts these imply with regard to communication and exchange, on the difficult terrain of the mutually agreed interference in the internal affairs of the other?

performative presence: absence as presence, presence as parapraxis

Over the past several years I have been exploring the question of how films and filmmakers have entered the public space by way of cinema’s peculiar performativities, in order to work through certain blockages in the aesthetics of realism, but also blockages in the politics of identity. These inquiries have led along a number of parallel, but hopefully converging tracks, of which I briefly want to present three that may have a bearing on the contribution cinema can make to the way Europe sees itself and engages its others. In each case, I have taken an antagonistic, inherently a-symmetrical situation as my starting point, whose conflictual potential comes not from divergent goals or mutually exclusive claims, but from each party being inextricably intertwined with the other, dependent on the other and in this sense doubly occupied by the other. I wanted to examine how filmmakers perform rather than represent this impossible relation, or find within the conditions of this impossibility something like a new poetics of (European) cinema. I began by looking at the entanglements between Germans and Jews after 1945, that is, after “Auschwitz” and the peculiar a-symmetry of this relationship, which, it became soon evident, could not stabilize itself around the positions of perpetrators and victims, but neither could it satisfactorily inscribe itself into West Germany’s public life in the form of commemorations, professions of guilt and accountability or acts of mutual reconciliation. Looking at the films of the New German Cinema and after, film by R.W. Fassbinder, Alexander Kluge, Syberberg, Werner Herzog, Harun Farocki and others, I came up with a formula which I called “absence as presence, presence as parapraxis” in order to explain the peculiarly present non-presence by which this relationship was thematized. Parapraxis in this context referred to Freud’s slips of the tongue, called *Fehl-Leistungen* in German, and here meant quite literally to index and point to the many instances of failed performances in public life, contrasted with some very elaborate, because either excessive, tragic or absurd

performances of failure in films like *In a Year of 13 Moons*, *Germany in Autumn*, *The Patriot*, *Hitler a Film from Germany*, *Fitzcarraldo* or *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*. Performativity here meant an often quite allegorical way of enacting failure or futility, for instance in Fitzcarraldo's absurd quest to build an opera house in the Amazon rainforest, while hauling a boat over a mountain, the tragic-absurd love of a male transvestite for a heterosexual man in *In a Year of Thirteen Moons*, or Harun Farocki's documentation of the Americans' failure to realize that their reconnaissance planes had photographed the death camps of Auschwitz and Birkenau as early as May 1944, but missed them, because they were not looking for them.

A different kind of performativity, as well as failure, was at issue when I looked at race in recent American cinema. What interested me was not Hollywood's "representation of race" and race relations, but whether there was a way that specific films might be said to have performed the "failure" of the interracial dialogue and the attainment of racial equality in the US over its long history since the abolition of slavery and the break-up of the coalition between left-liberals and the civil rights movement in the 1970s. Inspired by the work of Eric Lott, Michael Rogin⁴ and Carol Clover among others—and using Lott's formula "love and theft"⁵ as my cue to indicate the mutual imbrication and affective a-symmetry of their respective entanglements, I began to look at films like *Back to the Future*, *Forrest Gump* and *Pulp Fiction* (rather than *Birth of a Nation*, *The Jazz Singer* or *Gone with the Wind*) to track the strategies of performed failure in the face of an intractable, but also inevitable dialogue. What was helpful here was the long history of cross-racial mimicry and masquerade in music and popular culture, such as the notorious popularity of blackface minstrelsy or racial "passing" as depicted in the novels of Ralph Ellison or James Baldwin.

My hypothesis was that, for instance, the films of Robert Zemeckis (*Back to the Future* and *Forrest Gump*) enact quite elaborate, but also very hidden forms of "passing" (here whites for blacks, rather than the other way round, as in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*). By contrast, in the case of Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*, it makes more sense to see the film as a contemporary form of blackface minstrelsy, albeit so cleverly disguised that most critics missed it. What interested me was that these apparently so odious and discredited forms of disguise—whether over-elaborated or unmarked—served in the films in question not only a very specific psycho-subjective purpose (the stabilization of a post-Oedipal identity within the family formation), but also required peculiar cinematic and narrative poetics, most notably those of time-travel and chronological inversion, which in turn raised interesting questions as to the "ethics" of such time-travel or narrative loops. The ethics had to do, on the one hand, with what kind of agency the films ascribed to their characters, but on the other, the film allowed one to see—in the very failure to "represent" racial encounters other than in inverted, absurd or comic form—what it would take to have

a cross-racial dialogue in contemporary America that might actually “work.” Here, the double occupancy would be the way these mainstream or cult films take a first-order genre-reality and re-inscribe into it a second-order hypothetical reality, which stands to the first not as recto and verso, or each other’s mise-en-abyme, but as each other’s mimicking or “signifying” double.⁶

post-mortem, not post-modern

A third set of films that interested me, while tracking the cinematic forms of performativity that give missed encounters in history or intractable social conflicts a space for an impossible dialogue, were some of those recent works which either involve people who are there and not there, or who are already dead (*The Man Who Wasn't There*, *Eyes Wide Shut*, *American Beauty*, *The Sixth Sense*, *The Others*) or which feature protagonists with debilitating pathologies (for example, paranoia, schizophrenia, amnesia) who nonetheless function in remarkably effective ways, by possessing agency in parallel universes (*Forrest Gump*, again, but especially *Memento*, *Donnie Darko*, *Fight Club*, *Nurse Betty*). These films I call post-mortem films, to distinguish them from post-modern films, and to highlight yet another kind of performativity. How can the dead, the excluded, the non-persons of this world enter into the realm of the symbolic, these films seem to ask, and the answer is: through belief and fantasy. In the film *The Others*, two sets of occupants of a house think they are alive and have a claim on a house, which quite literally, is under double occupancy. What happens is not that each group tries to persuade the other of their existence, but rather each tries to get the other to believe in their existence, so that they can—via the belief of the other—sustain their own modes of being. The Nicole Kidman character and her daughters manage to convince the new owners that they are ghosts, in order to then claim that they are not dead: a situation which Slavoj Žižek, following Robert Pfaller, has called “interpassivity,”⁷ meaning that we rely on the belief of others in order to keep the faith ourselves, but which I prefer to see as an example of the “mutual interference in the internal affairs of the other,” in order to sustain the fragile and always ungrounded act of communication, based as it is on the contract of mutuality, or as linguists call it, the felicity conditions of successful communication. How fragile these felicity conditions are can be seen when two people are in love as portrayed, for instance, in the interspersed pillow-talk scenes in *Run Lola Run* where Lola asks Mannie how he knows that it is her that he loves and not someone else. Using a more psychoanalytic, Lacanian vocabulary, we could say that all intersubjectivity is a mutually validating fantasy, necessary to sustain our belief in reality, and falling in and out of love shows us how easily this reality can collapse, given that “love” is the name of a pact or a contract by which each partner agrees to believe in the fantasy that the other has of oneself.

What is remarkable about many of these post-mortem films is that they do not indicate the difference in register between fiction and reality, the dead and the living, the real partners and the imagined companions, those who know about their post-mortem status and those who don't. In other words, these films avoid the usual ways that signal "subjectivity" or "interiority" to the spectator (such as flashback, superimposition, aural cues) and instead maintain an unmarked diegetic space that manages to remove or make invisible the frame that would normally "distance" as well as "place" the spectator. Indeed, they carefully eschew any kind of "modernist aesthetics," such as *mise-en-abyme*, reflexivity or Brechtian devices, even of the kind used by Atom Egoyan, Wim Wenders or Richard Linklater, where one level of reality (usually signaled by specific moments of medium-within-medium: home movie, grainy video, surveillance footage, pictures taken from television) is allowed to comment on or frame another. This is because the post-mortem films have a fantasy frame, in the Žižekian sense, in that the fantasy sustains a reality which in turn protects us from the real, but which at the same time allows for successful intersubjectivity and communication, when this fantasy frame supports mutual imbrication/interference in each other's belief. That this can go badly wrong we have all seen in Michael Gondry/Charlie Kaufman's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, but I would like to illustrate it with two other examples, before making some concluding remarks.

The first example is Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, which for me is all about fantasy, or rather all about the devastating effect of having a fantasy frame and of not having a fantasy frame. It strikingly confirms Žižek's claim I just cited: that you have to have a fantasy (a "symptom") in order to function at all in everyday reality or in a human relationship; otherwise you would be overwhelmed by the Real. In this reading, *Eyes Wide Shut* would be the story of Bill Harford, played by Tom Cruise, a man who has no fantasy to sustain his (sense of) reality, in contrast to his wife, who has all kinds of "healthy" sexual fantasies to support her active role as caring mother and loving, attractive partner. Bill is thus the victim of other people's fantasies, or as Deleuze famously said: if you are living in someone else's dream, then you are *foutu*—lost, "done for." And so Bill Harford is, several times over, having to seek out the fantasies of others (where he promptly and abjectly loses himself)—be they those of his wife, those of the two women he meets, or those of the "enjoying" super-fathers (his "friend" Victor Ziegler as much as Sandor Szavost, the lewd, pimping costume lender). Bill, almost begging to be admitted to their fantasies, ends up in the most terrible forms of imprisonment at the masked orgy in the mansion of the Masonic Lodge. Kubrick makes the viewer aware of the "naked" violence that frames not just this fantasy enclosure, but all "institutionalized fantasy" as we know it from the entertainment industries and experience economies. It is a lesson also present in David Lynch's

post-mortem films like *Lost Highway* or *Mulholland Drive*, although Lynch has a more ambivalent estimation of the respective “ethics.” Not so for the stern moralist Kubrick: in *Eyes Wide Shut* violence and fantasy become the recto and verso of each other, outlining the twin boundaries of Deleuze’s control societies and their post-Oedipal identities.⁸ Violence and fantasy are equally “complete,” sealed worlds, neither promising freedom nor release, because they are as self-referential as they are self-policing.

The other example is Fatih Akin’s *Gegen die Wand*. What interests me in Akin’s film is not the ethnic in-between-ness or the cross-cultural musical interludes, but almost the opposite, namely the first half of the film, where multi-cultural loyalties play hardly a role, but which offers a perfect example of my post-mortem category. Both characters meet when they are, in some sense, already dead, having tried to commit suicide and found no reason to live, ejected as they are from their respective social symbolic. The two do not fall in love but enter into a contract to sustain their mutual fantasy-frames, thus letting us see what intersubjectivity beyond identity might look like: a very dangerous, but also potentially liberating state, which unravels precisely when one takes the fantasy for a reality and the mutually sustaining fiction collapses. The uncanny power of the first half of the film comes from not only *not* marking any difference between “Turkish” and “German” culture—thus forgoing the hyphenation I began with, which is indeed exceptional in the context of films about multi-cultural life—but also from showing how the non-marking of cultural difference and the non-marking of the fantasy-frame (here the “contract” that they do not love each other) are mutually interdependent. Therein lies the paradoxical hope, which the second half of the film has to take away again, falling back into a more conventional identity politics.

This hope is that the conditions of double occupancy that make up a subject’s identity formation, in a world of material inequality and seemingly intractable struggles over recognition and acceptance, can only be negotiated and overcome once each party perceives the other as a non-identical, non-mirroring double. Identity, rather than folding inward or backward through memory and self-presence, would then be wholly relational and unsecured. That is, constituted in two dimensions at once, no longer coded as subjective and objective, and no longer defined by inclusion or exclusion, and instead as a mode of being where each side exists in the space of the other—from double occupancy to mutual interference, as it were—defined as the very condition of selfhood, but also with the potential of cooperation and interdependence.

If films like *The Others*, *Eyes Wide Shut*, *Open Your Eyes* and *Gegen die Wand* are in this respect for me symptomatic films of the new post-realist ontologies, performing presence as post-mortem, and thematizing the consequences—positive and negative—of mutually interfering with, mutually sustaining and mutually authenticating each other, as both “ghosts” and “real,” both

actual and virtual at the same time, then cinema can indeed contribute to redefining the conditions of being European, that is to say, politically and socially responsible for each other, by constantly renewing what I would now call the felicity conditions of belief and trust, that is: of being each other's other: not mirroring the other in mis-cognition and endless deferrals of self-identity, but enabling the other to interfere in my own mirror image. That, it seems to me, is the best, but also perhaps the most difficult way of living our hyphenated and always already occupied identities.

notes

1. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).
2. Thomas Elsaesser, *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005).
3. Robert Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2004).
4. Michael Rogin, "Democracy and Burnt Cork: The End of Blackface, the Beginning of Civil Rights," *Representations* 46 (Spring 1994), 1–34.
5. Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Race and American Culture) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
6. Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).
7. Slavoj Žižek (2002) "The Interpassive Subject," <http://www.lacan.com/interpass.htm> (accessed May 24, 2007).
8. Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (Winter 1992), 3–7.

