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UNIVERSIDAD DE ZARAGOZA
Escuela de Doctorado

2021

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Tesis Doctoral Realizada por Andrés Bartolomé Leal
Dirigida por el Dr. Celestino Deleyto Alcalá

Universidad de Zaragoza
Enero 2021

Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana

Universidad Zaragoza

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

Introduction

In 2017, as part of its fall program, the *Cinémathèque Française* of Paris organized a month-long retrospective of Roman Polanski's work. Screenings, discussions panels and the presence of various distinguished speakers, including Polanski himself, who also commissioned a selection of classic films to be shown alongside his, were organized. Though it was certainly not the first time his films were showcased at the *Cinémathèque* or that he participated in some event in the institution—just the year before he had been invited to an exhibition on the history of film technique—it was the first time Polanski was the subject of a full retrospective there. The time was, however, not the most propitious for celebrations. The outpouring of accusations of sexual abuse and predatory behavior against Hollywood film producer Harvey Weinstein only a few weeks earlier had brought the public's attention back to Polanski's own charges of statutory rape from the 1970s, reigniting once again the age-old debates around the relationship between art and artist. In face of mounting unrest, Costa-Gavras, president of the *Cinémathèque* at the time, issued a statement asserting that the retrospective would go on as planned and that doing anything else would amount to "out-and-out censorship" (Kim Willsher 2017). The day of the opening, with Polanski set to personally attend the debut of his latest film, *D'après une histoire vraie* (2017), a demonstration was organized outside of the building by various French feminist groups, and reports and critical pieces on the events occupied many a page in national and international newspapers in the days that followed.

This thesis does not concern itself with resolving the problem of what to do with Polanski as a public figure, although it will at certain points necessarily take his status as

such into consideration. This determination stems primarily from my own inability to approach the issue in a way that does not merely re-enact already long-existing and widely-dissected arguments and positions. Admittedly, however, even today, three years later, the time remains as unpropitious as ever for a thesis on the cinema of Roman Polanski, which would seem to make its very writing look like something of a statement in itself. And there is a shade of truth to that impression. Though not my initial motivation in engaging with this task, part of what convinced me to stick with it was the conviction that artworks in general and films in particular are, for better or worse, always much more than their makers, and that, as soon they are conceived, made, released and exist in and as part of the world, they are and always be worthy of study and/or critique, maybe even enjoyment, regardless of what one personally thinks of those who created them. Once that is (somewhat) out of the way, let us return to Paris, five days after the protests.

This was the day set for Polanski to make his second appearance at the *Cinémathèque,* and this time he was to deliver a masterclass, undoubtedly the highlight of the event. Remarkably enough, *The Ghost Writer* (2010), rarely if ever counted amongst his best or most popular works, was the film chosen for screening before the discussion with the veteran auteur. Introducing the film, Frédéric Bonnaud, organizer of the event, explained the selection on three grounds. One, the film was a great illustration of Polanski's renowned cinematographic prowess and mastery of framing, camerawork and mise-en-scene. Two, it put contemporary, explicitly political matters front and center, not a common theme in his filmography. Three, dealing as it did with the life and fate of an exiled artist, the film seemed once again deliberately playing with the connections between his personal life and art. Predictably, in his comments after the screening, Polanski would only admit to wanting to make a good movie.

The reason I single out Bonnaud's statements here is because, though in general terms, they do delineate the two main analytical concerns through which Polanski's cinema is going to be considered in this thesis, namely the formal and the political. More than a question of whether or not they deal with some explicit political issue, as is the case of the Iraq War in *The Ghost Writer*, however, this thesis starts from the premise that any and all films are 'political'—even, some would say especially, when they deliberately try (to appear) not to be. This notion pertains not just to the presence of more or less hidden ideological messages and relations in otherwise apparently unassuming narratives, but also, and to return to Bonnaud, to the films' very form as well. Though this is far from a novel insight, the truth is that it has hardly been put to work on the interpretation of Polanski's cinema, whose stylistic flair and formal sophistication have been taken as either evidence of great individual artistry or, when subjected to close textual analysis, as 'expressionistic' devices meant to replicate and convey cinematically the state of mind and inner self of the characters. Without dismissing the 'politics' of individual experience and perception, but retaining the methodology of textual analysis, this thesis approaches the political question from a broader angle, in some ways the broadest possible, namely that of globalization. More specifically, my aim in what follows is to explore some of the ways in which the material and ideational transformations our societies have undergone in the last few decades, usually condensed under notions of globalization and transnationalism, have reverberated and been re-articulated on the cinematic arena: on what kinds of films are being made, what stories they tell and what their images look like. While the mobilization of Polanski as the central subject of such a study may appear somewhat counterintuitive, if only for the perceived lack of 'political' content in his films and his cinematic 'classicism,' removed as it is from the more readily evident products of the recent digital turn in the cinema, much of this introduction shall be devoted to

demonstrating, successfully I hope, his suitability for the task. In the process, this introduction will also set up the concept of 'space' as the central theoretical tool and organizing concern of this study, meant to connect globalization, transnationalism, cinema and Polanski in the way of not only offering a novel appraisal of the cinema of the director, one that is removed from the vicissitudes of his personal life and character, but also contributing, however modestly, to that most pressing collective task of attempting to account for what it is that has been going on in the world in these last few decades.

Author on the Move

Although, as suggested, this thesis will not use Polanski's personal life as a reading strategy, it feels inevitable to start with a certain appraisal of his biography considering its relevance for the public, journalistic and academic perception of his oeuvre. What follows is then a summary of the many accounts of Polanski's life and work published so far. It is both longer than usual for non-biographical auteur studies and shorter than what an overview of a sixty-year career would demand. In the context of my thesis, however, the following summary of his personal and cinematic trajectory aims mainly to serve as an initial contextualization of the particular segment of his work that this study aims to cover as well as to ground my later justification of him as the subject of this investigation.

Roman Polanski (his actual name being Rajmund Roman Thierry Polanski) was born in Paris on 18 August 1933 in the bosom of a Polish-Jewish émigré family. At the age of four, the rise of Nazism prompted his family to leave France and return to Poland, thinking it to be a safer place to be. By 1939 however, Krakow, where they were living at the time, was taken by the Germans and the 60,000 Jews living in the city were ghettoized in several neighborhoods separated from the city, only to be then gradually

sent to concentration and forced-labor camps. Roman, who escaped in the last minute, would spend most his childhood living with other families in the Polish countryside. The end of WWII and the establishment of a Communist government in the country allowed him to reunite with his father and resume his schooling. Already an adolescent, he enrolled in the in the Krakow school of arts and started acting in radio shows and theatre.

It was in fact through acting that Polanski first became involved in cinema, appearing in a number of films by young up-and-coming Polish directors, including Andrzej Wajda's 1955 influential debut *A Generation*. By the time of the film's release, Polanski was already enrolled in the Łódź National Film School, founded only six years earlier as part of the nationalization of the film industry and alma mater of filmmakers like Andrezj Munk, Kazimierz Kutz and Wajda himself. Polanski would direct nine short films during his time at the school, most of them exercises in style built around absurdist and violent storylines with more or less open connections to the socio-cultural climate of the country. While quite simple narratively speaking, these shorts already evidenced signs of a sharpening cinematic language built on skillful framing and editing techniques, visual metaphors, expressionist lighting and various cultural references.

Although he never completed his education at Łódź, it was not long before Polanski became part of one of the most prestigious production crews in the country, Kamera, which gave him the personal and technical means to develop his first feature film, *Knife in the Water*. Several rewritings of the script had to be made for the film to pass the Ministry of Culture's censors, who would not approve a film with not enough "social commitment" (Polanski 1984, 173). The film, a visually rich, erotically charged, slow-burning story of three characters sharing a tense boat ride during a summer day, was finally released in Poland in 1962 to a cold public and institutional reception. In the West, however, the film became a hit in the blooming art cinema circles thanks to its intricate

style, jazzy score, an undertone of social critique and the 'exotic' tales about Soviet censorship that surrounded its production. The film would go on to win the Critics' Prize at the 1962 Venice Film Festival, was nominated for Best Foreign Language film at the 1963 Oscars and featured on the cover of an issue of Time magazine devoted to international cinema. All this, together with his own worldly aspirations, made Polanski decide to leave Poland and go West.

Polanski's first stop was Paris, where he participated in the collaborative film *Les plus belle escroqueries du monde* (1964) with the likes of Claude Chabrol and Jean-Luc Godard. Unable to find financing to make his own film, Polanski moved again, this time to London, where the input of Hollywood money made the prospect of finding backers more plausible. His period in the UK would prove one of the most productive of his career, resulting in the making of three films in three years: *Repulsion* (1965), a female-led psychological thriller located in the Swinging London of the 60s; *Cul-de-sac* (1966), a 'Beckettian' take on the gangster movie; and *The Fearless Vampire Killers* (1967), a parodic homage to the splashy horror films made by Hammer Productions. Already established as a proficient genre director, Polanski was then courted by Paramount's executive producer Robert Evans, who offered him to direct the adaptation of Ira Levin's bestselling horror novel *Rosemary's Baby*. The film, a female-centered urban psychological horror with fantastic undertones, was a critical and commercial smash in 1969, turning Polanski into one of New Hollywood's brightest young stars. The decade would however end for him (and the whole Western popular culture) on a tragic note with the infamous murder of his wife, actress Sharon Tate, and eight other people by the Manson cult, prompting his move to Europe away from the media frenzy that the event generated.

Polanski's production in the 1970s was, if possible, even more eclectic, beginning with a dry, naturalistic adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in 1971 made in Britain and followed by *What?* (1972), a lighthearted sexual comedy placed in an Italian villa. Then in 1973, Evans reached out to Polanski again, this time pitching him Robert Towne's screenplay *Chinatown*, a detective story loosely based on the building of Los Angeles's Aqueduct system at the beginning of the century. Articulated in the form of a Technicolor Hollywood neo-noir, *Chinatown* (1974) turned again into a big success that, among other accolades, was nominated for eleven Academy Awards, yet winning only one for Best Original Screenplay. Right after finishing his next film, *The Tenant* (1976), a Parisian re-writing of the motifs in *Repulsion*, another major scandal engulfed Polanski when he was charged with drugging and raping a minor during a private photo-shoot for *Vogue* magazine. Facing the possibility of a 50-year conviction, Polanski fled the US and returned to France. There, Polanski's stature as celebrated, homecoming auteur seemed to outweigh any controversy, allowing him to make what would become the most expensive production in French film history until then. Simply titled *Tess* (1979), Polanski's exuberant adaptation of Thomas Hardy's 1892 novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* became one his most acclaimed films and, seen retrospectively, the beginning of a 'realistic' turn in his narrative and aesthetic approach which would pervade most of his later output.

Despite the success of *Tess*, it would take seven years for him to project and make his next film, the self-explanatorily titled *Pirates* (1986), which would result in the biggest flop of his career. Between this and his return to prestige with *The Pianist* in 2002, Polanski would make four films in the 80's and 90's, all them shot and/or produced transnationally in Europe and all of them generic hybrids of some sort: *Frantic* (1988), a take on Hitchcock's 'wrong man' motif; *Bitter Moon* (1992), a torrid love story gone

horribly sour; *Death and The Maiden* (1994), a spatially self-contained pyscho-political thriller; and *The Ninth Gate* (1999), a mildly parodic return to horror and the fantastic. Despite the presence of high-caliber stars and decent production values, none of the films was particularly celebrated by either critics or audiences, with all of them except *The Ninth Gate* bringing losses to their producers. [1]

        The Pianist, arguably the most straightforward of his films to date, turned all that around. Not only an immense commercial success, the Holocaust survival story won, among others, the Palme D'Or at Cannes and three Academy Awards, including Best Director. Back in the pantheon of European filmmakers, but still unable to return to the States, Polanski has in the last two decades found a welcoming niche in the continent's co-production and distribution circuit. In this time, he has shot six films to relatively consistent reception: *Oliver Twist* (2005), *The Ghost Writer* (2010), *Carnage* (2011), *La Vénus à la fourrure* (2013), *D'après une histoire vraie* (2017) and *J'accuse* (2019). The controversy around his figure, however, has not waned. In 2009, during the post-production and release of *The Ghost Writer*, Polanski was put under house arrest for months, confronting the possibility of an extradition to the US, where he is still wanted for trial. More recently, the social media outcry generated by his appointment as president of the Jury of the 2017 Cesar awards ended up with his dropping out of the ceremony and the organization of a retrospective on his career that same year at the *Cinémathèque Française* gave way, as we have seen, to a heated demonstration against the event. Add to this the recent outburst in sexual harassment accusations all over the Western cinematic world and Polanski's name and figure, more than his films, are very likely to remain under the public limelight for the near future.

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[1] Unless stated otherwise, the production and financial data referenced has been retrieved from the webpages Internet Movie Data Base (http://www.imdb.com) and Box Office Mojo (http://www.boxofficemojo.com/).

The Name Above the Title

Polanski's sixty-year trajectory seems too much to digest at once, offering at first sight very few consistent points of entrance. Among those interested in his cinematic merits, one of the most repeated mantras is that Polanski is a director whose work resists easy classifications. Ewa Mazierska has called him an "elusive filmmaker" (2007, 1) and John Orr, "a law unto himself" (2006, 5). And there are good reasons for such statements. After all, it is difficult to imagine films like the absurdist, almost plotless affair of *Cul-de-Sac*, the meticulous revamping of Hollywood film noir in *Chinatown* and the postmodern erotic pastiche of *Bitter Moon* as part of the work of the same director. A deeper look into his filmography moreover reveals that his works not only differ in terms of genre, themes and even style, but they also do so in terms of production, personnel, budget, nationality and scope. What is, then, a Polanski film? The question has lingered for years and Polanski's own comments on his work have not helped to answer it. Reluctant to appear in public and give interviews except when contractually required, Mark Cousins (2006) relates, he has consistently avoided explaining the reasoning or meaning behind his films, providing instead mechanic and inconsistent responses to the questions posed by journalists and critics.

Taking this into consideration, it is not surprising that many of those looking for a unifying narrative holding his filmography together have resorted to his public and notorious biography for answers. Holocaust survivor, tragic widower, sexual felon and perennial fugitive, there is plenty of material in his life to search out in his work; and his films, not devoid of violent and sexual overtones, have proven fertile grounds for such connections. As of today, at least six biography-centered works (Thomas Kiernan 1980; Barbara Leaming 1982; John Parker 1995; Denis Meikle 2006; Cristopher Sandford 2009; Julia Ain-Krupa 2009) and Polanski's own autobiography (1984) have been

published, this last one to notable editorial success and re-edited with a new epilogue in 2017. The relationship between his life and art has also been the subject of three documentaries (Marina Zenovich, 2008; 2012; Laurent Bouzerau, 2011) and even a feature film titled *Polanski: Unauthorized* (Damian Chapa, 2009). All this, along with the periodic surfacing of stories about his personal life in the media, has made it almost impossible for the general public to see his films and career in a different light. In fact, up until the first decade of the 2000s, that is, more than forty years after his feature debut, only two in-depth analyses of his works had been published in English: the first, a short pocket companion written by Ivan Butler in 1970, and the second, more conscientious and critically engaged, by Virginia Wright-Wexman in 1985. In the latter, Wexman convincingly characterized Polanski's output until *Tess* as that of a "modernist," most notably for its consistent attack on the relation between film and the spectator. Meanwhile, alternative readings of his work were relegated to single-text studies of particular films, mainly *Repulsion*, *Rosemary's Baby* and *Chinatown*, generally approaching them from generic or psychoanalytic perspectives.

Around ten years ago, however, the trend started to change. Stimulated, I would argue, by the global success of *The Pianist*, two academic monographs (James Morrison 2007; Ewa Mazierska 2007) and an edited collection of essays (John Orr and Elzbieta Ostrowska 2006) were published in the short span of two years. Despite their different approaches and theoretical premises, all three works were consistent in their attempt to take the analysis of Polanski's oeuvre away from the vicissitudes of his personal life and into the realm of the purely cinematographic. More or less directly, these works undertook the ultimate task of defining the auteur 'persona' of Roman Polanski; that is, that aesthetic and critical profile collectively built by film critics and scholars out of the recurrent formal and thematic motifs found throughout the work of a filmmaker and according to

which his or her work is considered and interpreted. In the case of Polanski, as the works by Wright Wexman (1985), Mazierska (2007), Morrison (2007) and more recently Davide Caputo (2012) tell us, these recurrent motifs include, to name a few, a penchant for violent or psychologically distressing themes, a keen interest in the alienation and victimization of outsiders and/or women (sometimes embodied in the same character), a consistent discrediting of modern institutions and power structures, an anti-essentialist approach to sexual, ethnic and national identities and, above all, a bleak, emotionally and politically detached view of human nature and relations. In formal terms, his style has been characterized by a notable technical prowess and visual sophistication, a tendency to rework aesthetic and cinematic clichés, particularly genres, a consistent exploitation of enclosed, claustrophobic settings and a recurrent use of certain imagery, symbols and locations—such as glasses, knives, closets, mirrors, apartments or the sea. Beyond the particulars, the image these texts have produced of Polanski as an auteur is that of an eclectic, meticulous and maverick filmmaker—someone able to move and adapt to different cultural and cinematic milieus without compromising his personal style, ideas or worldview in the process.

This briefly delineated critical trajectory begs the next question: given that, together, these works may have answered successfully the auteur 'question' of Polanski's cinema, is there a reason for yet another study of his oeuvre? And, from a different perspective, can the films of a director, auteur or not, be studied together in search of something more than his creative mark, artistic identity or particular view of the world? My aim in what follows is to answer both questions affirmatively. After all, and just like any other theory or reading strategy, the auteur approach brings its own blind spots and limitations to the reading of texts, as many academic and critical debates have shown (see,

for instance, Barry Keith Grant 2008). To clarify, my aim is not to question the validity of auteur approaches to film in general or to problematize the specific image of Polanski they have produced. Neither do I endeavor, in the following pages, to approach his films as 'authorless' products, unmediated expressions of the dominant ideology of the moment and whose real manufacturers are simply the 'social forces' in the abstract. Altogether denying the position, agency and responsibility that particular individuals hold in the shaping of a work of art would be naïve, if not 'politically' irresponsible. My approach in this study is more modest. It aims to retain a focus on Polanski, but not as a demiurgic figure to be traced and unveiled film after film. Rather, in my analyses, Polanski features as an already given aesthetic and industrial body; a body of work with certain recurrent textual motifs or "structures," as Peter Wollen (2013 [1972]) would call them, and a certain position within the cinematic relations of production. Like Wollen, this study will treat the auteur not as an end in itself, but as a starting point, a critical bedrock or, in his own words, a "catalyst" (2013 [1972], 145) for the gradual decoding of the film text. In other words, in my analyses, I will not be looking *for*, but *from* and eventually *beyond* Polanski.

In trying to look *beyond* Polanski, this study will build on the widely accepted idea that works of art are not only windows to the particular psyches, ideologies and/or lives of those involved in their making, but also, integral elements of their surrounding social realities and, thus, suitable platforms from which to observe, decode and influence those same realities. As Paul Willemen reminds us, separating cultural representations from social 'fact' is only a "methodological" move, not a "real" one; cultural and artistic representations are themselves, and always, part of the social fabric of a time and place (2010, 249). While there are various possible social 'facts' to explore *from* Polanski's

cinema—gender relations strike me as the most glaring one—, my study will zero in on those which we nowadays subsume under the notion of 'globalization.'

Now, fully defining what globalization is and what it is not is a complicated endeavor that falls out of the limits of this research. Dozens, if not hundreds, of academic books, papers, conferences and talks are devoted to it every year with the paradoxical effect of adding to the scope and complexity of the very notion they aim to delimit. On the whole, however, scholarly discourse on globalization tends to revolve around a few, rather consistent, lines of inquiry. These include worldwide economic integration, geopolitical interdependence, technological interconnectedness, border-crossing mobilities, cultural hybridization and a new international legal paradigm centered on citizen and human rights. Rather commonly as well, these developments are related to the transformation, and erosion, of the nation-state as the basic paradigm of sociopolitical organization and interaction, and with the emergence of multiple sub-, supra- and especially trans-national alternatives. All in all, and to put it in Doreen Massey's eloquent writing, we can begin by seeing globalization as a generalized "stretching out of the geography of social relations" (1997, 7). But it is not only through conscientious scholarly work that we collectively try to make sense of globalization. As social relations spill beyond our everyday, tangible realities, cultural production and consumption become even more central to our understanding of the world 'out there.' If only for the images of other places and peoples they disseminate, media, art and cultural objects in general contribute heavily to where we locate ourselves and others. At the same time, mobile cultural objects act themselves as vehicles for multifarious relations and exchanges across the globe, both material and psychological, becoming thus active participants in the factuality of globalization and apposite instances where to start to decode it.

Scholarship on film in particular has been for the last two decades attempting to find the most appropriate ways to assess all these changes under the consensus that cinema is involved in globalization at various levels. Film historians point out, for instance, that the film industry and Hollywood in particular has been at the forefront of different forms of internationalization for more than a century, moving workers, equipment, capital and obviously movies all over the world since the medium's very inception. As a result of all these mobilities, a series of extensive personal, cultural, institutional and economic networks have emerged, with international film festivals functioning as pivotal nodes. At the same time, films themselves, while long removed from the top of the cultural food chain, remain loci of wide-ranging economic, social and cultural interactions with important repercussions for the shaping of 'the global.' In their planetary circulation and 'realism effect,' filmic representations provide crucial building blocks with which many of us construct our 'ways of thinking' of and 'ways of being' in an increasingly vast social world. What we see in films has the potential to determine something as seemingly banal as where and when we go on vacation, but also something as serious as where, and how, we go to war (Paul Virilio 1989).

Film practices, narratives and aesthetics have also changed and adapted in parallel to the changes brought by the 'stretching out' of the social world. The emergence of a global film market, for one, has inevitably affected the discourses of films, as their representations now need to transcend all kinds of boundaries, attract global consumers and compete in a culturally heterogeneous film landscape. In this context, the historical tendency of cinema to cross territorial and cultural borders has intensified to unprecedented levels, making it more and more difficult to consider any particular film practice or text today as strictly 'national.' Nowadays, characters, narratives and filmic objects in general hardly ever 'stay put,' with mobility becoming a prime ethos of

contemporary cinema. Of course, this mobility is not random, even, equal or necessarily fair as it remains determined by the interplay of forces, hierarchies and powers conceptually and materially not dissimilar to those that determine human and non-human movements in other areas of social, economic and cultural life. Cinema, however, seems to always find a way. If it is true that Hollywood, in its new global conglomerate, multi-platform, copyright-enforcing avatar (Virginia Crisp 2015), retains the upper hand in determining what kinds of images and stories about the world we are faced with, it is also true that many more 'dialects' of cinema are generally available today than in any other period in history. And this without mentioning that the production and consumption of movies, not to mention other audiovisual media, has been globally on the rise for years.[2]

All in all, we can contend that cinema as an artistic manifestation, a medium, a cultural object and an institution can, and does, simultaneously open and close, expand and contain, the world unfolding around us; that contemporary cinema, as Mark Shiel writes, not only "*reflects*," but also "*effects*" globalization; and that, as he concludes: "films *are* globalization, not its after-effects" (2001, 11, his emphases). Seen in this light, filmic texts and practices turn into most exciting sites where to investigate the different dynamics and discourses shaping an increasingly global world, and to the understanding of that overarching, multi-layered and seemingly ungraspable social and discursive phenomenon we call 'globalization.'

With all this in mind, the aim of this thesis is to explore the ways in which Polanski's cinema has heralded, channeled and mediated the changes and challenges brought about by the onset of globalization. Thus, this work aims to not only provide a novel perspective with which to complement the scholarly literature on Polanski's work but also, to open a window into a particularly turbulent and complex period in

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[2] For a detailed account of the different trends in global film production and theatrical consumption, see also the Unesco Institute for Statistics: http://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/feature-films-and-cinema-data.

contemporary history and into some of the social, political, cultural and specifically cinematic reverberations it has engendered. Before addressing the specific textual corpus of my study, I will reflect upon Polanski's suitability as an object of a study of this sort and delineate the main theoretical and analytical lenses through which his cinema will be approached in search for symptoms of, and responses to, our global moment.

Why Polanski?

Maybe due to what Mazierska has termed the "autobiographical effect" (2007, 7-23) of his cinema; to the markedly individualized, subject-centered stories they tend to relate; and to his own unwillingness to discuss such matters when interviewed, the truth is that extensive analyses of Polanski's cinema have only sporadically raised the issue of the social or the political in his films. *Knife in the Water* stands as the proverbial exception in this regard, being usually addressed in light of its "thinly veiled" critique of the cultural repression and ideological corruption reigning in the communist Poland of the sixties (Caputo 2012, 18). Yet again here, whatever socio-political or historical meanings are found in the film treated as extensions of Polanski's personal experience and thinking— namely his declared antipathy towards communist ideology, which led to his departure from the country only a year later after the film's release. Looking at the rest of his filmography, Morrison and Mazierska do offer illuminating accounts on the presence of issues like power, gender, ethnicity, religion and nationalism throughout his work, but both remain invested in unearthing the filmmaker's personal perspective on them and not the overall social conditions, relations and conflicts to which the films, and Polanski, were responding.

There are other reasons to see Polanski's cinema as an afterthought for the exploration of such inquiries. For one, his overall production clearly lacks the open social

or political investment of the works of more usual suspects like, say, Ken Loach, Costa-Gavras, the Dardenne brothers or Abbas Kiarostami. Compared to their usual hard-hitting themes and stark, unobtrusive visual styles, Polanski's films may appear disengaged, lavish and even self-indulgent, more committed with the cinematically aesthetic than with the socially 'realistic.' Polanski's divisive personal history also contributes to making his works a somewhat troublesome place where to look for social commentary or analyses, let alone lessons. My own experience reading, researching and speaking on his works has shown me how uneasy many people feel regarding his figure, and more than once have I been (productively) confronted with the moral dilemmas underlying my interest in his works.

Finally, and aside from the unshakable shadow of his biography, there are in my view also 'theoretical' and 'methodological' reasons why film scholars have tended to bypass his works as socially resounding. In particular, film and cultural studies' penchant to frame cinematic social commentary in national terms has been at odds with the geographical and cultural mobility that has come to define both his career and the content of his films. This difficulty in framing his works, their narratives, characters and aesthetics within the social and cultural history of a particular country, I would argue, has contributed to the interpretation of the discourses of his films as the product of his unique trajectory as an individual and creator.

Given the above, the inevitable question to ask at this point would be, why Polanski? At first sight, his production and career seem to offer more obstacles than advantages for the study of cinema's relationship with the social world. As I stated above, my aim with this work is to explore the ways in which Polanski's films have "heralded, channeled and mediated" the effects and challenges brought about by globalization to both the social and the cinematic. It is with this aim in mind that those 'structures' that

we associate with the name of Polanski come into significance for my study. Specifically, in my mind, two features of his cinema place it as a significant subject for the study of the cinema of globalization.

The first of these features refers to Polanski's status as a transnational filmmaker and of his films as transnational artifacts. The term "transnational" is a popular yet highly debated one in film studies today and it is easy to fall into problematic generalizations if we do not specify what we mean when we use it (Mette Hjort 2009; William Brown 2009). While most theorists coincide in seeing in the concept of the transnational a way out of the limitations of national, or nationalistic, approaches to filmic texts and practices in an era of increased global relations and exchanges, the consensus goes little further (see Austin Fisher and Iain Robert Smith 2016). In order then not to get "Lost in Transnation," as Brown (2009) aptly titles his essay on the subject, or to void the concept of any critical resonance, a certain degree of theoretical clarification must nowadays accompany each iteration of the 'transnational.' Thus, in my use of the term, and for now, the transnational label aims to highlight and open up for later analysis two particular, yet interrelated, facets of Polanski's cinema. The first refers to what we could call the *industry* side of his career and, more precisely, the location of his figure and his films within it. At the most fundamental level, Polanski's transnational status points to the fact that, whether by choice or by necessity, his films have been made, funded, shot, distributed and exhibited in a range of national and transnational contexts. At each end of the spectrum we may find Polanski's essentially all-Polish debut *Knife in the Water*, made within the context of a fully nationalized film industry, and the exemplary transnational *The Pianist*, a three-language, sixteen-company, French-Polish-German-British co-production, with a US American (Adrien Brody) in the leading role and clearly conceived for a global audience. This contrast in itself would offer enough grounds to guide a study of, say, the

evolution of the auteur film market in the last sixty years – a subject already addressed in Seung-Hoon Jeong and Jeremi Szaniawski's edited collection *The Global Auteur* (2016). Yet what interests me about the industry dimension of Polanski's output is the ways it may determine, interact, or interfere with a second level of transnationalism at play in his cinema: the textual.

When referring to *textual* transnationalism, theorists tend to discuss films that in their contents and/or forms put in dialogue, challenge or reflect upon various national cultures and identities—including cinematic ones. As authors like Deborah Shaw (2013) have argued, this may be done in terms of modes of narration, genres, styles, locations, characters or the stories themselves. Moreover, the transnational*ity* of these aspects may be more or less prominent for the film's development and meaning, so that a film text may be, in Hjort's words, more or less "markedly" transnational (2009). A glance at Polanski's production throughout the years reveals that his films consistently, and markedly, touch many of those bases. As mentioned above, outsiders, migrants, travelers and tourists are particularly recurrent characterological tropes in his films and it is difficult to find one in which mobility, displacement and the encounter with some type of 'other' do not play a significant narrative role. Although in his earlier output it was individual characters that carried most of the transnational 'load' of his films, as is the case with *Repulsion*, *Cul-de-Sac, The Fearless Vampire Killers*, *What?* and *The Tenant*, later ones, like *Pirates*, *Frantic*, *Death and the Maiden*, *The Pianist* and *The Ghost Writer* are openly imbued with questions of international power relations and wars, national and transnational politics, human rights and different forms of global finances. In this light, if Polanski's films may be seen, above all, as films *about* transnationalism, in much of his later output they have become examples of what Tom Zaniello calls a "cinema of globalization" (2007).

But Polanski's films are also transnational in their formal and conceptual engagement with aesthetic traditions from around the (Western) world, ranging from European 'high' culture and its various cinematic new waves, to the 'popular' culture and the entertainment and narrative-driven cinematic style usually associated with Hollywood. Throughout the years, names as varied as Shakespeare, Vermeer, Kafka, Munk, Beckett, Antonioni, Bergman, Godard, Hardy, Welles, Hitchcock, Kubrick and Spielberg have come up in analyses of Polanski's works, revealing the breadth of cultural connections and references that his cinema is able to evoke. With time, it is true, his films have progressively moved towards the more financially secure bounds of narrative logic and aesthetic realism, but it is still easy to find in his later output instances or moments of formal experimentation and cinematic rupture clashing with the demands of the plot.

If transnationalism is, as many argue, the general condition of the world's cinema and society within globalization, Polanski's career seems to offer an embodiment of most of the meanings we associate with the concept. Although he does not use the term, Morrison begins his book on Polanski with a somewhat similar remark, characterizing his trajectory as "one of the most representative of the dispersions, crises, victories, undoings, rehabilitations, and fissures of international cinema in the last fifty years" (2007, 1). Of course, this does, or should, not mean that his career can be taken as epitomizing *all* of the world's cinema, not even the type we may readily call transnational. As much as generalizations might be "an inevitable cultural process" (Colin MacCabe 1992, xiv), we should be very wary of the kind of arguments we produce from the particular information we have at our disposal. As we know, cinematic transnationalism may take many shapes, and Polanski's brand in particular, if not Eurocentric, is certainly Euro*centered*. Not only have all his films been made, ever since leaving Poland, from within a wholly Western socio-economic and cinematic context; they also take place mostly in Western settings,

tend to deal with the lives of Western, white and bourgeois characters and consistently resort to Anglo-European history and cultural referents for their stories and aesthetics. Even a film like *Death and the Maiden*, based on a Chilean play and whose diegesis is explicitly located in South America, was Westernized in almost every possible aspect of its production: it was funded by European and US companies, filmed completely in French and Spanish locations and studios, shot in English and used US American and British actors.

Moreover, despite his nomadic and even exilic status, Polanski himself hardly fits the bill of the marginal, dissident or dispossessed figure Hamid Naficy wanted to eulogize when he developed the concept of the "transnational" or "accented" filmmaker (1996; 2001). Contrary to most of the displaced directors whose lives and trajectories Naficy explores, Polanski has enjoyed a rather privileged career as a transnational filmmaker: he was educated in the most prestigious film academy in the whole Soviet bloc, experienced highly successful stints both in Western Europe and Hollywood in the 60s and 70s, and since his return to the continent he has been able to finance and sell his projects all over the world with relative ease—even when at a monetary loss. All this does not make his films necessarily less deserving of critical investigation, but it should affect the kind of social inferences or diagnosis we make out of their analyses. Polanski's, even if exemplary in many respects, is just one of the many guises that transnational cinema may acquire in this day and age.

The second 'structure' my thesis will build upon is the prominent role that space, social, geographical and cinematic, plays in the construction and development of his films. In light of contemporary film theory, with which I will engage more extensively in the following chapter, arguing that the cinema of a certain director is particularly 'spatial' could sound tautologous. If only for their eminently visual nature, all filmic

representations entail the articulation of certain spaces and spatial codes—on and off-screen, foreground and background, inside and outside, close and far and so on. Formally speaking, these spaces and codes are not only necessary to accommodate character and narratives demands—in the cases in which such functions are required—but are also essential for the spectator's placement, engagement with and understanding of the text as a whole. In this sense, theorists like Mary Ann Doane (1980), Stephen Heath (1981) and Mark Garret Cooper (2002), among others, have found in the concept of space the main connecting thread between the multiple levels of representation, meaning, interpellation and discourse at which all cinema operates.

All things considered, however, it is undeniable for anyone more or less accustomed to watching films that there are certain filmic texts and the work of certain filmmakers in which the aesthetic, narrative and symbolic dimensions of the spaces they deploy and employ become particularly prominent. Names like Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Orson Welles, Eric Rohmer, Robert Bresson, Chris Marker, Michael Snow, Michelangelo Antonioni, Alain Resnais, Stanley Kubrick, Jean-Luc Godard, Agnes Varda, Andrei Tarkovsky, Theo Angelopoulos or Wong Kar Wai may come to mind. In their filmic (and sometimes written) works, we can find some of the most unique and revealing illustrations of the possibilities and dilemmas of the cinematic practice of space. Spatially speaking, their films are significant not only, or always, for their ability to capture cinematically the essence, topography or social dynamics of a concrete place like a village, a landscape or a city, but also, for their critical exploration of cinema's very intervention in space and for their capacity to redefine what it is that space can be, and mean, for cinema and its spectators.

This study is built on the conviction that, throughout his extended transnational career, Polanski's oeuvre has come to occupy a place in the above list as another stepping-

stone in the historical reworking and reframing of the concept and aesthetics of cinematic space. Critics of Polanski's works have rarely disregarded his films' construction of space in the development of their analysis and arguments and the subtitle of Orr and Ostrowska's 2006, edited collection on Polanski, *Dark Spaces of the World*, already hints at it as one of the defining characteristics of his cinema (although the volume itself deals with many different aspects). In the foreword to that volume, critic Mark Cousins, echoing a rather popular sentiment, celebrates Polanski as "quite simply the master" of the film studio and the "unified, enclosed […] claustrophobic space," and laments the "unconvincing" feel that his filming in the open brought to *The Pianist* (2006, 3). Although Cousins certainly has a point, in my own viewing and reviewing of his films, Polanski's filmography has proven much more spatially rich, dense and even contradictory than he concedes. There are of course numerous and remarkable instances of oppressive interior locations, dominated by what Cousins calls "a fourth wall aesthetic" (2006), usually tied to the experience of a secluded character, but they hardly stand on their own. What are we to make, for example, of the eerie pastoral landscapes of *Macbeth* and *Tess*, the vast, tranquil lakes engulfing the boat of *Knife in the Water*, the anonymous and bottomless Parisian streets of *Frantic*, the violent and menacing coastlines of *Death and the Maiden* and *The Ghost Writer* and the deserted Warsaw ruins of *The Pianist*?

Looking at other analyses of Polanski's work, even the spaces of prototypically 'claustrophobic' films have given enough room for different and differing interpretations. Looking at the tense dynamic between characters and space in *Repulsion*, for instance, Brown reads the decrepit London streets and apartment of the film as an extension, or "spatialization," of the protagonist's body and inner being, to the point that her inside and outside worlds end up sharing an "equal ontological status" (2015, 63-65). Mazierska, for her part, finds the protagonist's psychosis intensified by her alienation from a messy,

noisy and assertive urban ecosystem she is unable to cope with (2007, 74). Well-grounded as they are, there is no reason, I think, to favor any of these two readings. Rather, I would argue that the film consciously relies on the coexistence of both as a way to reflect on the unstable and dialogical relations that humans—their identities, bodies, trajectories and lives—maintain with the spaces they inhabit and imagine. Most of Polanski's films offer the grounds for equally multisided readings of their articulation of space, and it is often the case that their narratives and aesthetics are precisely built around conflicting perceptions and experiences of a particular place, be it a landscape, a city, a house, a character's body, a country, or even the whole world. Instead of constructing those spaces and places as decidedly open or closed, private or public, safe or dangerous, single or multiple, physical or psychological, national or global, Polanski's films tend to embrace and exploit the personal and collective anxieties that emerge from their complex and ambivalent nature.

My interest in Polanski's articulation of space is, however, not reduced to its visual richness or ontological ambiguity. As arguably the most essential component of the overall form and aesthetics of film, cinematic space is also strong bearer of the traces of the different cultural traditions, systems and ideologies of which a movie participates. It is in great part, and of 'formal' necessity, through its treatment of space that cinema is able to compress and encode a vast, complex and heterogeneous social world and make it fit within the limits of a screen. Concomitantly, it is also through space that film suggests the medium's very own limitations to represent this world and the underlying discourses through which this world is conceived and imaged. We need only to think of landmark films like *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920), *Touch of Evil* (Welles, 1958), *A Clockwork Orange* (Kubrick, 1971), *Paris, Texas* (Wim Wenders, 1984), *The Matrix* (Lana and Lilly Watchowski, 1999) or *Babel* (Alejandro González

Iñárritu, 2006) to see to what extent the cinematic articulation of space may bespeak the social, cultural, political and geographical dynamics of a certain time and place. Increasingly sensitive to this fact, film theory has in the last few years turned to disciplines like geography, sociology, anthropology or architecture for theoretical and analytical tools with which to grasp the social dimension of cinematic space. This ongoing interdisciplinary exchange has not only favored a new critical understanding of the spatiality of film language but also opened new avenues for the exploration of the complex relation between cultural texts and the social (Shiel 2001, 5-6).

With all this in mind, I will argue that reading closely into the formal and narrative articulations of space in Polanski's transnational production we may find not only his authorial mark, a projection of the psychological state of a particular character, or visual enunciation of the power relations at play in a given scene. As I aim to demonstrate, close analyses of space in Polanski's films can also offer illuminating insights into the various socio-political, economic and cultural dynamics shaping an increasingly global and transnational social world and into how cinema has mediated them. Thus, while attentive to production values, characters, narrative arcs and the use of other formal devices, this study will be particularly alert to the many ways in which Polanski's transnational films construct and enunciate cinematic space and try to align such configurations with spatial theories coming from other disciplines of the social sciences and humanities attempting to make sense of globalization.

At a time in which the spaces we inhabit and imagine are changing so drastically—stretching yes, but also compressing, connecting, overlapping, fragmenting, collapsing, disappearing—filmic representations, in their global reach, cultural relevance and mimetic capacities, seem all the more powerful, illuminating and in demand of spatial exploration. In this framework, Polanski's markedly transnational production and the rich

and suggestive treatment space receives in his films place his cinema as a most interesting object for the development of such investigations.

A Geopolitical Cycle

Globalization, transnationalism and space are thus the main conceptual, theoretical and analytical frameworks I will mobilize in my analyses of Polanski's works. Considering the development of globalization as the socio-historical framework in which I want to situate my study, my analyses will be dedicated to a rather clear-cut segment of Polanski's almost sixty-year production. Specifically, the main textual corpus of this work centers on what many now call his 'post-Hollywood period' and, more precisely, on seven of the eight films he directed between *Frantic*, released in 1988, months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, and *Carnage*, released in 2011 in the middle of the aftermath of the 2008 global economic crisis. These two films, separated by a 23-year span, mark the primary social, historical, cultural and cinematic perimeter of my study.

I am aware that focusing on such a late segment of his career leaves a great deal of his production out of the picture and goes somewhat against the grain of the popular, journalistic and scholarly interest in Polanski's work, much more celebratory of his earlier output. Although I cannot but agree with many of their arguments, at least part of the motivation behind my selection resides in the attempt to counteract the tendency to regard Polanski's post-Hollywood period as a mere, for some forgettable, appendix to his glorious 60s and 70s work. More decisive for my study, however, is the fact that the releases of *Frantic* and *Carnage* demarcate what I see as a crucial epoch between two major events in the trajectory of neo-liberal capitalism as the world's economic system, as well as the latest of those major "cultural revolutions" which Fredric Jameson deemed to be the ultimate object of critical cultural analysis (2002, 81-84)—pre-COVID 19 at

least. Incidentally, the two world-changing events framing this revolution also have what Henri Lefebvre (1991 [1974]) seminally called the "production of space" at their center; one in the form of capitalism's geopolitical expansion over Eastern Europe, and the other, in the form of the housing and mortgage bubble that exploded globally in September 2008 with the fall of Lehman Brothers' investment bank.

But these films share more than a suggestive historical location and a relative unpopularity among critics and scholars. This segment of Polanski's work also displays a series of readily noticeable industrial and aesthetic consistencies and permutations which beg to be approached together. For a start, this period is significant within the whole of Polanski's output in that it signals his definitive immersion in the then-emerging, now consolidated, always evolving, European transnational co-production market. With *Frantic* marking his last US major production, Polanski's output since then offers one of the most complete indexes of the different transnational co-production and distribution schemes developed within Europe in these years. For a work mostly focused on close textual analysis as mine is, this is relevant because how a film is financed and to whom it is purportedly addressed inevitably affects the kind of representation which ends up on the screen.

Their different production values notwithstanding, it is in the form and content of the films that the reasoning behind my selection ultimately resides. Textually speaking, I regard the seven films I have chosen to analyze as a cycle of sorts, which I will tentatively label *à la* Jameson (1995) as the 'geopolitical cycle,' in that they share, with obvious intermittences, a rather consistent set of thematic and aesthetic concerns related to the changing social and geopolitical landscape of the contemporary world. We can trace some of these concerns back to Polanski's earlier production, particularly the focus on dislocated, mobile characters, be it in the form of migrants, tourists or work-related

travelers. Yet from the late 80's onwards, some noticeable changes can be appreciated in the way these mobilities are addressed in his work. For one, while still involving individual displacements, voluntary and involuntary, the films in this cycle tend to situate them within the context of major historical moments of heightened transnational interactions at multiple levels, locations and times—particularly wars or violent conflicts. In this sense I coincide with Caputo (2012, 168) when he notes a change in Polanski's late output from a psychological to an institutional origin of the predicaments depicted and, as a result, to a new understanding of the relation between subjects and their surrounding social realities.

This move is clear enough in films of this cycle like *Frantic*, *Death and the Maiden*, *The Pianist*, *The Ghost Writer* and *Carnage*, which openly situate their characters and narratives against the context of specific moments of geopolitical turmoil. These include, respectively, the Cold War nuclear threat and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the South-American military dictatorships of the 1970's and 1980's, the onset of World War II and the Holocaust, the Iraq War and the genocides in Africa of the late 1990's and early 2000s. Simultaneously, these films and those less openly engaged with historical events like *Bitter Moon* and *The Ninth Gate* also encode wider transnational social and collective dynamics in their characters, narratives and spatial configurations. In most of these films as well, different economic interests appear recurrently as the guiding principles behind individual and collective relations and mobilities.

Considering the vastness and complexity of globalization and the zeitgeist of uncertainty and ungraspability that seems to surround it, it is also remarkable that this cycle of films seems to articulate a self-reflexive, even meta-cinematic concern with the fate of cultural objects and texts, the issue of representation and the very act of narrating— something Jameson (1995) has pointed to as a recurrent trope in postmodern cinema. In

the case of *The Pianist*, of course, the very subject matter of the film brings along its own representational 'issues,' which in themselves seem to establish a historical and conceptual bridge between two events as apparently disparate as the Holocaust and globalization. The representational conundrum is however more readily evident in the case of *Death and the Maiden*, a film whose plot revolves to a great extent around the impossibility of knowing and what Morrison calls "the irreducibility" of the past into an act of narration, and by extension, of filming (2007, 98-100). In the most obvious cases like *Bitter Moon*, *The Ninth Gate*, *The Ghost Writer* and *Carnage*, books become central, even totemic elements. Books are key in these films and at times desperately sought-after, not only for their 'exchange' or monetary value, something which would connect with the generalized commodification of culture and cultural representation within late capitalism. Books also become pivotal for what they contain, i.e. their use-value, and for their potential effects in the 'real' world; ranging from the uncovering of a geopolitical complot in *The Ghost Writer* all the way to the opening of the gates of hell in *The Ninth Gate.* As I will develop through my analyses, this cycle of films shows not only a symptomatic concern with the epistemological power of media representations. It also bespeaks a widespread cultural anxiety with respect to our collective dependence on, even subjection to, their mediation at a time in which the complexity and extension of our social contexts increasingly overpowers our sensorial reach, cognitive abilities and, by extension, capacity for political action.

The issues of mobility, geopolitics and representation bring the focus back to the concept of space. As I have advanced, my approach to Polanski's work builds on the idea that space may very well be cinema's main formal, ideological and identitarian linkage to the world outside the screen. This is not to suggest, as Celestino Deleyto (2017) recently pointed out, a direct correlation between certain social, historical or geographical

contexts, in this case globalization, and a single, specific set of aesthetic devices or spatial 'poetics' in film. Cinema in general and Polanski's films in particular function in much more ambiguous and disorderly ways. It is to imply however that in the multifarious, intricate ways in which contemporary cinema deploys and employs cinematic space—in its choice of locations, mise-en-scene, the framing and lighting of scenes, the blocking of characters, the editing of the shots, the camera movement, the use of sound and so on— we can find the traces of the different, and themselves multifarious and disorderly, ways in which social and geographical space, and our relationship with it, is being produced and reproduced within globalization. All this being said, within our global and transnational 'chronotope' it is inevitable that certain spatial dynamics and systems become particularly recurrent in the way contemporary cinema looks at, and from, the present world. The dynamics and dialectics between openness and closure, movement and stasis, integration and fragmentation, concretion and abstraction, location and dislocation, proximity and distance, locality and globality, space and place, will certainly recur in my analyses. Similarly, and owing to the idiosyncrasies of Polanski's output, a number of spatial motifs will receive special attention, particularly cities, houses, natural landscapes, different forms of borders and borderscapes, all the way to that supranational cultural and political space we call Europe.

Mapping the Territory

This thesis has an introduction, four chapters and a coda. As is customary, the opening chapter is devoted to establishing the main theoretical lines that will inform my analyses of the films. Serving as the key connecting theoretical thread and organizing concern in this chapter will be the concept of space. Thus, I shall begin by touching base with how it is that space has been conceptualized in recent academic literature, with a specific focus

on social theory's assertion of space as a crucial material and ideational component of all social practice, relations and experience. Second, I shall offer an overview of the historical presence of spatial concerns in film theory and the current defense of space as not only the foremost aspect of film aesthetics, but also as the medium's main historical, ideological, formal and discursive route of engagement with the dynamics of the social world. The chapter will end with a spatial account of the nature, trajectory and uneven development of globalization, taken here as the main socio-historical framework for the study. In particular, I will focus on the contradictory relation between the emergence of a series of new, ever-changing spatialities challenging but also interacting with the master rule of the nation-state and the subsequent need to understand, analyze and decode contemporary social and cinematic dynamics in a transnational framework. Overall, this chapter aims to offer an initial theoretical account of what space can *be*, *mean* and *do* as a critical concept for the joint analysis of the social world and cinema of globalization.

The next three chapters are dedicated to close textual analysis of six of the seven films of the geopolitical cycle, with the last and more recent one, *Carnage*, appearing in the coda. While the first analysis will be dedicated to the oldest of the seven, *Frantic*, the rest of the films have not been arranged in a specifically chronological order. Following the main conceptual thread of this thesis, I have chosen to organize my enquiry spatially, with each chapter built around a particular spatial motif especially relevant both in Polanski's output and within the social, political, cultural and economic landscape of globalization. Each of these chapters contains the analyses of two films.

Chapter 2 revolves around the city as a geographical, architectural, social and cinematic construct. I choose to begin here because cities are not only a primary theme in Polanski's overall production and leading actors in the contemporary global stage, but also because their study has provided the earliest and more consistent theoretical avenues

for the study of the intersections between social and filmic spaces. As an exemplary national and cinematic city, Paris and its transformation under globalization in the late twentieth century will act as the geographical and cinematic focal point here. As case studies, in this chapter I will look at the use and representation of Parisian urban space in the films *Frantic* and *Bitter Moon*, both of them built, in radically different ways, around the experience of a US American citizen in the French capital. Both films, however, engage in a self-conscious depiction of the city at the onset of globalization that evidences the weight of artistic and cinematic (specifically Hollywood's) discourses, forms and representations in the history of this most cinematic of cities.

The shadow of the US also looms large, for various reasons, in Chapter 3, where I turn to the concept, social realities and filmic embodiment of borders. Contrary to some predictions at the end of the century, geopolitical borders remain very much alive and kicking in our global era. In fact, many social commentators have pointed out that borders and bordering dynamics are actually proliferating and permeating various realms of social and personal life within globalization. Cinema has not been alien to this tendency, with borders becoming a recurrent presence in contemporary cinematic imaginaries (Ana Cristina Mendes and John Sundholm 2015) and even a structuring mechanism in their overall aesthetic systems (Deleyto 2017). Thus, this chapter begins with a sociological and cinematic overview of the notion of the border and its several derivatives— borderlands, borderscapes and borderwork. As case studies of the filmic embodiment of borders and 'border thinking,' I will analyze the films *Death and the Maiden* and *The Ghost Writer*. Both films share a similar primary location, an isolated house in the liminal space of the coast, and a major geopolitical event functioning as the origin of the conflicts depicted in the films. The interplay between space, narrative and politics in these two films, and their approach to the notion of the border is, however, notably dissimilar; while

Death and the Maiden builds on the late-twentieth-century prospects of a world without borders, *The Ghost Writer* focuses on the more contemporary unease that emerges from their epochal proliferation and the subjection of our identities and lives to their sovereignty.

Chapter 4 completes this essay's conceptual, geographical and cinematic journey from the national (city) through the transnational (border) to the supranational (Europe). Europe is, therefore the main space to be explored in this chapter's two case studies, *The Ninth Gate* and *The Pianist*. Europe has of course attracted much academic interest as a relevant case for the study of political, economic and cultural responses to an increasingly de-nationalized geopolitical landscape. European cinema itself has been the subject of multiple analyses, usually focused on either the study of the changes to the film market or the textual articulations of a certain "European *sprit*" (Randall Halle 2008, 8, italics in the original). My analysis, however, will be devoted to exploring the ways in which two completely different transnational texts attempt to imagine and image the trajectory of Europe as a single geopolitical and cultural space, and to how their attempts allow for a meta-cinematic analysis of the role and mediation of cultural objects in the production and reproduction of such a space.

In the form of a coda, and rounding out the conclusions for the whole work, I will engage in a brief analysis of *Carnage*, at once the most spatially self-contained and, in some ways, most globally oriented of the films in this cycle.

1. Mise-en-Space

The last three decades have seen globalization become a crucial ingredient of the common, collective sense of our age. Coming to grips with its origins, nature and multiple ramifications, however, has proven a difficult task. For those more critical of the phenomenon, globalization's discursive propagation and its ontological indeterminacy hide ideological and programmatic interests. They serve at once to call up and naturalize a certain state-of-affairs of the social world—usually related with the intensification of capitalistic practices, relations, values and exchanges all over the world—while denying 'uninformed' individuals the epistemological and practical tools to productively confront its causes and consequences.

Beyond its economic dimension, globalization is also related with deep changes in the sociopolitical configuration of the world and the everyday life of individuals and groups. Phenomena like increasing mobilities, cross-border exchanges and growing interconnectedness are engendering new and challenging landscapes for social relations and reproduction. The explosion of globalization and its irruption in our social and mental lives have meant a stimulating challenge for social and cultural theorists all over the world. New concepts, approaches and methods are explored, old debates are recuperated and energized, and disciplines open up to the input of other fields. In these years of frantic search, one of the most suggestive and productive avenues opened up and partly inspired by globalization has been the revival of the interest in geography and the spread of its concepts and theories across the humanities. As many now contend, globalization—literally, the process of becoming global—in essence evokes a geographical phenomenon

and, as such, is to be best understood through the lens of concepts like space, place and environment. As a result, these and other terms in the same semantic field like mapping, locality, margin, territory, landscape, zone, network, flow, area or scale have become familiar vocabulary in a great variety of studies. In the process, the concept of space, the most overarching and abstract of them all, has turned into a sort of grand theoretical and methodological container for geographical thinking and, more generally, an example of those "traveling concepts" Mieke Bal (2002) has defended as the main avenues for serious and exciting interdisciplinary exchange. If, as David Harvey, after Kant, has argued, a "proper geographical knowledge" is a "necessary precondition as well as the ultimate end point of all forms of human enquiry" (2009, 133), the resurgence of space and spatial thinking must be seen as a step in the right direction for the future of the humanities.

Whether or not interested in the nature and development of globalization, the study of film has proven a most fertile ground where to explore the potential of spatial thinking and criticism (Wendy Everett and Axel Goodbody 2005, 9). Given the spatiality inherent to film language, exhibition venues and industrial networks, putting the focus on space has provided a broad and fertile contact zone for film and social theories to interact and illuminate each other. This has resulted, on the one hand, in many film scholars (and filmmakers) embracing the spatial theories and concepts of other disciplines—including the very adoption of transnationalism and more recently cosmopolitanism as critical concepts and/or methodologies for the study of film—and, on the other, in an increasing number of geographers, architects, anthropologists and sociologists turning to cinema as a heuristic, theoretical and practical tool for their spatial theories and projects (see Deborah Dixon 2014).

Reading across this burgeoning interdisciplinary sub-field, however, one soon becomes aware that while 'space' functions as a solid connecting thread and organizing

concern, the concept itself is not approached by all in the same way or used with the same meaning. 'Spatializing' the study of film thus requires that we first reckon with an extensive and variegated theoretical background on an elusive concept. What follows in this chapter is an introductory account of what it is that academic literature, particularly from the social sciences, has said about the nature of space and its relationship with society and how such insight, combined with film theory's long-standing interest in the concept of cinematic space, can help us deepen our understanding of the spatiality of film and its engagement with the social in globalization.

Of Surfaces, Trajectories and Maps

Among all the key material, conceptual and ideological structures guiding our understanding and engagement with the world, space has long occupied a subsidiary position. In particular contrast with time, human geographer Doreen Massey notes, we rarely give space much thought (2005). Historically, even within the academia, space has seldom been approached with the dedication and critical fervor devoted to other epistemic 'word-concepts' such as gender, race, culture, power, nature or time. These are all indeed complex terms that call for careful dissection and analysis. In the case of space, however, a little common sense seems to have been enough. But this is a mistake, Massey argues, because how we conceive space is not banal: it responds to particular motivations and, she emphasizes, has consequences. The way we think about space not only determines our understanding of all those concepts mentioned above, but also, our overall experience and engagement with the world and others. To neglect space is thus to make us blind to its effects on our consciousness, relations and conditions of existence and to allow hegemonic forces to continue to mobilize it for their interests.

In few areas has this realization become more apparent and illuminating than in the study of the history of modernity. Geographers, historians and social theorists like Massey herself (2005), David Harvey (1989; 1990), Anthony Giddens (1990), Dick Hebdige (1990) and Timothy Mitchell (2000) have found in the reconceptualization and reorganization of space a foundational pillar of modern thinking and order. This reconceptualization, they underline, did not simply respond to a spontaneous shift in thought, but was an integral part of a series of wide-ranging material, social and intellectual processes difficult to disentangle or narrativize.

Those who choose to begin in the realm of ideas begin by pointing to the influence of Descartes and Newton in establishing a crucial divide between the human mind and the physical world and in instituting vision as the prime mediator between the two. In this binary imagination, they note, space and time did not figure as mental categories or tools of knowledge, but as absolute properties of the world; space and time existed *a priori,* independent of one another and of the means humans used to measure or represent them. Both notions, however, were not regarded or valued in equal terms. While time was conceived positively as a dynamic, forward-pushing force and the universal motor of social and natural change, space was imagined simply as the fixed, material context in which those processes took place. The development of mathematics, cartography and linear perspective sustained this imagination, producing an image of space or, rather, producing space as an image: a geometric, uniform and continuous expanse readily graspable and governable by the human eye (Barney Warf 2009, 60-61). The result of all this was a view of space as a fixed and absolute given and of the planet as an empty "surface" (Massey 2005, 4); a silent stage waiting for history and progress to unfold.

Behind this cloak of neutrality and scientificity, modernity's reification of space was far from an innocent maneuver. On the contrary, it sustained and legitimized a host

of political and socioeconomic associations vital for the development of capitalist modernity as a whole. Harvey explains, for example, how the Enlightened doctrines of universal justice, democracy and progress depended on a rational and objective conception of space impervious to geographical, social or cultural idiosyncrasies (1990, 424). And so did colonialism. Underpinning the geographical expansion of the Western Empires all over the world was the same objectifying, universalizing and time-dominated spatial imagination: "beyond Europe was *before* Europe," Barney Warf and Santa Arias write (2009, 3), and colonialism, a mere matter of the West bringing the rest of the world 'up to speed' with what Fredric Jameson has called "the great clock of development" (1991, 310). Modern technologies like mapping, topography, urban planning, roads, mass media, the metrical system, calendars, clock-time and the census brought increasing parts of the world under the purview of the West. Finally, the gradual partition of the planet's lands into discrete, carefully bordered and non-overlapping territories, nationally ascribed and/or privately owned, 'materialized' geopolitically the modern ordering of space while establishing solid limits, physical and conceptual, to the spatial imaginations, relations, and horizons of subjects and groups. And so, modernity's particular time-space reconfiguration helped 'stage' the Globe for the expansion of Western values, principles and, also, networks of trade and commerce, laying the ground for the blossoming of a new planetary socioeconomic order with European capitalism as its center and model.

The twentieth century saw these ideas become increasingly contested, at least theoretically, from different fronts. In the 1910s, Émile Durkheim advanced the seminal idea that space was, like time, a social construct and that both categories together acted as part of the "*permanent* framework of mental life" (1995 [1912], 441, my emphasis). In other words, in his theorization, neither space nor time is absolute, objective facts—even if they tend, and in many ways need, to function as such. On the contrary, they are cultural,

idiosyncratic categories that differ from society to society in response to their particular circumstances and collective needs for survival and reproduction. This view has remained central for most social scientists and has been substantiated by extensive anthropological evidence, but it has also been significantly colored and complicated through the years. Phenomenological treatises like Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1962 [1927]), Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* (1999 [1982]), Guy Debord's and Asger Jorn's *Mémoirs* (1994 [1958]), Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1957), and Yi Fu-Tuan's *Space and Place* (1977), to name a few, explored from different angles the role of experience, relations, memories and emotions in the personal and collective conceptions of both concrete places and abstract spaces. Meanwhile, developments in physics, usually associated with the theories of Albert Einstein, promoted 'scientifically' a relativistic understanding of space and time and the collapse of the separation between the two concepts (Harvey 2009, 135-136). At least in what concerned the physical universe and its study, space and time were no longer discrete, isolated entities, but complementary and correlated dimensions of all its processes and phenomena.

Despite the immense artistic and scientific impact of these theories, and the de-stabilizing processes of "time-space compression" (Harvey 1989) brought about by technological, transport and communicational developments throughout the first half of the 20th century, it would take a few decades and the eruption of poststructuralist and postmodern thinking to decisively overturn the spatial imaginations of social and cultural theory. Most contemporary geographers coincide in locating the genesis of what is now known as the 'spatial turn' in the Paris of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the midst of an "explosive urban unrest" (Edward Soja 2009, 17), and a rapid growth in postcolonial migration (Phillip E. Ogden 1995, 292), and on the brink of a crisis-induced change of paradigm in global capitalism (Harvey 1989, 141-172), spatial matters re-emerged as a

central concern in the agenda of several French theorists. As modern historicism and its 'narratives' of stable meaning, universal truths and linear progress became increasingly contested, geography came to offer what seemed a more genuine entry point into the materiality and contingency of human life and relations. Michel Foucault, a historian himself, was one of the first to signal this turn when in 1967 he proclaimed: "the present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space" (1984 [1967], 1). The idea, he would later stress, was not to reject time but to recognize that space was as important a factor in the development and social organization of the modern world (Foucault 2009 [1980], 70). Foucault's subsequent incursions in the study of geography opened the door for the reconsideration of how knowledge, meaning, and power (in all its forms) operated within and through space (see Jeremy W. Crampton and Stuart Elden 2007).

Henri Lefebvre would go several steps further, and deeper, in his theorization on the nature and dynamics of space. Throughout an extensive output of which *The Production of Space* (1991 [1974]) became the best known, Lefebvre not only asserts the active role of physical space, natural or built, in structuring and guiding human life. More significantly, he defends the inherent spatiality of all social activity and modes of production or, in his own words, the "(social) production of (social) space" (1991 [1974], 26-27). Contrary to the 'abstracted' spatial logic of Cartesian rationality and Newtonian physics, Lefebvre suggests that our experience of space is not simply ruled by a binary opposition between a fixed, material object and a vision-mediated mental subject. The space of our everyday lives, what he calls "lived space," is for him an open-ended social process always inflected by discourses, beliefs and practices, both material and symbolic (1991 [1974], 38-39). For him, it is the constant negotiations and struggles between these forces that constantly produce, and reproduce, the space in which we move and through which all social life is realized.

Lefebvre's and Foucault's spatial ideas would reverberate in some of the most influential works of the following two decades, including Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), Edward Soja's *Postmodern Geographies* (1989) and Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). Phenomena like nationalism, colonialism, the development of capitalist modernity and later globalization started to be widely reframed in geographical terms as specific and to a great extent calculated exercises in spatial production. Works on class, sex, gender, ethnic and cultural relations embraced the production of space, including that of the human body, as a defining factor in both creating and sustaining social hierarchies (see, for instance, Massey 1994; Kevin Hetherington 1998; Sherene H. Razack 2002). Meanwhile, more 'genuinely' spatial disciplines like geography, architecture or urbanism moved into a new sphere, where their traditional material and representational concerns intermingled with profound symbolic, political and historical considerations (see Soja 1989). In the process, the concept of 'place' also gained increasing momentum as the physically grounded, historically charged and culturally meaningful counterpart of the more abstract and theoretical notion of space (John Agnew 1987; Tim Creswell 2004). All in all, these works and those which followed their tradition (too many to be referenced here) reasserted space as a defining factor, medium and outcome, of all social phenomena, relations and action; not only a theoretical tool with which to interpret the world, but also an indispensable component in any attempt to control it and any struggle to change it.

A key participant in these debates, Massey, with whom we began this section, offers perhaps the latest major theorization on the concept in her book *For Space* (2005). In it, she underlines that space is a serious political affair and proposes that we conceive

space as "a meeting-up of histories" (2005, 4). For Massey, this means, on the one hand, to conceive space as a "relational" construct, the ongoing product of multiple, mutually shaping processes, relations, interconnections or what she refers to as "trajectories" (2005, 12). These include for Massey human, but also non-human ones, past, present, and future. On the other hand, her new conceptualization means to do away with the divide between space and time, geography and history, and the clear-cut conceptual associations and functions attached to each of them. Massey's goal is to blur this conceptual divide; to inject space into time, and time into space (2005, 55-59). Whether we look at the natural, the social or the imaginary, she asserts, space and time are inseparably linked in their multiplicity, openness and dynamism.

This increased attention to spatial concerns has called into question previous accounts of society and history, but also the representational work performed by different cultural practices and texts. As one of the main conclusions in his *Postmodernism,* Fredric Jameson reflects on the way in which human experience and cultural production in late capitalism

> has been spatialized in a unique sense, such that space is for us an existential and cultural dominant, a thematized and foregrounded feature of structural principle standing in its relatively subordinate and secondary (though no doubt no less symptomatic) role in earlier modes of production. So, even if everything is spatial, this postmodern reality here is somehow more spatial than everything else (1991, 365)

Space has, in short, become the dominant mode of thought of the postmodern. Jameson illustrates this cultural shift in his analyses of postmodern theories, novels, paintings, music and buildings, but also in films, including *Terrorizer* (Edward Yang, 1986), *Days of Eclipse* (Alexander Sokurov, 1988), *Videodrome* (David Cronenberg, 1983), *Passion* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1982) and *The Perfumed Nightmare* (Kidlat Tahimik,

1979). These are for him films in which space and spatiality consistently take precedence over characters and narrative as both source and expression of their main aesthetic and discursive preoccupations (see Jameson 1995). According to Jameson, these films bring to the fore of their representations not only the preponderance of space in postmodernity, but also the acute problems of subjects, collectives and cultural texts themselves to navigate the increasingly urbanized, multinational and globalizing spaces that characterize the postmodern. It is for this reason, he argues, that the characters of those films are so consistently alienated, disoriented and lost, and why the conspiracy trope became so recurrent culturally and cinematically from the late 1970s onwards.

But if expressing this generalized cognitive and spatial dislocation has become a crucial figurative function of postmodern representations, it is for Jameson also the political and pedagogical task of cultural critics to unearth, decode and 'realize' such spatial meanings and operations in our analyses; to make them common and apparent, and so help endow the individual subject with "some new heightened sense of its place in the global system" (1991, 54), a hermeneutic exercise he calls "cognitive mapping" (1995, 3-10; see also 1988; 1991, 51-54). Jameson borrows this concept from geographer Kevin Lynch (1960) who, he explains, used it to refer to the way in which humans constantly, and instinctively, combine their spatial thoughts and practices in the attempt to make sense of and locate themselves in their urban surroundings. According to Jameson, however, this unconscious habit is nowadays not reduced to the mapping of the urban or even the national territory. In an era of global informational networks, financial transactions and transnational mobilities, the space, or place, we are constantly at pains to imagine and map in our thoughts and practices is no other than the totality of the 'world system' or, in our current terminology, that of "globalization" (Jameson 2009, 315). Jameson does recognize that such a totalizing task may very well never be complete and

that geography, demography and space are not in themselves all that there is to be said about the social world, but also that "in the intent to hypothesize, in the desire called cognitive mapping—therein lies the beginning of wisdom" (1995, 3).

To study space is thus for Jameson and the tradition of theorists to which he belongs to open an avenue to understand the conceptual, material and, ideological relationship between economy, culture and the social in the modern and, especially, the postmodern, as well as to inflect such analysis with an active political signification. Of course, the spatiality of each cultural practice or text should be approached on its own terms, according to its own context, materials, conventions and forms, and therefore, with the appropriate set of theoretical and methodological tools. The next section is devoted to an introductory account of what those tools may be in the case of film.

From Film Theory to Film Geography

The reassertion of space and geography in social and cultural criticism I have quickly sketched, and that Soja so timely documented in *Postmodern Geographies* (1989), did not immediately permeate the study of film. When David Bordwell and Noël Carroll surveyed the state of film theory seven years later in their edited collection *Post-Theory* (1996), and despite including a (rather censorious) chapter on Jameson's work on the medium, space featured all but nominally as a given or a mere formal addendum to other approaches, not as an issue worth discussing in itself. Today, such relative neglect appears all the more remarkable considering both the concept's rising prominence in other areas of the humanities at the time and the considerable body of work devoted in earlier film theory to spatial concerns. After all, it had been in great part the medium's possibilities for the creative manipulation of space and time that had attracted so much fascination from the Russian formalists and so many other thinkers and writers confronting the

medium in its early days. Since then, and in parallel to major currents of film theory, a continued though intermittent tradition of works exploring the multiple spatial dimensions of film would develop before becoming the central concern it is today. Of those, some would center on film as an art form, some as a technical apparatus, some as a cultural phenomenon, some as an ideological institution and some as a production system. Some would cut across various levels.

Arguably the most basic, widespread sense in which space has been used in film vocabulary refers to the two-dimensional visual field contained within the frame. Such an understanding tends to include notions of how camera position, perspective, and depth of field create the illusion of three-dimensionality, and how the resulting composition, including the arrangement of the pro-filmic elements in that space, contributes to the film's narrative and aesthetic purposes. In other words, filmic or cinematic space delimits what it is that the film wants to show and how it wants to show it. In this view, filmic space sits somewhere between notions of pictorial space and the theatrical concept of mise-en-scène. Film is, however, neither painting nor theatre, or even a mere combination of the two, and it is precisely by delving deeper into its treatment of space that many have found the source of its very specificity, ideology, pleasure and overall activity as a medium, as well as a crucial linkage between its representations and the dynamics of the social world.

Writing in the late 1940s, then-critic Eric Rohmer located the essence of film's unique aestheticism in its capacity to combine space and movement. In an influential text in which he labeled cinema as "*l'art de l'espace*," Rohmer focused on the interplay between the interior space of the individual shot and the total space to be filmed, and how the movement of the camera and of the characters helped the integration of both. Jean-Luc Godard would years later credit this essay with presaging "the take-over of modern

cinema" by suggesting "cinema as an art of direction, an art of movement in space" (qtd. in Charles Rice and Kenny Cooper 2017, 113). James Tweedie finds this same fascination with the spatiality of film art in the writings of André Bazin and most *Cahiers*'s critics and *Nouvelle Vague* filmmakers (2013, 54-68; 75-80). Ingrained in their professed devotion for the cinematic mise-en-scène, Tweedie argues, lay an emerging awareness of the spatiality of human experience and a belief in the unique capacity of cinema to account for and reproduce it (2013, 67). Developments like the jump cut, the long take and the turn to location shooting were all but formal attempts at translating such ideas into the practice of film. Across the pond, in a similar aesthetic vein, US painter and film critic Manny Farber begins his 1971 collection of writings on film, suggestively titled *Negative Space*, extolling space as "the most dramatic stylistic entity" (3) and lamenting how, in his view, this fact has been all but ignored in film criticism. Farber then goes a step further and divides filmic space into screen, psychological and geographical, but without offering any systematic theorization of their limits or the relation between the three.

Farber's unstructured approach stands in contrast to the rigorous formalism of film structuralists and semioticians that dominated film theory at the time of his writing. Haunted by the question of film's functioning and specificity, theorists like Christian Metz, Umberto Eco, Peter Wollen and Stephen Heath worked to produce a systematic account of what signs, symbols and codes cinema used to convey its messages, how their functioning resembled or departed from those in the languages of other cultural practices, and to what extent they related ontologically to the pro-filmic 'reality' they represented (see Robert Stam 2000, 107-118). Of particular interest for these theorists was explaining how (narrative) films were able to create an intelligible spatiotemporal continuum despite the obvious fragmentations, omissions and gaps that characterized their representations. They studied the interplay between shots and cuts *ad infinitum* in the attempt to explain

in the most methodical way every single device mobilized in the construction of the spatial fabric of a scene or a whole film. These included, of course, framing and editing, but also camera movement, sound, lighting, the blocking of characters and the mise-en-scène.

Books in this tradition such as Heath's *Questions of Cinema* (1981) and Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985) explored film's spatial processes further. For all their discrepancies regarding cinema's formal, cognitive and ideological underpinnings, these two works share a view of spatialization as an indispensable component of cinematic storytelling. One of Heath's more interesting contributions to this debate is the bridging of the gap between narrative and space as two separate functions or activities of cinema (1981, 19-75). By proposing the idea of film *as* "narrative space" (1981, 27) Heath signals the imbrications of narration and space in feature films. According to him, it is the structuring of space that allows for a narration to develop and be understood, and it is the narration, in turn, that contains and smoothens the off-screen 'excesses' that movement and montage bring to the spatial unity and continuity of a film: "film produced as the realization of a coherent and positioned space, and as that realization *in movement*, positioning, cohering, binding in" (1981, 26, his emphasis).

More recently, Mark Garret Cooper (2002) recuperates and expands Heath's idea that film narration is immanently spatial, underlying that while narrative films strive for spatial unity, they first *need* spatial difference for a narrative to emerge. As Cooper explains, it is through the creation, confrontation and stitching together of distinct spaces— on and off-screen, interior and exterior, front and back, close and far, and so on—, through the constant presentation and resolution of a "spatial problem," that narration "*takes place*" in a feature film (2002, 149, his emphasis). No spatial difference,

no film narration; and the more conventional a film's narrative, he goes on to add, the more conventional its spatial arrangements (2002, 152). For Cooper, as it was for Heath, this spatial process is not only formal or narrative but also profoundly ideological, as it is precisely film's artificial unification and coherence of space that grounds the movement, interpellation and suturing of the modern subject qua spectator, and the hegemonic social order he or she inhabits, as unified and coherent.

Bordwell, for his part, explores in less politicized terms the multiple cues film provides the spectator with in order for him or her to create a "cognitive map*"* out of what he calls "scenographic space" or, in other words, the imaginary realm in which the film's events occur (1985, 113-130). Apart from notions of editing and off-screen space fluctuation and containment, Bordwell refers to issues like perspective, texture, size, lighting patterns, color, lenses and what he refers to as "sonic space" (1985, 118-119) which, while of secondary order with respect to the visual one, greatly inflects parameters like range, distance and location. It is thanks to such cues, he argues, that we as spectators are able to make sense of the narrative and overall fictional universe generated by the film.

Potentially productive conceptual overlaps begin to emerge between the spaces invoked by social and film theory. Both spaces are regarded not as merely given but as 'produced,' and the recurrence of the idea of 'cognitive mapping' in the theories of Lynch, Jameson and Bordwell already suggests a degree of similarity in our psychological engagement with physical, social and cinematic geographies. At the same time, Lefebvre's and Heath's theorizations coincide in seeing space not as a mere background for histories and stories, but as intrinsic to them: neither the social nor the cinematic exist without spatialization. And, most crucially, both regard space as political and ideological. One could argue then that a close analysis of the spatiality of a film, just like those carried

out by geographers and sociologists in the real world, could go a long way towards unveiling forces, meanings and discourses operating around, behind and beyond the personal dramas films tend to put at the center of their representations.

Heath's and Bordwell's theories, however, soon prove to be insufficient tools for such a task, especially if we aim to take our diagnosis beyond the text. Perhaps the most widely noted shortcoming of their approaches is that, beyond Heath's relating of cinema's pursuit of spatial coherence to modern ideology and capitalism, there is little to no reference in their works as to the relation between film aesthetics, discourse and the social, historical or cultural worlds of which they participate. In terms of cinematic space, this translates most notably in their bypassing any consideration of the actual locations, real or fabricated, films deploy to construct the spatio-narrative universes they then so meticulously de-construct (Deleyto 2016, 6). Of all the 93 pages Heath devotes to his canonical analysis of Welles' *Touch of Evil* in *Screen* (1975a, 7-77; 1975b, 91-113), none is dedicated to reflecting on why the film takes place around the Mexico-US border or what the film does with and through this location, or any other for that matter. Similarly, and despite their differences of interest and approach, both authors coincide in limiting themselves to formal or technical descriptions of the spatial mechanisms of cinema: a close-up, a tracking shot, an eye-line match, a diegetic sound effect or even a closed door matter only for how they help guide and contain the narrative, not for what they may say about characters relations or psyches, the socio-cultural and historical context of the story, the actual places being portrayed, or the specific representational politics of a given film. These theorizations, in short, offer important guidance as to how filmic space *works*, but not so much about what it *tells*.

Seeking a richer understanding of film's spatial aesthetics and meanings, several scholars have looked beyond the boundaries of the discipline for answers. Giuliana Bruno

(2002) and Peter Wollen (2002), for instance, invoke Walter Benjamin's classic "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (2007 [1935]) and his analogy between cinema and architecture. As these authors note, Benjamin not only understood the spaces generated by these two arts as meant for collective, even if distracted, consumption or practice, but there was according to him also something very similar about the geographies they called into being. Beyond mere contemplation, he argued, filmic spatial universes unfolded and were apprehended in a lively and kinesthetic way as when moving through a building or a built environment (see Benjamin 2007 [1935], 239-241). Film's power to recreate our experience of the material spaces of our lives also allowed it to reveal their artificiality and production, to challenge their hegemony and maybe, in the process, contribute to the building of something new and different:

> By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring common-place milieus under the indigenous guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action. Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling (2007 [1935], 236)

Benjamin's evocative account of cinema's spatial 'qualities' in this passage anticipates some of the more general ideas about the practice and production of space that Lefebvre and De Certeau would develop some decades later. Although not particularly interested in film—Lefebvre only refers to the medium to criticize its contribution to modernity's "logic of visualization" (1991 [1973], 286)—, both authors would coincide with Benjamin's view of space as a social phenomenon, a collective construct always subject to the practices of history, society and culture. This seminal idea embraced and developed by human geographers like Soja, Harvey and Massey, has become the

springboard for many film scholars to reassess filmic spatial articulations. Mark Shiel (2001), Rosalind Galt (2006), Merrill Schleier (2009), Maeve Connolly (2009), Elena Gorfinkel and John David Rhodes (2011) Jason S. Williams (2013) and Celestino Deleyto (2017), among others, have variously resorted to these authors to explain the spatial activities of film and their imbrications with the social realities of the world.

In their works, space is brought to the fore not only in terms of cinematic form and narrative, but also identity, discourse and politics. In their view, it is in great part through space that film engages with the social world. Most of these authors develop their approaches by focusing on cities and how they are framed and articulated in movies, and thus turned into filmic space, language and discourse (Deleyto 2017, 5-9). Somewhat like Benjamin, they see film as an ambivalent spatial medium; capable of capturing and exposing like no other the nature and dynamics of lived environments, be they real places or not, but inevitably bound to transform them in the process. And it is precisely there, many conclude, that a great deal of the power and pleasure of cinema resides. Looking beyond the specifically urban, difficult as it may be in our day and age, their texts offer some general guidelines as to how to assess spatial discourses in film.

In the first place, the conception of space as an ongoing production always mediated by the symbolic they acknowledge complicates a view of films as simple indexes of the real and of filmic space as a mere function or requirement of the narrative. From the perspective of social theory, films, as much as other spatial practices like architecture or mapping, do not merely represent, but actively participate in producing the spatialities of our daily lives. As Deleyto puts it, "cinema is one more cultural mechanism that is constantly at work in the creation of social space" (2017, 8). This refers not only to the way in which our own mental geographies become altered by filmic representations—films tell us constantly about our and others' place(s) in the world—but

also to how those representations affect our environments and our physical and psychological relationship with them. This is evident when some iconic film location becomes an overcrowded tourist destination, but also when we transit (or choose not to transit) a dark street after watching a horror flick. In short, social theory prompts us to reflect upon how films mediate how we think, practice and live space.

Secondly, embracing the social and political implications of spatial thinking and representation opens up a window to a new critical understanding of films' ideological grounding and worldview. Filmic space is never idle. It provides formal foundation for the narrative and an essential expressive outlet for filmmakers. Yet as a defining unit and category of the filmic representational and signifying system, space is also a key component in grounding and containing cinematic discourse. In its geographical dimension, filmic space works by drawing up the boundaries of the social totality a movie aims (and is able) to capture. It delimits what gets in and what is left out the picture, the reach of the concerns at stake, and the range of social, geographical and historical relations involved in the conflicts in display. In other words, filmic space embodies the horizons of a film's concerns, imagination and ideology; its particular map of the world. If we look, for instance, at the diegetic geographies of two films as intimately related as *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (John Ford, 1962) and *Lone Star* (John Sayles, 1996), delineated as they are through their narratives, characters, locations and formal devices, we will end up with two different, almost antithetical imaginations of the US American West and the social forces and relations that have 'produced' it. If we compare the diegetic urban geographies of the more recent *Attack the Block* (Joe Cornish, 2011) and *Man Up* (Ben Palmer, 2015), we will end up with two antipodal notions of what it is like to live in twenty-first century London and, concomitantly, with two antipodal, yet equally ideological, discourses on the city itself, its geography, demography and history.

Thirdly, if, as most theorists today agree, space and time are mutually determining and inseparable dimensions of all physical, mental and symbolic processes, keeping them apart when addressing the narrative, syntax, style or discourse of a film does not make much sense. A readily available solution is to recuperate Mikhail Bakhtin's novelistic concept of the "chronotope," which he defines as "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relations that are artistically expressed in literature" (1981, 84) and, more specifically, as "the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied" (1981, 250). Abstract logic and/or concrete location, the chronotope proves to be useful when analyzing filmic texts, especially when dealing with key spatiotemporal settings like, say, the Hermitage Museum/Winter Palace in *Russian Ark* (Alexander Sokurov, 2002), the minimalist US Depression-era town of *Dogville* (Lars Von Trier, 2003), the police van moving through Arab-Spring Cairo in *Clash* (Mohamed Diab, 2016) or the crumbling Port-au-Prince mansion of *Murder in Pacot* (Raoul Peck, 2014). More generally, however, a chronotopical approach to film looks to integrate the spatial and temporal aspects of filmic representations. This means, on the one hand, that even if we maintain a focus on issues of geography and spatiality, as is our case, we remain attentive to their temporal and historical dimension. In terms of film form, on the other, this means recognizing that neither editing, shot length nor even film duration are only a matter of the managing of cinematic time, nor framing, camera movement or shot depth are only there to construct cinematic space. Space and time, geography and history, determine one another—also in films.

Last but not least, as Durkheim advanced more than a century ago, notions of space and time do not only relate to each other, but also to the social worlds of which they participate. Ideas do not fall from the sky; they always emerge and develop in relation to the concrete realities of the natural world and of society. If the postmoderns felt the urge

to dismantle the spatiotemporal conceptions of the past (just like the moderns before them had done), it was not because of a sudden shift in thought, but because the world that had sustained them "was drawing to a close" (Warf 2009, 65). The fact that precisely at that time cinemas all over the world went through a series of paradigm changes—particularly in their spatiotemporal articulations (see Bordwell 1979; Allan Siegel 2003; Tweedie 2013)—is significant because it signals both the socio-historical grounding of aesthetic permutations and the value of the film form as symptom of the social. Film theorists, scholars and critics from Benajmin, Rohmer, Farber and Heath, through Cooper, Bruno and Jameson, to Shiel and Deleyto, have taught us that cinema is a particularly spatial form of culture, figuration, discourse and address. On this basis, we might conclude, it must be in cinema's spatial, or rather spatiotemporal, forms that film analysts can find the most genuine reverberations of the dynamics of history, geography and society, as well as the most powerful and illuminating responses and reactions to them.

The Spaces and Places of Globalization

As argued thus far, changes in spatiotemporal thought, representation, experience and practice, including cinematic ones, never happen in a vacuum. They are always embedded in broader changes affecting the conditions and realities of society as a whole, and thus, always point back to them. In the context of this study, those overall conditions are taken to be those of globalization. What follows is then a general picture of the social, historical and geographical processes that fall under the contextual umbrella term globalization. Even if at risk of reifying what is mostly a conceptual or discursive construct, globalization is taken here as the dominant frame of contemporary social interaction and imagination; both a historical stage and a geographical paradigm, a social reality long in full throttle and a social process in constant state of becoming. In this sense, the image

that will come from the following pages by no means aims to be definitive or all-encompassing but an introductory, admittedly selective and contingent, picture of the overall social landscape of which our selected films have participated.

Most social scientists on globalization begin with empirical, quantitative 'facts' about global economic and cultural exchanges, border-crossing mobilities and supranational legal and political arrangements. All those, they note, have intensified in the last fifty years fueled by new technological and transport communications to the point of becoming the norm rather than the exception in the organization and functioning of the contemporary world. A new geographical reality and consciousness have risen as a result: broader, more interconnected, more interdependent and, also, more flexible and unstable. It is also common to relate this new material and ideological landscape to the erosion of the national paradigm. Politics, economy, culture and the social seem no longer bound by the national as they used to be. In the film studies camp, this has translated into a certain (though certainly not definitive) move away from the notion of national cinema as the structuring geographical, cultural and methodological framework for the understanding of film. Nowadays, it would be difficult to find any extensive film study which does not consider, or at least acknowledge in its analyses, the increasing global circulation of films, film cultures, film capital and film workers.

Yet as political sociologist Kate Nash notes, while some of the general facts about globalization are no longer as disputed as they used to be, their origin and alleged novelty certainly are (2010, 47). Marxist social theorists, focused as they are on the *longue durée* of capitalism, have tended to see more historical continuities than ruptures in the socio-spatial development of the contemporary world.

For David Harvey, what we tend to call globalization represents little more than "yet another round" of the unbroken chain of processes of production, destruction and

reconstruction of space through which capitalism has tried to "fix" its inner crisis since its very inception (2001a, 24; see also 2000, 53-72; 2001b, 285-311). Through the strategic expansion, reorganization and/or movement of its forces and resources, Harvey explains, capitalism has for centuries attempted to mask, tame, postpone, or simply move around the globe the undesired consequences of its practices while indulging its constant need to grow and evolve. Producing space has been, in this sense, a way of buying time. Colonialism offers a clear antecedent of this dynamic: early modern European empires did not take over the world only because they could or wanted to, but because they had to (Eric Wolf 2010 [1982], 101-125). And today, in our so-called postcolonial, transnational and globalizing world, it is "yet another round" of new technologies of communication, transport and war, the increased delocalization of production and outsourcing of jobs and the rescaling of geopolitical governance and territorial organization that is, at least in part, and for now, doing the trick.

In this sense, for Harvey and others, globalization is little more than the new clothes of an old emperor—only that, for them, these conceal more than they reveal. Immanuel Wallerstein (2000), for instance, has criticized globalization as a misleading concept, as in his view the processes which it tends to describe have been taking place for more than 500 years. Speaking of globalization as something new occludes for him the long-standing, historical and geographical trajectory of what he prefers to call the capitalist "world system" and thus, precludes us from properly understanding its nature and current situation, as well as from producing effective alternatives. For Doreen Massey, globalization as we are experiencing it today is a political project with not only institutional but also ideological roots in that of modernity (2005, 81-89). According to her, both rely on a discourse of historical inevitability—"the 'future' in justification"—and a single, grand "*aspatial*" narrative functioning above any local particularities and

inequalities (2005, 82, her emphasis). This narrative of globalization, she elaborates, serves to conceal the project's own production and geographical organization, and to keep its economic and technological motors beyond political questioning.

Harvey, for his part, concedes that the attention now given to globalization has put issues of geography and spatiality under a much-needed scrutiny, but laments the concept's limited scope as a theoretical or political tool for the left. His proposal is thus to shift our language from globalization to "uneven geographical development" (2000, 68-94; 2014, 146-163). This shift, he argues, will enable us to better understand the present rearticulation of different spatial processes long at work and how they have served capitalism historically to produce a "geographical landscape favorable to its own reproduction and subsequent evolution" (2014, 146).

Having said all this, even the most historical-materialist of accounts acknowledges some degree of newness in what has been happening to the world in the last fifty years. Following precisely Harvey's findings in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989) and elsewhere, many locate a decisive turning point in the 1970s economic recession and the propagation of neoliberal policies with which many governments confronted its effects. Their agendas included economic deregulations, the opening of national markets, the arrangement of supranational agreements and institutions like NAFTA and the EU, the move to a more flexible, post-industrial mode of production based on financial capital, currency speculation, information technology and communications services, as well as the weakening of the welfare state and workers' rights (Nash 2010, 49-51; Manuel Castells 2010 [1996]; Harvey 2005). Backed by the United States' commercial, intellectual and military apparatus, neoliberalism became a dominant political and ideological force well before the century had ended. Deng Xiaoping's implementation of such policies in China in the 1980s and the collapse of the

Berlin Wall in 1989 seemed to symbolize, in very spatial terms, the triumph of the free market logic worldwide. And it was at this point and tied precisely to the supposed virtues, and inescapability, of the neoliberal project, that 'globalization' gained currency as *the* way of thinking and speaking about the world as a whole.

In the intervening years, the world has become increasingly faster and smaller; not only for the economy, but also for individuals and groups. Harvey calls this phenomenon "time-space compression," and relates it to the constant transformations of the spatiotemporal horizons of private and public practices, experiences and imaginations proper of capitalist modernity (2001b, 123-124; 1989, 260-283). It is, moreover, a process whose effects he is able to trace 'culturally' to phenomena like the rise of modernist aesthetics and, later, to what he calls "postmodern cinema," which he exemplifies through two films: *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982) and *Wings of Desire* (Win Wenders, 1987) (1989, 308-323). Despite their obvious differences of approach, he finds that both films are articulated around a similar conflict: the clash of different, uneven times and spaces and the overall crisis in identity, relations, structures of feeling and representation that such confrontation brings about. Unfortunately, Harvey limits his analyses of film to narrative arcs and the pro-filmic, leaving aside the kind of formal or stylistic components that he does take into account when writing about, for instance, the shift in Kandinsky's painting stroke, sense of space and use of color in the period between 1914 and 1939 (1989, 280).

Manuel Castells, who also writes from a strong materialist perspective, describes a more qualitative change when he portrays our contemporary condition. His well-known term for this new condition is the "network society," which he associates with the communications and information technology revolution that exploded at the end of the 20th century (2010 [1996]). It is this revolution, he argues, that has allowed a new global

economy to blossom; one that is more interconnected, interdependent, flexible, asymmetrical, and, in his account, "leading to increasing inequality and social exclusion" (2010 [1996], 134). Castells coincides with other social theorists like Zygmunt Bauman (2000), Elliot and Lemert (2005) and Elliot and Urry (2010) in pointing to the human, personal and emotional consequences of these changes. They all signal the accelerating rhythms and rising levels of mobility that have been imposed on the daily life of the individual, and the sense of ephemerality, insecurity and alienation they tend to bring about. The dislocating effect of these changes, they also agree, has resulted in deep alterations to the individual subjectivity, the rise of the self and identity as "the main, and sometimes only, source of meaning," as Castells writes (2010 [1996], 3), and the resurgence of essentialist developments—national, territorial, religious and ethnic—as the refuge of seemingly stable values, relations and agency.

Castells' theorization also has room for spatial considerations. Just like any other historical social formation or process, he argues, the network society has its own spatial manifestation and support. This new spatial regime is dominated by what he calls "the space of flows," a web of material and symbolic spaces made of fluid and multi-layered interconnections and exclusions; what has monetary value gets in, everything else is left out (1996, 407-460). Under this logic, those excluded have no choice but to remain tied to the local or, in his terminology, "the space of places" (2010 [1996], 407-460). These two interdependent spaces have different urban, architectural and geographical associated modes, but also different temporalities (2010 [1996], 494-499). Personal, biological, and collective time belong for Castells to the space of places, while the space of flows is able to function in what he calls "timeless time" (2010 [1996], 460; 494-499), an ever-compressing temporal logic generated by the breaking up of the sequential boundaries between past, present and future; an eventually eternal, undifferentiated instant in which

only cybernetic capital transactions are able to operate, but whose rhythms increasingly permeate the whole realm of human experience.

If one conclusion has to be drawn from these accounts, it must be the realization that, in contemporary globalization, capitalist political economy and spatiotemporal logics are becoming, with growing virulence but also visibility, the guiding principles of social life, practices and relations. This intensification may indeed signal the ultimate victory of market imperatives over all things human and natural—their utmost globalization—but also, hopefully, the moment when its assemblages, machinations, injustices, contradictions and weaknesses become definitively exposed and confronted by the masses.

There is a point to be made, however, against the idea that it is the economy and only the economy that is behind whatever shape or form contemporary globalization is taking or might take in the future. Such has been the claim of many theorists, worried not only that we fall in the same de-humanizing economicism that guides neoliberal political agendas, but also that we become blind to the role and power of culture and cultural production in mediating the social landscape and trajectory of the contemporary world. Purely economic accounts are even more difficult to defend at a moment in which, as such accounts themselves repeatedly tell us, the boundaries between economy and all other aspects of social life are so blurred as to be difficult to locate. If the commodification of culture has made its manifestations and practices an integral component of the postmodern, global economy and ethos—as argued some time ago in, for instance, Jameson's *Postmodernism* (1991), George Ritzer's *The McDonaldization of Society* (2015 [1993]) and Naomi Klein's *No Logo* (2002)—when can we say that culture, aesthetics and the symbolic have stopped being mere by-products of the economic, and

become a central part of its engine, and thus, entry points to evaluate, decode and maybe even "grasp the beast itself," as Jameson (1995, 14) would put it?

Castells, for one, is reluctant to see culture in all its manifestations as a mere reproduction of the logics of the economic system. The "specificity of new cultural expressions"—particularly for him their de-localized, border-crossing character—may fit within the spatiotemporal logic of "flexible capitalism," he concedes, but it may also act powerfully, even disruptively, on it (2010 [1996], 492-493). In this line, other theorists, especially within the postcolonial and postmodernist field, have pushed to relocate the cultural at the center of the debates on globalization. Arjun Appadurai offers one of the earliest and more influential of such attempts in his book *Modernity at Large* (1996). In his theorization, Appadurai is particularly interested in the way in which the global practice, circulation and consumption of culture is contributing to the shaping of a new transnational, maybe even postnational, ideational landscape. Appadurai conceives cultural globalization not as a singular homogenizing force with the US at its center, but in the form of a series of vast, ever-fluid, heterogeneous and intertwining spaces he calls "scapes," which are constituted by the global flows of images, ideas, ideologies, identities and, also, capital among individuals and groups (1996, 27-47). Although these interconnecting "scapes" exist for Appadurai globally and largely in the imagination, they nonetheless remain anchored in and mediated by the material, context-specific realities of locality, tradition, migration and the consumption of media.

While notions of hybridity are surprisingly scarce in Appadurai's work, it is through them that other akin observers have characterized the present and future of cultural experience in globalization (Marwan M. Kraidy 2005; Jan Nederveen Pieterse 2009). The tendency is here towards optimism. They celebrate the potential of "hybridity" (Homi K. Bhabha 1994), "mélange" (Pieterse 2009, 75-77) or "contamination" (Kwame

Anthony Appiah 2006) as a force against the artificially rigid cultural, identitarian and geographical boundaries imposed from above (and beyond) in modernity. Mixture and change, as opposed to essence and constancy, are and have always been the ground zero of human culture and identity. Globalization processes are bringing this reality into the open, they suggest, making border-crossing exchanges, hybrid cultural expressions and mongrel media texts pervasive. More skeptical accounts, however, have argued that access to cultural capital and resources remains too unevenly distributed and monetized to consider their mere admixture a universally emancipatory practice (see Kraidy 2005, 58; 66-67). What is, we can ask, subversive or liberating in two openly hybrid texts like *Slumdog Millionaire* (Danny Boyle, 2008) or *Running with the Bulls* (Zoya Akhtar, 2011)? When is the hybridity discourse serving a mere masking function for neoliberal symbolic accumulation, commodification or co-option? While most agree today that transcultural practices and spaces have an important, maybe even radical, role to play in the trajectory of the global, a critical stance is needed that relates those manifestations of aesthetic or symbolic 'impurity,' diversity and ambivalence with not only the socio-economic, geographical and historical relations under which they come into being, but also the ones they themselves produce and reproduce.

In our case, such debates around culture, space and politics in globalization inevitably lead to the 'question' of place. Arguably the most recurrent debate regarding today's ever-changing spatialities revolves around the tension between the global and the local, which, in turn, tends to be subsumed under a fundamental distinction between space and place. A popular argument is that an unstoppable global and abstract space of financial flows and cultural commodities is doing away with the very notion and specificity of places as those geographical containers of history, identity, relations and meaning. That, in a way, the world is in the process of becoming 'placeless.' Massey

offers a different, more nuanced perspective. While she acknowledges the immense changes affecting localities and local subjects all over the world, she laments the problematic spatial assumptions on which these arguments tend to rest; namely, that places were somewhat coherent and self-contained entities in the past and that nowadays they are mere passive victims of a free-floating force always generated somewhere else (2005, 99-103). For her, not only are these accounts inaccurate but, as importantly, they negate the possibility of politics. They project an image of globalization as ungraspable and irreversible. They place us at the end of history and geography. Against these views and in line with her relational and political approach to space-time in general, Massey proposes what she calls a "global sense of place" (1991; 2005): a notion of place which obtains its uniqueness not from its isolation from others, but by embracing its particular location with respect to them; understanding that the "'outside[s]' […] are part of what constitutes the place" (Massey 1991, 28).

Massey's viewpoint on place, beyond its theoretical, moral or even political potentialities, is very much grounded on the geographical materiality of globalization. This is so not only because, at ground-level, most people today still are born, live, develop, relate, move, and die *in places*, but also because even for the interests of those neo-liberal elites moving in the space of flows, which Bauman equates with pre-modern "absentee landlords" (2000, 13), place still matters. In some ways it may matter more than ever before. The capitalist economy depends, and thrives, on difference, and in an increasingly integrated global world local differences become "more rather than less significant because highly mobile capital is in position both to shape them and take advantage of them" (Harvey 2009, 131). If capital is "more than ever" the "concrete universal" of our historical epoch, as Slavoj Žižek (2004) argued some years ago, it also

true that its planetary activities have become more diversified, locally-oriented and unpredictable than ever before.

Moreover, not only does economic globalization acquire significantly different shapes in different contexts, but, as studies have proven, "the incorporation of unique places into the global division of labor changes not only those locales, but the world system as well" (Warf and Arias 2009, 5). Max Weber's classic study *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2002 [1905]) already opened the door to consider the way in which capitalist economy, far from a self-propelled and pre-designed roadmap, responds, adapts to and feeds off from sociocultural and geographical specificities. In this sense, 'local places' in general should not be seen today simply as the victims of "some ethereal process called globalization" but the very contexts and venues where it is unevenly produced (Harvey 2001a, 30). This idea is particularly central to Saskia Sassen's groundbreaking study of what she has labelled "global cities" (1991; 1998; 2007), a concept that refers to those financial centers like Frankfurt, New York and Hong Kong in which globalization not only materializes, but is also actively given shape. These cities are for Sassen not only infrastructural and strategic concentrations of capital, technological or managerial power; they are also home of myriad crisscrossing social, labor, personal and cultural relations all participating in different degrees in the city's inward and outward production of space. Cities are also central for, among many others, Edward Soja, who focuses on Los Angeles as the emblematic urban formation within globalization he calls "cosmopolis" (2000) and, more recently, Elizabeth Grierson and Kirsten Sharp, whose edited collection *Re-Imagining the City* (2013) explores the interactions between urban spatialities, creative practices and globalization processes.

Inevitably, increasing awareness of the place-bound nature of globalization has involved reconsiderations of the nature, role and fate of the national. While "first-wave"

globalization theories confidently predicted the demise of the nation-state and the decline of national cultures and identities under the urges of the global, recent years have seen scholars defending more balanced approaches (see Robert J. Holton 2011). According to Sassen, a leading voice in the matter, it is crucial that we begin by understanding that many of the processes which we associate with the global inhabit and are still realized from within the national—both geographically and institutionally (2007, 11-44). As she argues, it is the sustained work of states around the world that supports the growth of global cities, the implementation of a global economic and cultural market, the uneven and selective border regimes funneling the mobilities of peoples and objects, and the formation of the very supra-national institutions like the WTO, the IMF, NATO and the ICC compromising a great deal of their sovereignty.

But the interactions between global and national are more than a matter of the transformation of the states' functions and sovereignty. The value and stability of the national as a social, cultural, emotional and identitarian touchstone is today also under duress. Increase in cross-border mobilities and encounters, demographic changes, hybrid identities, and the incessant physical and virtual circulation of images and stories Appadurai brought to light have thrown modern national imaginaries and spaces into flux. What social theorists call transnationalism refers precisely to this new social condition; one in which nation-states still retain different degrees of material and symbolic power, but in which a number of phenomena and dynamics spanning borders increasingly transcend their territorial and epistemic logic. If the pressures, frictions and "risks," in Ulrich Beck's famous usage (2009), brought about by these and other globalizing process are being confronted by some with vindications of the national—under claims as varied as cultural protectionism, labor and economic stability, ethnic purity, security threats, social cohesion, and/or political self-determination—it is also true that alternative frames

of thinking, looking and engaging with the world and others are gaining momentum. The recent comeback of cosmopolitanism in the social sciences signals the need for new ways to account for these developments.

Building on the early work of Ulf Hannerz (1990), Martha Nussbaum (1994) and Jacques Derrida (2001), as well as classic texts by the Stoics and Kant, many contemporary theorists have hailed cosmopolitanism as the conceptual framework most attuned to a social, spatial and ideational world increasingly working "beyond national frames of reference" (Gerard Delanty 2009, 3). Literature on cosmopolitanism has therefore taken most interest in those emerging modes of thought, practice and affect which imagine and respond to more extensive and heterogeneous communities of responsibility and belonging. Globalization, it is said, has laid the ground for such modes and communities to flourish. In such a fertile environment, the question for many theorists has been how to translate the classic cosmopolitan ideal of the 'citizen of the world,' somebody morally committed to the whole of humanity, into a critical, normative and politically transformative agenda for the cotemporary world. Studies in social theory (Delanty 2009; Beck 2009), history (Walter Mignolo 2000), geography (Harvey 2009), urbanism (Jon Binnie et al. 2006) and political science (Pheng Cheah 2006; Chris Rumford 2008) have wrestled with the challenges and contradictions of such a project. They have had to confront notions of cosmopolitanism as an attack on national and local identifications, the historically Eurocentric and imperialistic underpinnings of the term, its diffuse utopian horizons of a 'perpetual peace,' and the thin geographical footing on which a mostly abstract ethical ideal has tended to rest. "No cosmos," Bruno Latour notes responding to Beck, "no politics either" (2004, 450).

Less disputed than its political implementation or its potential as counterbalance to the structural inequities of global capitalism is the awareness that cosmopolitanism is

becoming a prominent and enabling component of everyday social interaction; an inescapable cultural and sociological fact. Theorists tend to describe contemporary cosmopolitanism as an overall disposition of openness to other peoples, their cultural forms, practices and experiences (see Zlatko Skrbiš and Ian Woodward 2013, 10-28). Such a disposition, they underline, is not the exclusive domain of the mobile, culturally fluent elite class of financiers, diplomats and intellectuals, as earlier approaches seemed to suggest. Cosmopolitan attitudes and practices manifest themselves also in the localized, everyday encounters of ordinary people. Research locates them in daily interactions in streets, cafés, workplaces, schools, music festivals, football stadiums or the internet. Above and below, cosmopolitan 'moments' even take place, studies tell us, in encounters of humans with culturally diverse objects and symbols, from foreign languages, to food, clothes or films. Looking at its many permutations, Skrbiš and Woodward lean towards a view of cosmopolitanism not as a fixed blueprint, but as a flexible, at times purely strategic, cultural "discourse" or "repertoire;" a broad set of symbolic, attitudinal and behavioral resources mobilized unevenly, and in many occasions unconsciously, depending on the actors and the situation (2013 24-26; see also Kendal et. al 2009, 99-123). As they explain, cosmopolitan orientations—related as they have been mostly with cultural openness—are at each emergent social situation in negotiation with other social and personal imperatives, including those of money, work, class, sex, gender, identity, family and community. The cosmopolitan 'way' may thus be favored at times and discarded at others. 'Actually existing' cosmopolitanism is then for these authors as much a question about individual actors as it is about social and spatiotemporal contexts, as much about abstract dispositions as about concrete performances.

Cosmopolitanism, or its possibility, adds yet another piece to the saturated conceptual puzzle of globalization and another discursive and aesthetic modulation to consider when facing a cultural text or practice. Film scholarship, albeit with a certain delay with respect to other disciplines, has found in recent years a number of avenues to mobilize the concept when looking at contemporary cinema (see James Mulvey et al. 2017). Cosmopolitanism has been deployed to explore emerging, more inclusive institutional practices, spaces and arrangements in the cinema (Dina Iordanova 2017; Monia Acciari 2017; Dorota Ostrowska 2017), the disposition of certain films and filmmakers to engage with cultural alterity and the other (Dimitris Eleftheriotis 2012; Maria Rovisco 2013; Daniela Berghahn 2017), the cinematic articulation and performance of postnational subjectivities (Tim Bergfelder 2012; Maria del Mar Azcona 2015; Jackie Stacey 2015), or the development of new approaches to contemporary filmic forms, spaces and narratives (Deleyto 2017). Cinema, all these works suggest, can be a stimulating site for cosmopolitan discourses, encounters and debates.

Polanski's transnational cinema, far as we have strayed from it in the preceding pages, seems an intuitive choice for such kinds of analyses. His films are packed with mobile and rootless characters, cross-border encounters, morally ambivalent predicaments and acid attacks on all kinds of essentialist identities, national ones included. As a filmmaker, Polanski's errant wanderings across borders, his continued rejection of national labels for himself or his work (see Cronin 2005), the stylistic hybridity of his oeuvre and the kind of ambivalent detachment that his films emanate qualify his sensitivity as an example of what Eleftheriotis indentifies as "cosmopolitan authorship" (2012). Even in industry terms, Polanski's persona and body of work suggest an interesting springboard to assess the ethical, ideological and economic reasoning

behind the permutations of cinematic production, distribution, consumption and reception patterns in globalization, particularly in the context of Europe.

All this said, and without discarding the conceptual value of cosmopolitanism for my analyses, the main interest of this work lies somewhere else. The analyses to follow are less concerned with reflecting on issues of cultural openness and tolerance, moral inclusivity or ethical commitment and more with bringing to light, through their cinematic manifestation, the socio-spatial dynamics, hierarchies and forces, determining the actual conditions under which people think, interact, confront and relate with each other in a transnational and globalized reality—even when it is among those conditions that the reemergence of cosmopolitanism must be considered. Before embracing becoming citizens of the world (those of us allowed such privilege), we should know what world we are pledging alliance to. Choosing space as the key epistemic and heuristic tool of this research responds to the belief that it is through its articulation and production, both material and symbolic, that the designs of those impalpable forces and networks we associate with power in the world system obtain their most painful expression and their most vulnerable exposure. But it also responds to the belief that the cultural imagination in globalization, its production and interpretation—including phenomena like cosmopolitanism, nationalism, transnationalism and hybridity—, is very much a spatial question; an ongoing and Utopian attempt at locating ourselves and others within an increasingly imposing planetary whole. In this sense, and finally, it responds to Harvey's long held resolution that it must be from the foundation, or rather the constant pursuit, of a reflexive and critical geographical (as well as historical) thinking and knowledge, not unlike what Jameson calls 'cognitive mapping,' that alternative ways of being in and with the world should begin to be imagined. The cinema is too powerful a source of geographical knowledge and imagination to be left out of this project.

Geography is What Hurts

With this task in mind, and as it should have become evident by now, the approach of this thesis will be decidedly interdisciplinary, one whereby film remains its main object of analysis, but is considered and approached as one more component of the socio-spatial fabric of globalization. In thinking through the dialectics between society and film within globalization, my main aim is to explore how Polanski's 'geopolitical cycle' has staged and chronicled both the crisis of the national and its gradual replacement by the transnational as the dominating socio-spatial paradigm of our epoch. Artists, Jameson has written, "sense the dilemmas of national subalternity and dependency much earlier than most other social groups, except for the actual producers themselves [as] they find themselves keenly aware of the external damage to that paradigm of national allegory within which they used to work" (1995, 110). Speaking specifically about literature and its historical ties to nationalism, Kwame Anthony Appiah recently noted how "the condition of so much contemporary fiction and poetry […] involves a kind of cartographic crisis, an emergency in the map room" (2017). Less concerned than Jameson on the geopolitics of globalization, Appiah finds justification for this crisis on the ever-more recurrent presence of 'Others,' real and literary, and the de-stabilizing effects their encounter brings to the national(istic) geographies and narratives their absence used to sustain. Of course, many theorists today remind us that transnationalism, understood as those relations and spaces spanning national borders (Steven Vertovec 2009), is at least as old as national states themselves—the inclusion of *The Pianist* in this study responds at some level to this fact. But it is also true that it is within globalization that transnationalism has first emerged as viable and necessary concept as well as "a productive form of cultural-political organization and identification" (Halle 2008, 5). Underneath the abstract totalizing view of the global, and above the limited and limiting

imagination of the national, transnationalism offers the opportunity to rethink space, time, and society anew.

Critical spatial thinking, as well as film theory (see Hjort 2009; Brown 2009; Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim 2010), teaches us, however, to be careful to equate transnationalism with progressiveness or emancipation, even if it can certainly become the vehicle for such projects. Space may be inherently political, but this does not mean that certain spaces, spatial practices or topographic categories have, by default, specific political associations. Larger scale is not a synonym for fairer politics. Mobility does not equate freedom. Borders not only divide. "The devil," Harvey writes, "all too often lies in the geographical details" (2009, 125). Massey herself warns us against spatial abstractions by which openness and closure, locality and globality, mobility and stasis, space and place, are ascribed a priori positive and negative connotations. As she takes great pains to argue, there are simply no universal rules for space and place; there are only theoretical and conceptual tools with which to assess particular situations and the concrete "power-geometries" that shape them (2005, 163-177; see also 2009). Nationalism, for one, is not the same in Palestine, Poland or Catalonia, and we may easily find ourselves defending one while abhorring another. Nor is transnationalism the same when we talk about Hollywood's global dominance or about the "counter-hegemonic responses" emerging from Third World cinemas, to use Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden's introductory examples to the concept (2006, 2). As Massey writes: "simply saying no to nation, home, boundaries and so forth is not in itself a political advance (it is spatial fetishism to think it will be)" (2005, 174).

All these ambivalences, contradictions, instabilities and blurred boundaries leave us a frustratingly messy and volatile landscape to navigate and evaluate in our analyses. Geography hurts, to rework Jameson's famous dictum on history (2002, 88), because it

has the nasty habit of disrupting what we deem to be universally true, fair or logical and of showing us the wild multiplicity of which the world is actually made. But geography also hurts, as history does for Jameson, because its pasts and presents, its 'heres' and 'elsewheres,' are steeped in the inequities, violence, struggles and suffering under the capitalist system, its continuous and uneven cycles of fragmentation and unification, concretion and abstraction, territorialization and de-territorilization, creation and destruction.

Now, it may seem trite to argue that film—the spatial system, the moving image—is the cultural and artistic form more adept at conveying and illuminating the relentless spatial transformations of society and the world. And yet, it is a statement that rings today as valid as ever. Globalization's economic, cultural and spatiotemporal dynamics make cinema's particular form of production, representation and address an exciting site for analysis. Polanski's 'geopolitical cycle' offers in this sense a rich, if idiosyncratic, transnational constellation of characters, spaces, trajectories, relations and social and historical forces to be explored in search for insights, symptoms and responses to the multiple, uneven, contradictory and in many cases unfair spatialities of globalization. Owing to its recurrent presence in Polanski's filmography, its relevance for social and film theory in general, and its pivotal location in the overall trajectory of the global, the following chapter will revolve around the urban chronotope in general, and late twentieth-century Paris in particular; the capital of modernity, social and cinematic, sitting at the edge of a new age and a new world.

2. Paris, Je te Déteste

Much has been written in social theory on the impact of contemporary globalization on cities, particularly on major metropolitan centers. Saskia Sassen's work on global cities describes their transition from centralized embodiments of state power and national identity into interconnected hubs of all kinds of transnational networks, exchanges and relations. According to the work of Sassen and others, cities are the main sites in which globalization engages with the national and the local; the places where the global is produced and *takes place* (see Sassen 1991; 1998; 2007). This reality, they propose, makes cities key sites of analyses, but also of struggle, negotiation and possibility.

My focus in this chapter is not so much on the 'sociological' transformations of the city within globalization but on exploring their effect on what Edward Soja calls the "urban imaginary" (2000, 218); that is, the ways in which we imagine, practice and represent cities and urban life. Among the global cities usually charted in the literature on the topic, Paris occupies a peculiar position. From a historical perspective, Paris has long been involved in transnational and globalizing processes. Stephen W. Sawyer and Mathias Rouet (2012), for instance, point to its place as the epicenter of the French colonial empire, trans-Atlantic commerce and exchange since the sixteenth century. The city's colonial surplus would fund not only its physical modernization, but also its gradual transformation into a global capital of tourism, consumerism, culture and the arts, particularly from the 1800s onwards. The influx of French, colonial, American and European tourists, workers and merchandise and the arrival of foreign thinkers and artists turned Paris into a breeding ground for different forms of cosmopolitanism, both aesthetic

and political (see Ihor Junyk 2013). Modernism and its (Westernized) universalistic ideals flourished in response to this new socio-spatial environment, while the images and stories about the city it disseminated, and which cinema would not take long to set in global motion, fashioned Paris into the universal symbol of all the promises and mystique as well as dangers of modern urban life.

Fast-forward to the present and Paris, reports tell us, rates as high as the third economic center in the world (A.T. Kearney 2018)[3] and its metropolitan population is the second largest in the European Union (Eurostat 2016, 87).[4] Paris is a leading global tourist destination and one of the most culturally buoyant and ethnically diverse cities in the West. Centralized core and symbol of the French state, Paris is also a key player in the European and international geopolitical arenas, most recently as the site and name-giver of the 2015 Paris Agreement, a United Nations treaty conceived "to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change."[5] Even the city's long tradition of urban mobilization, resistance and crises has been reframed in the last decades in markedly transnational terms, most notably around the plights of migrants and refugees. At the time of writing, workers of all ages, races, origin and even ideologies, are taking to the streets of the French capital, dressed in yellow vests, in reaction to the neo-liberal, pro-global market policies of President Emmanuel Macron.

Judging from this brief account, it would be tempting to see the city's trajectory as one of continuity and almost inertia; a pristine, if idiosyncratic, example of the organic evolution of a major metropolis within an increasingly globalizing world. Writing in 1996

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[3] See A. T. Kerney's 2018 "Global Cities Report" here: https://www.kearney.com/documents/20152/4977523/2018+Global+Cities+Report.pdf/21839da3-223b-8cec-a8d2-408285d4bb7c?t=1527106649606

[4] See Eurostat's report "Urban Europe: Statistics on Towns Cities and Suburbs" here: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/7596823/KS-01-16-691-EN-N.pdf/0abf140c-ccc7-4a7f-b236-682effcde10f?t=1472645220000

[5] See the United Nations' Paris Agreement webpage here: https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement

at a peak moment in the globalization debate, Marc Augé celebrated the resilience of the "village" character of Paris under the pressures of "supermodernity"—his particular label for our present condition. Whatever changes the contemporary world may be bringing to the contours, surfaces and entrails of the city, and whatever fears these may prompt in the old-time Parisian and the *flâneur*, Augé sustained, time and time again the city has proven able to adapt and incorporate them into a seemingly coherent and continuous, if imaginary, whole (1996, 177-179).

Unfortunately, not all accounts have been so benign. Multiple studies before and after Augé's have revealed that such incorporations, particularly those related to the global economy, tourism and the city's colonial 'Other,' have not been necessarily organic or peaceful. On the contrary, they have been achieved through strategic acts of urban upheaval, spatial segregation, historical silencing and symbolic repression (see, for instance, Manuel Castells 1972; Paul White 1998; Michael Sibalis 2004). In one of his latest explorations of his native city, for instance, Paul Virilio (2005) depicts Paris as plummeting, if not dissolving, into a global urban continuum defined by violence, mediatization, paranoia and anonymity.

The stark contrast between the 'urban imaginaries' of two Parisian denizens like Augé and Virilio suggests not only discrepancies in their personal views, experiences, or even ideologies, but also, and more significantly, the latent struggles and anxieties of a national capital trying to come to grips with its own position, identity and fate within a new, more intensely global reality. Issues of change, nostalgia, resilience and/or loss fluctuate across these and other recent accounts. The cinema, major industry and cultural staple of the city, has of course not been alien to these tensions, but it has reframed them in its own unique terms and according to its own realities, possibilities and fears. This chapter dwells on a historical turning point in the trajectory of Paris within contemporary

globalization, the last two decades of the twentieth century, as reflected in the cinema and, more specifically in two Polanski's films set in this city, *Frantic* and *Bitter Moon.*

Paris, Hollywood

Referring to filmic 'responses' to this or that 'real-life' development has the danger of inferring that cinema exists somehow detached from society, a more or less reliable chronicler but not a player. The study of the interplay between urban and cinematic spaces, Mark Shiel (2001) has argued, may be a useful tool in righting that wrong. Starting with Benjamin in the 1930s, many have signaled the dialectical affinity between both modern creations. If cinema is an eminently urban commodity, the necessary aesthetic companion to the perceptual challenges, accelerating rhythms and spatial overlappings of the metropolis, cities have in turn proven highly responsive to the forms, images, discourses and practices generated by the medium. Films always affect the spaces they depict and cinema, David B. Clarke writes channeling Baudrillard, "necessarily possesses the potential to leak out, continuously, all over the city; and vice versa" (1997, 3).

At least to an outsider, few cities appear as cinematic as Paris does. Home to the medium's first public exhibition, one of the two or three most filmed cities in the world, and a recurrent selling point in movie titles and promotional imagery, Paris has had a second life on the screen that to many of us seems inseparable from, if not superseding, its 'real' one. Of course, much of the medium's historical fascination with the city has been predicated on the romanticized meanings and alluring visual morphology of the city 'proper;' with its carefully located monuments and wide open spaces, its monumental bridges standing over the glittering waters of the ever-flowing Seine, the transparent façades of shops and café terraces and the omnipresent domestic balconies opening the private and the public to each other's gaze, as well as the sublimely messy human

spectacle Baudelaire and then Benjamin marveled at while wandering through its streets. Even the rationalistic, perspectival design of its boulevards, opened by Haussman's nineteenth-century renewal to impede the erection of barricades (Benjamin 1999 [1982], 23) and to favor the circulation of labor and capital throughout the city (Harvey 2003a, 100-112), seem to have been conceived also with the foresight of making them amenable for the optical workings of the film camera (or a surveillance device).

In Paris, cinema embodies both the banal and the mighty. As part of an oft-cited article on the narrative dimension of the city, Susan Hayward labels Paris as "French cinema's number one product" (2000, 28), pointing at once to the city's material and symbolic centrality in the country's film industry, and to how its practices, stories and images have 'produced' the capital in particular ways. Specifically, Hayward laments here French cinema's historical contribution to the cultural and geographical marginalization of the city's alterity and, by contrast, its perpetuation of hegemonic images and meanings stemming from its modern epoch. Yet, against this background, Hayward provides evidence of changes taking place around the turn of the century in Paris' cinematic image, especially in terms of space, history, sexuality and race (2000, 32-34). Films such as *La haine* (Mathieu Kassovitz, 1995), *J'ai pas sommeil* (Claire Denis, 1994), *Les amants du Pont-Neuf* (Léos Carax, 1991) and *La Commune (Paris 1871)* (Peter Watkins, 2000) are examples of that change.

The cinematic history of Paris, however, soon reveals a second force at least as powerful as that of French cinema in the composition of the city's 'sense of place,' and that is Hollywood. In this, Paris may not seem different from other big cities. Roughly since the end of the First World War, Colin McArthur points out, Hollywood has exerted an "economic and aesthetic hegemony over world cinema" and "the cinematic representation of world space," something especially evident in the case of cities: "there

must hardly be a major city in the world which […] is not known primarily by way of Hollywood" (1997, 33-34). Looking at iconic examples such as *Funny Face* (Stanely Donen, 1957) and *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972), McArthur characterizes Hollywood's representational activity on non-US cities as mainly one of Othering, whereby those foreign places are turned into passive, albeit spectacular, spatial backdrops for the projection of particular US American stories, needs, fears, fantasies and ideologies. Shiel, who also mentions *Funny Face* as the archetypal example of the reification and "branding" of Paris in post-WWII Hollywood, elaborates on the ambivalence of this dynamic (2008, 115-116). In his view, if the cinematic appropriation of Paris and other European cities by Hollywood has been fraught with feelings of economic and geopolitical superiority, it has also attested to certain US cultural and ideological anxieties. In general, however, analysts have seen in Hollywood's transnational expansion a Trojan horse for globalization *as* Americanization, opening the gates for the borderless expansion of a US-led "market capitalism" and its whole cultural and ideological package (Tweedie 2013, 1).

Before globalization, and before cinema, the imperial shadow of the US already loomed large over French and Parisian imaginaries. Historian Philippe Roger traces the genealogy of Anti-Americanism in the French cultural and political intelligentsia back to the late 1700s and yet notes the all-pervasive idea that "in the twentieth century, France was invaded by the United States" (2005, 339). This sentence opens a chapter precisely dedicated to the growing fear in France towards the American metropolis, its de-humanizing scale and capitalistic rhythms. The chapter ends with Baudrillard's notoriously cynical "jubilation" at the 9/11 attacks in New York (2005, 370; see Baudrillard 2002). That it was a particular image of Paris, with its bistros and concierges, that was acting as the urban 'Other' to the American city and all that it represented is clear

enough. It is not surprising then that it would be through the streets, buildings, and peoples of Paris that French cinema would channel and stage its discourses on the transnational, dialectical relationship between France and the US. From Jean-Pierre Melville's declared Americanophilia, evidenced in films like *Bob le flambeur* (1956) and *Le samouraï* (1967), through *Cahiers du Cinéma's* and the *Nouvelle Vague's* more ambivalent yet increasingly sour infatuation with Hollywood, to the blatant anti-Americanism of Bertrand Travernier's *L'appât* (1995) and Godard's *Éloge de l'amour* (2001), Paris has acted as the main spatio-cultural prism for the articulation of the anxieties, desires, and struggles pervading Franco-American transnational relations.

My analyses of *Frantic* and *Bitter Moon*, both Parisian and Franco-American transnational artifacts in their own way, aim to build on this idea while also rethinking its implications on two fronts: on the one hand, that the French historical obsession with US imperialism, although not unfounded, is at times a working substitute in the geopolitical imaginary for the processes of a much more complex global capitalist system; and on the other, that such simplified, surrogate imaginary tends to carry with it a dissimulation of France's own active involvement in this system, particularly through its imperialistic past and its neo-liberal, globalizing present. It makes sense that such preoccupations would gain renewed momentum in the period surrounding these two films. The late 1980s and early 1990s were a decisive period in the progressive opening up of the European national spaces and the liberalization of their economic and cultural markets. These were the years of the 1987 Single European Act (SEA), aimed at the creation of a single market in the continent, and the negotiations of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), a more extensive treaty signed in 1993 and directed at the global reduction of trade barriers and quotas. Finally, the formation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 sealed the neo-liberal, de-nationalizing future of the global economic space.

In this climate, France's state *dirigisme* under Miterrand after 1981 had soon proven unresponsive to rising global competition and the increasing dependence of countries on foreign trade and investment. This resulted in a deficit crisis which all but forced the country to fold and adopt neo-liberalism, corporatization and austerity as leading economic principles going forward (John Girling 1998, 14-18). Those years of crisis also brought, first under Mitterrand and then under the ensuing center-right rule of Jacques Chirac, an increasingly tense engagement with the country's immigrant population, marked by the rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen's far right Front National in the early 1980s and the racially-charged riots proliferating in the *banlieues* of the country's major cities. As for Paris itself, growing pressures coming both from the requirements of a transnational, intra-urban global economy and its burgeoning and multicultural demographics were met with a series of urban renewal programs aimed to adapt the cityspace to its new location in the planetary scene while also maintaining its much-vaunted national character (Annette Fierro 2003; White 1998). These programs involved a new generation of skyscrapers, hotels and shopping malls in *La Defénse,* Paris' international business district, an architectural upgrade and cleansing scheme directed at particularly strategic areas of the city, and Mitterrand's own "pharaonic" *Grand Projects* (most notably the *Pyramide du Louvre*), conceived as symbols of the French State's prestige and enduring rule over the city as well as tourist attractions (Fierro 2003, 19).

Yet perhaps closer to the hearts, minds and pockets of filmmakers were the changes taking place all over Europe in the realm of the cultural industries and cinema more specifically. Thomas Elsaesser (2005) and Randall Halle (2008) describe what a tumultuous time this was for the then-emerging European cultural market. As voices rose on the continent against the idea that culture was to become another commercial good under GATT and thus likely to fall prey to US hegemony, several protective measures

were put in place. Only in the period between the releases of *Frantic* and *Bitter Moon*, the Council of Europe (CE) created the Eurimages fund (1988) and the EU implemented the first MEDIA program (1991), both dedicated to the public support of trans-European audiovisual products and industries; an association of filmmakers led by Ingmar Bergman and Wim Wenders created the European Film Academy and the European Film Awards (1988); and the CE established the Television Without Frontiers (TWF) directive (1989), aimed at fostering cross-border circulation of programming within Europe. Then in 1993, mainly aimed at curbing Hollywood's penetration of European markets, France famously forced to introduce the so-called '*Exception Culturelle*' into the GATT negotiations, basically allowing countries to regulate the degree of protectionism they exerted over their national cultural markets.

Despite all these reactive measures, a certain unshakable, gloomy feeling was beginning to sweep European imaginaries that something was being lost never to return and that the continent's future was, for the first time in centuries, being written from somewhere else. In the realm of film, the questionable quality of some of the productions resulting from trans-European collaborations, mockingly referred to by some as "Euro-puddings" (Halle 2008, 48), did not help appease those fears. At the same time, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 had left the continent and the world more generally devoid of political alternatives (at least in name) to a looming, US-led global cultural and economic system seemingly predicated on the commodification of everything. The popular wisdom at the time was that European countries were destined to either "conform or collapse" (Daniel Singer 1995, 123). As the national city and cinematic space *par excellence*, Paris became once again a key arena for the playing out of these material and symbolic tensions on the screen.

As in most other historical or geographical categorizations, Polanski's work on Paris sits somewhat awkwardly within either Hollywood's or French cinematic standards. Between *The Tenant* (1976) and the recent release of *J'accuse* (2019), the city of Paris has appeared, more or less prominently, in seven of Polanski's twenty-two feature films. Although not extraordinary, the number is still remarkable. More dedicated and recognized cinematic chroniclers of the French capital like Marcel Carné, Julien Duvivier, Jacques Rivette, Eric Rohmer, Louis Malle, Alain Resnains, Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Bertrand Blier, Bertrand Tavernier, Claire Denis, Cédric Klapisch or Olivier Assayas are not far from Polanski's figures, in some cases even below them. Nevertheless, Polanski tends to occupy an anecdotal place in cinematic histories of Paris, while takes on his work prefer to present him more generally as an "urban filmmaker" (Mazierska 2007, 72); someone more interested in the transnational continuities of themes of urban alienation, eroticism and danger, than in dissecting the unique set of relations, spaces, histories and stories that subtend and ultimately constitute a particular place. After all, his cinema's urban imaginary encompasses multiple cities around the Western world, including Los Angeles (*Chinatown*), New York (*Rosemary's Baby, The Ninth Gate, Carnage*), London (*Repulsion, Oliver Twist, The Ghost Writer*) and Warsaw (*The Pianist*). And it is it is only in his later, post-Hollywood productions that Paris has become a recurrent presence in his cinema both in front of and behind the camera.

Yet rather than a drawback, Polanski's irregular and, in a sense, opportunistic engagement with his native city offers a uniquely intriguing platform from which to explore the transition of Paris from a national into a global or transnational space. In this, we may find in Polanski's work on Paris that ambivalent critical vantage point that Georg Simmel calls "the stranger" (1950, 402-408) and Eleftheriotis reworks in his notion of the "cosmopolitan author" (2012): an artist simultaneously distant and close, involved and

detached, from the social realities it portrays. Moreover, Polanski belongs to that group of emergent European filmmakers who witnessed from the 1960s onwards with different degrees of suspicion the rising prominence of Hollywood and the US more generally all over the continent. In those years, however, no director would arguably come to occupy the kind of ambiguous, liminal position Polanski would. A Parisian native and proud European, a self-declared world citizen, a Hollywood adoptee and later an unwilling *exilé* back on the continent, Polanski and his cinema have been "looking from the border," to use Deleyto's phrase (2017), between France and the US for more than half a century while never fully committing to either cultural or cinematic canon.

Furthermore, besides being a relatively disengaged, if critical, observer, Polanski himself has also acted as a transnational contact zone and pollinating agent between the cinemas on both sides of the Atlantic. Cultural motifs and formal devices, funding and audiences have followed him in his travels across the pond. This is evident when considering his pivotal role in the emergence of the 'New Hollywood' (and maybe even its decline). But it also surfaces in his late European period, when his authorial prestige and cosmopolitan flair acted as magnets for Hollywood studios and stars like Harrison Ford, Johnny Depp, Sigourney Weaver and Jodie Foster to make the jump to the continent, and France in particular.

The two films analyzed in this chapter, *Frantic* (1988) and *Bitter Moon* (1992), belong to this later period. Beyond their Parisian location and the interest Polanski's 'strangeness' and 'borderliness' bring to the equation, particular thematic motifs, their geohistorical coordinates and the significant tension existing between their similarities and differences make them a suggestive twin object of analysis. Much of their initial appeal resides in the fact that both texts revolve around and rework the old 'American in Paris' motif in particular ways, depicting two notably different, if in their own ways

archetypal, WASP male protagonists and their relationship with the late-twentieth-century Paris as their main narrative and aesthetic motor. Far from the ahistorical imaginaries of classical Hollywood's musicals and romantic comedies, however, these films offer two nonconformist and self-reflexive journeys into the geography, cultural meanings and representational history of the French metropolis at the onset of globalization. In this, I will suggest that these two films can also be read as geopolitical allegories capturing growing anxieties around the global expansion of US neo-liberal economy, cultural ethos and cinema in the late twentieth century as played out within and through Paris.

Screening the Cosmopolis: *Frantic*

As pointed out in the introduction, *Frantic* was Polanski's last major studio film before his eventual, albeit reluctant, immersion in the European transnational co-production market. Judging from Hollywood's financial standards of the time, topped by the $70 million budget of Disney's *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (Robert Zemeckis, 1988), the estimated $ 20million invested by Warner Brothers on *Frantic* made it into a relatively expensive production with, one assumes, substantial monetary aspirations. The figure is even more remarkable considering not only Polanski's controversial public image in the US, but also the fact that his previous studio film, *Pirates*, which had double that budget, had been a massive commercial and critical fiasco. While the ins and outs of *Frantic*'s production history are up to speculation, it makes sense to infer that it was Harrison Ford's involvement in the project that ultimately justified such an investment. Ford was at the pinnacle of his career at the moment of making the film, coming from a succession of massive box-office hits such as *The Empire Strikes Back* (Irvin Keshner, 1980), *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981), *Return of the Jedi* (Richard Marquand, 1983)

and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (Steven Spielberg, 1984), as well as a recent batch of more dramatically demanding roles in films like *Blade Runner*, *Witness* (Peter Weir, 1985) and *The Mosquito Coast* (Peter Weir, 1986), these last two granting him his first Academy and Golden Globe nominations. A match made in cinematic heaven, the union of Hollywood superstar, European *auteur* and the ultimate cinematic destination in Paris seemed the perfect recipe for crossover global success.

As a thriller *tout court*, the film also was to exploit that fertile borderland between the Hollywood *noir* and French crime melodrama or *polar*, a popular generic intersection with a long history in the fictionalized articulation of Franco-American relations (see Alistair Rolls and Deborah Walker 2009, 115-131). Thus, *Frantic* relates the story of Richard Walker (Ford), a US American doctor traveling with his wife Sondra (Betty Buckley) to Paris for a medical conference. Shortly after arriving at their hotel, Sondra disappears without leaving a trace. First on his own and later helped by a hip but penniless girl named Michelle (Emmanuelle Seigner), whose suitcase got switched with Sondra's at the airport, Richard engages in a two-day, restless quest around the city in search of his missing wife. Slowly but surely, it will transpire that Michelle's suitcase, now in Richard's possession, contains a hi-tech nuclear device hidden in a small figurine of the Statue of Liberty she smuggled in her trip from San Francisco and that Sondra has been kidnapped by an Arab terrorist group as a bargaining chip for the device. As Richard's struggles to make his way through the city looking for his wife, French, Middle-Eastern and US agents also get involved in the hunt for the device, turning the Walkers' predicament into a transnational geopolitical affair with the streets and locales of Paris at its center.

Perhaps taken aback by the sudden changes to the release date due to extensive re-editing and the reshooting of the ending (Pat H. Broeske 1988); by its relatively slow

pace and convoluted storyline; by its anxious, iconoclastic approach to the city; or simply discouraged by its 'rated R' label, US audiences responded tepidly to the film, and only the French box office balanced the numbers. However, reviews at the time were mostly favorable. Despite its falling into some narrative and cultural clichés, critics saw in *Frantic* a precise and accomplished generic artifact and a more original revamping of 'Hitchcockian' suspense motifs than those offered by, say, Brian De Palma (see Adrian Martin 1988; Janet Maslin 1988; Roger Ebert 1988; Michael Wilmington 1988). Moreover, the film tapped into the atmosphere of the nuclear paranoia of the 1980s, the intensification of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the convulsed global geopolitical climate that preceded the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. All in all, Adrian Martin would describe *Frantic* as "one of Polanski's greatest, most brilliantly constructed machines," and an astonishing display of the thriller's "pared down textual mechanics" (1988).

Behind, or rather in parallel to, its narrative intricacies and personal dramas, *Frantic* is, as *noir* thrillers so often are, a film about the representation of urban space and, in this case, about the city of Paris in particular. Before receiving its final title, the film was simply called *The Paris Project* (Gerard Brach and Roman Polanski 1987), a title kept for one of Ennio Morricone's musical pieces for the film. Polanski himself explained during its promotion that "from the start the idea was to make a film in the city where I live" and "to show Paris to those Americans whose idea of the city is still based on *Irma la Douce* and *Moulin Rouge*" (2005, 126). The centrality of the city in the film was not lost on critics, US American ones in particular (see Wilmington 1988; Maslin 1988). Most addressed the film's unglamorous depiction of Paris and its transformation of the 'City of Light' into an obscure and abstracted urban environ more defined for what it conceals than for what it shows. Later approaches to the film have not departed much from those original readings. Polanski scholars like Ewa Mazierska (2006, 75-77) and

Davide Caputo (2012, 210-211), for example, have elaborated on *Frantic*'s 'denaturalization' of the city, signaling the film's polarization of its urban landscape between a lifeless surface made of airport hallways, hotel rooms, parking lots and various institutional spaces, reminiscent of both Tati's *Playtime* (1967) and Godard's *Alphaville* (1965), and an Orphic hell characterized by immigration, drug trafficking and violence.

This vision of a city neatly divided in two, socially and spatially, is not new to the representational history of Paris. Authors like Susan Hayward (2000) and David Harvey (2003a, 273-276) describe how Parisian politicians, architects, urban planners and artists have since the beginning of modern times resorted to this binary trope to conceive, reproduce and tame an urban social body which is essentially fluid and unruly. Although a degree of 'binarism' is also present in *Frantic's* portrayal of the city, I would argue that the film does much to complicate this image and that subjected to a close spatio-textual analysis, the Paris spatialized by *Frantic* emerges as a much more nuanced, ambivalent and contradictory city than acknowledged in previous readings. More specifically, I want to suggest that in its spatio-narrative mechanisms, formal devices, character construction and use of locations, *Frantic* works to articulate what I see as an anxious, self-reflexive and ultimately self-defeating portrayal of the transition of the Paris cityspace into that "post-metropolitan" urban formation Edward Soja would some twelve years later identify as the "cosmopolis" (2000, 189-232): that is, a condensed spatial hub of world cultures, global economic flows, transnational relations and geopolitical conflicts permeating all layers of the urban fabric and thus defying any clear-cut representations of the city's space, demography, identity and boundaries.

Establishing Shots

Frantic's mesmerizing credits sequence goes a long way towards introducing many of these meanings and, as is common in postmodern cinema, cueing our attention and "perceptual habits" towards the film's main aesthetic codes (Fredric Jameson 1995, 13). Fading in from a black screen, a towering cityscape gradually takes shape as we speed 'phantom ride'-style over the entry highway of a city at dawn [fig. 2.1]. Neon billboards, road lamps and car lights punctuate an otherwise drab and monochromatic built ensemble. There are no peri-urban rural areas or industrial estates in sight; no marker of place or recognizable construction; no beginning and no end; only an opaque succession of multinational office buildings and housing projects like those flanking the entrance to most European metropoles today. The depth of the shot and the length of the take render the highway straight, infinite and inexorable, while the relentless movement and crispness of the images accentuate the 'cinematicness' of the composition, creating a mood of dynamism, tension and instability. Then the credits begin to roll, the filmmakers' names floating over the road away from us and luring our gaze to follow the pictures' perspectival arrangement before fading in the distance. Finally, the sequence concludes

Fig. 2.2. Stuck on the Peripherique*: road sings and bad omens.*

with an elongated transition in the form of a dissolve from the shot of the highway to a close-up of the protagonist couple in the backseat of a taxi that has characters and cityscape overlapping for a good forty seconds in a brilliant, purely visual anticipation of the film's structural interlacing of both levels of the text.

Morricone's baroque-pop score in this scene adds its own nuances to the film's eerie introduction to the city. Mixing a medley of classical and electronic instruments, playful and tragic melodies, legato and staccato articulations, the piece transmits an uneasy sense of aesthetic and historical interplay, hybridity and subtle dissonance. A dialogue between different temporalities, moods and rhythms is thus appended sonically to the images of the city before the score fades out halfway through its main 'theme' leaving a feeling of haunting unresolved tension. At this point, and with the camera already inside the taxi, Culture's upbeat roots-reggae song "Jah Rastafari" coming diegetically from the car's stereo takes over as we see a black driver at the wheel, which complicates even more the audiovisual and spatio-temporal pastiche of the scene and our mental location of the action. "Do you know where you are?" the woman asks her partner in a clear North American accent; "No" he replies, "it's changed too much."

The daunting, dream-like atmosphere of the credit sequence abruptly dissipates as a sudden puncture forces the taxi to stop in the middle of the highway [fig. 2.2]. The scene lasts a minute, is resolved with no narrative complications beyond the protagonists having to change taxis and, as Caputo suggests, may be simply seen as a mood-setting device and as teasing play with the thriller's conventions and the spectators' expectations on Polanski's part (2012, 203). In terms of space and spatial relations, however, this brief incident proves more significant. On the one hand, this scene serves to bring up the first (accented) utterances in French on the part of the driver, thereby locating the action in postcolonial French territory, and to introduce the US American male passenger's inability to speak the language. On the other, the use of a wide-angle lens and extreme depth of the shots bring into view a number of distant road signs that locate the curious, and informed, observer at a rather specific location: the A3 *autoroute* just about to cross the eastern side of the *Péripherique* ring road; that "circular purgatory," as Kristen Ross describes it, separating Paris proper from the "formless magma" of the surrounding *banlieues* (1995, 53-54).

That the film chooses to pause at this junction is not without meaning. As Ross relates in *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, the *Périph* had been completed in the late 1960s more as a response to the sudden growth in the number of cars in Paris than to the city's infrastructural needs, whose street surface had only increased 10 per cent since the turn of the century (1995, 53). In other words, it was a sign that the city's spatial system was being produced in accordance to the needs of the means of transport and not the other way around. In addition, the government's massive expenditure on the construction and maintenance of the road led many to see it as a concession to big-money industrial interests at the expense of social needs and traditional city life (Simon Sadler 1999, 25-26). Yet as the century grew old and the city's metropolitan area sprawled to completely

engulf the road, its cultural meanings evolved. The growing disparity between the architectural, working and living standards on both sides of the road, and the glaring ethnic component that accompanied such disparities, turned the *Périph'* into a popular epitome of the overall marginalizing logics of the Paris cityspace, particularly in terms of race and class. Substituting the fortifications of the past, this "permeable wall of traffic" (Ross 1995, 54) represented the emergence of a new kind of physical and symbolic borderland within and through the city.

At first sight, *Frantic* does not seem to dwell on these implications, except maybe through the subtle fact that the reggae-loving West Indian driver is, after the change of taxis at this inner city 'border,' replaced at the wheel by a white woman listening to a stereotypically Parisian *musette* accordion piece. At any rate, this brief interlude at the *Périph* does anticipate two things in relation with the film's approach to Paris: on the one hand, a determined acknowledgement of its city's recent architectural history and arguably also its segregatory logics; and on the other, a self-reflexive recognition of the spatial and discursive limits of the film itself, which will focus its gaze for the rest of its length on the, in principle, safer and more familiar realm of the city proper. Only a few seconds later, the distant image of the Eiffel Tower at the far end of a boulevard (certainly a concession in terms of topographical coherence) accompanied by the cheesy, all-too-French song playing from within the taxi seals the deal: "Now do you know where you are?"

Frantic uses its initial moments to toy with the spectator's spatial knowledge and memories of the city, cinematic ones included. Here, sensory stimuli, signs, sounds and symbols pile up resulting in an overwhelming and mostly unreadable urban ensemble. No doubt mediated by the aesthetic interventions of the movie, the Paris cityscape presents itself as simultaneously saturated and generic, a place, as Soja would put it, "unmoored

from its spatial specificity, from the city as a fixed point of collective reference, memory and identity" (2000, 150). Only by explicitly, and ironically, resorting to some visual and aural clichés is some sense of place reinstated in the viewer. The result, at least for now, is a hazy combination of contrasting spatio-temporal referents, leaving Paris' present identity suspended somewhere between reified symbols of national identity and its distant modernist past, on the one hand, and the looming abstracted world of its global, postmetropolitan urban future, on the other.

Once the Eiffel Tower has fulfilled its 'land-marking' function, the rest of the couple's journey to the city center is elided. The ensuing establishing shot places characters and spectators at the entrance of the historic Paris Grand Hôtel, located in the 2nd *arrondissement*. The symbolic and geographical centrality of the hotel in the film is again hardly coincidental. Inaugurated in 1862 as part of Haussmann's renewal of the city, the hotel had by the time of the shooting of the film long ceased to be a French property. Sold in 1972 to an Italian hotel chain and then in 1978 to a Liberia-based corporation, the hotel had been acquired in 1981 by the British Inter-Continental Hotels chain which added its name to the hotel's.[6] A symbol of French 19th Century capitalist splendor turned transnational commodity, Le Grand Hôtel Inter-Continental Paris bespeaks from its very name Paris' knee-deep immersion in the global marketplace.

Although the international business trajectory of the hotel is surely unknown to most if not all spectators, its logics and effects are made conspicuous through the design and formal articulation of the hotel's interiors [fig 2.3]. In contrast to the spectacular 'Second Empire style' that characterizes the facade of the building and the whole

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[6] See *Le Monde* 20/03/1980: https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1980/03/20/dernieres-hesitations-avant-la-cession-du-grand-hotel-a-des-acheteurs-britanniques_2816904_1819218.html (accessed 10th May 2018). Continuing with its trajectory as transnational commodity, the Grand Hôtel changed hands once again in 2014, when it was bought by Constellation Hotels, part of the Qatar Holding investment. See *Financial Times* 7/08/2018: https://www.ft.com/content/b427c6d0-1e10-11e4-bb68-00144feabdc0 (accessed 10th May 2018)

Fig. 2.3. The Walkers in the aseptic spatial bubble of the hotel's lobby.

architectural landscape of the city center, the entrails of the hotel appear bland and meaningless. Straight lines, empty surfaces, cold lighting and pale colors prevail, matching not only the wardrobe of the hotel's occupants but also their skin color. The naked design and muted sounds of the lobby, together with the use of long takes and slow camera movements grant the hotel's images a sedating effect, conveying both the security and dullness of the space as well as its detachment from the messy, everyday realities of the city 'out there.' Defined by what Manuel Castells calls an "architecture of nudity" (2010 [1996], 450), the hotel is thus turned into a self-contained spatial bubble that, if not for the marginal use of French and the inclusion of an unbelievable (and physically impossible) picture-perfect view of the Opéra Garnier seen from the character's room, would seem to float completely outside place and history [fig. 2.4]. That is, the type of ultra-functionalist, de-localized space, Castells argues, most conducive to the restless flows of information, capital and peoples proper of neo-liberal globalization.

Fig. 2.4. Paris' 'unbelievable' views: The Grand Hotel, from where the shot is supposedly taken, can be seen on the left of the image.

Into the Concrete Jungle

This emphasis on the city, its identity and topography returns, moments later, and for good, with Sondra's disappearance: Richard goes to take a shower and Sondra, for the first and only time in the film, actively leaves the space of the shot [figs. 2.5, 2.6]. The scene, initially banal, is made ominous by the spatial manipulations of mise-en-scène, framing, sound, camerawork and editing. Shot from behind the plastic door of the room's shower and with the camera next to Richard's body, the scene is captured in a single, long take. The rumor of water muffles all external sound as we see Sondra take a phone call through the bathroom's open door. The camera, still inside the shower, slowly zooms in on her as she listens, talks, gets tense, tries to communicate with Richard to no effect, and finally, frustrated, hangs up and walks out of the frame. Instead of cutting or moving to Richard, the camera prophetically lingers, Antonioni-like, on the empty space she has left behind for fifteen more seconds: from this moment on, and up until the last scene of the film, Sondra will remain confined in an uncharted off-screen space that, for all we know, could encompass the whole city of Paris, if not more.

Figs. 2.5, 2.6. Staging a spatial problem: Sondra leaves the space of the shot.

Articulated in such terms, the scene exemplifies almost literally Stephen Heath's (1981, 19-75) classic argument on the spatial character of cinematic narration, more recently reworked by Mark Garret Cooper (2002), who suggests that the ultimate function and driving force of narrative cinema is the creation of spatial unity out of spatial dissociation. As he explains, it is through the presentation and resolution of a "spatial problem" that narration "*takes place"* in a feature film (Cooper 2002, 149, emphasis in the original). In this light, what *Frantic* articulates in this scene is a fundamental and rather conventional spatial problem, the separation of a couple, whose resolution will, in typical fashion, bring the narrative to an end.

The singularity of *Frantic*'s spatio-narrative structure however lies in how Sondra's disappearance and Richard's subsequent quest to find her work to conflate the spaces of narrative and city into one single entity, thus turning the geography of Paris into an immense off-screen narrative space for both protagonist and camera to investigate, chart and unify. By following Richard (from now on Walker) in his journey, *Frantic* can thus be seen testing not only the character's spatial and cartographic skills—deficient as they prove to be—but also those of the film medium itself; that is, the ability of film to both conjure and then contain, present and then resolve, the "spatial excess" (Cooper 2002, 151) of a whole metropolis within its diegesis. What is at stake in *Frantic* is, in other words, the capacity of (any?) film to map, narrate and maybe, in the process, 'solve' Paris itself.

However, with the Grand Hôtel as its gravitational center, Walker's desperate cartographic quest is bound to confront a city that, as the initial scenes suggest, rejects easy apprehension. In contrast with Ford's heroes of the early 1980s (with the notable exception of *Blade Runner*'s Rickard), his dazed performance, linguistic limitations and clueless wandering around this foreign city soon characterize Walker less as an "agent" than as a "seer;" that character type Gilles Deleuze describes at the beginning of *Cinema 2* and whose narrative function is merely to roam through and witness the unfolding of a world he is not able to describe or react to (1989, 2). That world, late 20th-century Paris, may not be the deracinated post-war urban landscape Deleuze had in mind in his theorization but, at least for Walker, it proves no less baffling. Channeled and codified through Ford's persona, we witness a whole cultural and economic apparatus, that of Hollywood cinema, struggling to reinstate its representational grip on a foreign space that resists the romantic, exoticizing, 'Othering' gaze through which its films had previously operated and capitalized upon.

For a start, and in contrast to the welcoming, picturesque urban imaginaries of the Parisian comedies by Lubitsch, Wilder and Donen, the city's social life, its true essence, appears here broken and scattered through a constellation of interior, seemingly unconnected spaces. To be exact, of the almost two hours that the film devotes to Walker's two-day journey around the city, only thirty minutes take place outdoors, a figure which decreases to around sixteen if we deduct the opening and closing scenes. Moreover, most of those exterior moments are reduced to static establishing shots of Walker entering or exiting different buildings in search of Sondra. They feature no public or natural spaces, depict little human interaction and provide close to no information about their location or relation to the rest of the city. Furthermore, Walker, untrue to his name, travels by car or taxi almost everywhere, with the rides being considerably cut or

completely elided, thus negating any mental mapping of his trajectory. Finally, the images produced reveal none of the social, physical and visual relations they were meant to generate. Instead, in these shots, Paris' built environment assumes what one critic aptly described as a "malevolent solidity" (Wilmington 1988); turning the city's landscape into an endless, opaque and suffocating architectural mammoth that dwarfs the characters and leaves no place for breathing, alternatives or exits.

Instead, we find the interior spaces in which the film ultimately develops almost literally buried behind the buildings' bulky facades. The constant depiction of interstitial passages, corridors and stairs leading to the actual sites creates a 'thrilling' sense of anticipation and mystery, while also symbolizing the separation between the private and public lives of the city [fig. 2.8]. The compositions inside are tighter and more oppressive, with the camera consistently close to Walker in a way that has his and the other characters' bodies "virtually touching" the frame (Kris Malkiewicz 1988, 29). Contributing to this claustrophobic atmosphere, the windows are consistently shut or blocked. Taken together,

the constellation of enclosed interior generates a fragmented picture, with each new location further complicating the urban socio-spatial puzzle that the narrative builds.

These interior spaces include the hotel's room and lobby, whose aseptic design and monochrome, minimalistic decoration are mirrored in those of the Paris Charles De Gaulle airport and the US American embassy. These spaces or "non-places," as Marc Augé would call them (1992), have in common not only their abstracted, de-localizing qualities and regimented functionality. They also share the same population; namely anonymous, white middle-to-high class tourists and uniformed institutional staff members. Private dwellings prove more clearly 'Parisian,' including the house-boat floating on the Seine where Walker wakes up after being knocked out by an unknown French agent and which doubles as the rehearsal space of a multiethnic jazz fusion band; Michelle's tiny attic apartment and that of her ill-fated friend Dédé, brutally murdered in his kitchen. Of these, Michelle's attic proves the more meaningful, as its geographical displacement, perpetual disorder and eclectic decoration (including a logo of Coca-Cola made to read "Cocaine" pasted in the bathroom's mirror) seem to encapsulate a great deal of the film's discourse on the city as a whole.

Even more significant are however the two flashy nightclubs portrayed in the film, with their colorful decoration, eclectic musical background and multiethnic population. There, the city's postcolonial and transnational ties and identity come to the fore through a heterogeneous collection of migrant characters, ranging from a Jamaican pusher friend of Michelle's, through a group of wealthy Tunisian doctors attending the same conference as Walker, to the Arab secret agents responsible for Sondra's disappearance. It is in these locales that critics have found the main expression of that urban 'hell' they write about and which Walker must explore, Orpheus-like, in search for his loved one (Caputo 2012, 207-208). For Mazierska, however, the association between space and skin color is too

close for comfort and it bespeaks what she sees as racist discourse running through the film (2002, 135-136). In her view, not only are blacks and Arabs constantly depicted through cultural stereotypes, but they are also made responsible for everything bad that happens in the film and to the city and, she adds, "possibly the suffering of many innocent people all over the world" (2002, 136). She then goes to argue that Michelle's death represents her punishment for mixing with "dark men." In making her argument, however, she may be relying on some selective generalizations and, moreover, she seems to downplay all the evil perpetrated by 'whites' and Westerners throughout the film. This includes the merciless torturing of Michelle in her own apartment, their generalized condescension towards Walker's predicament, and their disposition to sacrifice both Sondra and Michelle to retain the nuclear device they themselves manufactured and then sold to the Arabs—not to mention, more abstractly, all the imperialist and neo-imperialist practices that have brought all those 'dark' peoples to Paris in the first place. Although it is true that a nuanced representation of the city's non-white population is not among the film's strengths, a look at the bigger picture may indicate that the film's anxieties may go

beyond skin color and point instead to a broader rupture of basic social, moral and ethical communal standards and to the increasing proliferation of capitalistic interests, methods and logics as the rulers of human relations in the city [fig. 2.9].

In this sense, the film's relation to otherness may be read differently. It may be not so much Michelle's mixing with blacks and Arabs but her association with US Americans, from her smuggling the Statue of Liberty figurine containing the nuclear device to Paris from San Francisco to her involvement with Walker, that ends up leading to her demise. Such a relationship is moreover not one founded on friendship as is in the case of the Jamaican pusher, nor even on personal choice, but on need and dependency. After all, it is Michelle's economic precarity, reminded constantly during the film, that drives her first into crime and then into following Walker even when it clearly implies risking her life. Moreover, this reading allows for a historical and sociological explanation, whereby Michelle's transnational subservience in the film is a representation of France's increasing loss in the 1980s of political and economic autonomy in the global market and its increasing dependency on foreign capital and investment (John Girling 1998, 14-18). If Michelle's final 'punishment' is to be taken as an anxious and gendered cautionary tale on the part of the film regarding the increasingly global and multicultural identity of Paris, as suggested by Mazierska, I would argue that it is the infiltration of the US cultural, military and economic apparatus in the French national space of the capital that lies at the center of the film's preoccupations. That this message would be coming from a Hollywood film, rarely the place to look for or find self-criticism, may point to Polanski's own anti-American stance. Ultimately, it points to the ever-more apparent contradictions, and sociological realities, that transnational cinema has the potential to expose in its practices, narratives, geographies and interpretations.

Fig. 2.10. No safe space.

Paris, Open City

Considering the daunting concrete landscape of the city, the stark spatial and cultural heterogeneity of its interiors, the absence of public communal spaces, recognizable urban markers and instances of sustained, meaningful human interaction, it is not surprising that past and recent critics would coincide in seeing in *Frantic*'s Paris a fragmented and alienating environment; a city made strange. In his theorization of postmodern urban space, Soja signals the difficulty of unravelling the "inner workings" of the contemporary metropolis at a time in which so much of what defines and constitutes the urban is less and less rooted in the local and, instead, relates to dynamics and forces spanning the world at large (2000, 218). *Frantic* offers various glimpses of what Soja calls the global "unbounding" of cityspace.

For one, and for all the socio-spatial dissociations articulated through its images, a theme of openness and flow can be found running through the film, beginning with the very fact that Walker, with no credentials but his manly white looks and bulky wallet, is able to move and enter pretty much wherever he wants in the city—and so is the camera.

Similarly, open doors and exposed spaces are important and recurrent visual and narrative motifs in the film. Such is the case with Walkers' hotel room and Dédeé's house (both broken into and destroyed by unknown forces) as well as the nightclub scene where Walker struggles to keep the bathroom closed as he talks with the Jamaican pusher [fig. 2.10]. Similarly, Michelle is assaulted inside her own apartment and when Walker arrives and finds the door closed from the inside, he is still able to enter the house through a skylight after a perilous detour through the rooftop. More than mere narrative or generic devices, these open doors seem also to hint at the vulnerability of personal or private spaces of Paris and to the dissolution of the ideal of a stable and safe 'home' in this city.

Moreover, this overall porosity of the cityspace can be seen pointing not only inward, but also outward, to the transnational flows of people, culture and capital. For a start, open doors notwithstanding, Walker's mobility around the city, if not always smooth and easy, is still enabled by the fact that almost everywhere he goes English is understood and spoken; from tramps through bartenders to policemen. Additionally, another global language, that of money, recurs constantly as both narrative motor and main connecting tissue and mediator of human relations in the city: we see bills (particularly US dollars but also Francs), coins, checks and credit cards, including an American Express which ends up acting as the key to Sondra's liberation. Meanwhile, markers of the dominating presence of US American culture and economy are everywhere to be seen around the city. While images of Parisian monuments and French cultural imagery are notably scarce, the Statue of Liberty, incarnated in that small replica containing the nuclear device, is gloomily ubiquitous. US brands are also omnipresent, beginning with the Pizza Hut parlor fictionally incrusted in the historical facade of the Grand Hôtel and which, adding insult to injury, is in real life the house of the renowned Café La Paix restaurant which dates from 1862. Although the presence of the Pizza Hut

sign is a clear instance of so-called 'product-placement' on the part of the film's production, the original script of the film did include a reference to a perhaps more symbolic McDonald's establishment (Brach and Polanski 1987, 3). That it would be a Pizza Hut that ended up featuring there makes however sense, as the chain had just opened its first restaurant in Paris a year before and just a few hundred meters away from the hotel at the Boulevard des Italiens.[7] Meanwhile, more prolific, Marlboro and Pepsi signs and products appear 'placed' in dozens of interior shots, acting, by design or in effect, as visual, cultural and economic connecting threads among otherwise seemingly disjointed spaces and subjects.

It is difficult to know how much of the placement of such signs, and the way they are represented, responds to pure commercial agreements and US neo-imperialistic practices (i.e. the cinematic production of foreign urban space), and how much, as suggested in the case of Michelle's death, to a more or less conscious critical stance on the part of the film on the actual 'Americanization' of the city—which would imply that the film is acting against itself or, simply, again, that Polanski's *auteurism* is here biting the hand that feeds him. I would rather approach the question from a dialectical perspective, which accepts that, in a global, all-encompassing capitalist system, critique always exists, in larger or smaller measure, within the means, structures and ideological relations it imposes and makes available (in this case those of globalized commercial cinema). This means, on the one hand, that there is no act of subversion that fully escapes the very structures it may want to attack, and, on the other, that there is no act of systemic reproduction that does not exposes its own ideological mechanisms and contradictions and thus opens the door for critique and disruption.

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[7] See: https://www.pizzahut.fr/brand/historique/historique-monde

Such latent discursive contradiction can be found encapsulated in a carefully composed and sustained close-up of the bistro table where Michelle and Walker regroup after confronting Sondra's kidnappers for the first time. This shot translates the city's commodified 'cosmopolitan' identity into what Baudrillard once decried as the postmodern "proliferating vegetation" of objects (1998 [1970], 25). Here, we can distinguish the flashy business card of the Arab nightclub *Touch of Class*, the French driving license Michelle lifts from a dead Cypriot kidnapper, a *Carte Bleue* and an American Express credit cards, a Marlboro package, the much sought-after nuclear device, a cup of coffee and a *baguette* [fig. 2.11]. Although again an exercise in obvious product-placement, the associations established in the shot are hardly the stuff of a corporate commercial, having capital literally siting at the table with French gastronomy and transnational culture, yes, but also with nuclear war machinery and global terrorism.

Yet it may not be visually, but aurally, that the film's representation of the cultural-economic 'unbounding' of Paris is most conspicuously expressed. I refer mainly here to the song "I've Seen That Face Before (Libertango)*,*" played, and heard,

diegetically four times in the film and integral part of the script itself (see Brach and Polanski 1987). Sung by US-Jamaican artist Grace Jones the song reworks a classic tango by Argentinian composer Astor Piazzolla through a hybrid mixture of dub reggae arrangements, new-wave synthesizers and, again, a *musette* accordion. Coincidence or not, Piazzolla's original "Libertango" was key part of an earlier, more playful, but equally unglamorous, cartographic journey through 1980s Paris in Jacques Rivette's *Pont Du Nord* (1981). If the arrangements of Jones's version make it sound decidedly more contemporary, her added lyrics could not be more becoming: they are sung alternatively in English and French and describe the figure of a ghostly stranger wandering through the darker side of the Parisian nightlife. One of the biggest global triumphs in Jones' musical career, the song is sensuous, sophisticated and catchy, but not particularly energetic for a 'nightclub' song. The melodies are languid and the tone melancholic, while Jones' typically solemn, disaffected and alienating delivery (see Steven Shaviro 2010, 11-34), here particularly evident in her spoken parts in French, offers little cues for judgement and interpretation, adding to the daunting, ineffable character of the city it describes.

By the early 1980s, Shaviro notes, Jones had become a divisive figure for her ambivalent stance towards her own sexuality, transnational US-Afrodiasporic cultural identity and commodified image and art. In pure postmodernist fashion, she worked across the artistic spectrum by appropriating, embodying and performing to "sarcastic excess" all kinds of cultural stereotypes while making (much) profit out of them (Shaviro 2010, 19). Here both the transnational and commercial underpinnings of song and singer are made even more significant by the specific locations in which it is heard in the film. Michelle plays it twice with Walker on her car's stereo on the way to the airport and back; it is heard again at the predominantly Arab nightclub *Touch of Class*; and, much to Walker's surprise, at the other side of the phone when he calls their children back home

in San Francisco. In this way, the song, in its transcultural meanings and border-crossing circulation, establishes what Arjun Appadurai calls a "mediascape" (1996, 35), an imagined transnational cultural and economic space connecting not only a hybrid mixture of Parisian peoples and spaces (and even films), but also the city with the US, Jamaica, Argentina, the Middle East, and, probably, much of the rest of the world.

By the time Walker meets with Sondra's captors for the second time, precisely at that same nightclub where we hear "Libertango" and precisely by means of the American Express credit card, *Frantic*'s Paris has proven utterly ungraspable. The combination of Jones' decidedly transcultural song with the kaleidoscopic decoration of the nightclub, made of tiny crystals refracting colored lights and darkened dancing figures, offers a nice audiovisual condensation for the simultaneous fragmentations and continuities, emptiness and saturation, that pervade the city. In his early and tentative conceptualization of the cosmopolis (2000, 229-232), Soja acknowledges not only the dystopian risks but also utopian possibilities of this new urban paradigm with a potential to escape the rigid Eurocentric, nationalistic, and segregational rationalism of the modern metropolis— precisely the kind of which Paris is the planetary symbol. Some twelve years before the publishing of his book, *Frantic* reflects on the city's transition to that new global paradigm; and its future, according to the film, does not look bright. It is anxiety and not harmony that dominates the images, money and not love that drives the characters, fear and not hope that moves the cosmopolis.

Fitting in with its discourse on Paris as a city in transition to the global, *Frantic* closes its spatio-narrative journey by locating the final showdown of the film, the liberation of Sondra, at dawn and in the interstitial spaces of the *Pont de Grenelle* and the *Île aux Cygnes* standing below it; a 'border' chronotope if there ever was one. The bridge, located in the south-west of the city, marks not only an arterial passage across the Seine,

106

but also a symbolic boundary between Paris and its outsides; leading first to the *Péripherique,* then to the *banlieues* and beyond. Furthermore, Mark Shiel recounts part of the rich cultural, ideological and markedly 'spatial' history of the *Île aux Cygnes*, first as the location of the French colonial pavilions in the 1937 Paris World's Fair and, later, as the projected site of the 1950s Situationist International headquarters, "a kind of Antarctic research laboratory where they would launch psychogeographic expeditions across the city of Paris" (2008, 119; see also Sadler 1999). Here, the Île marks not the beginning of the film's 'psychogeographic' expedition, but its end, while the colonial symbolism of this urban location is here superseded by the globalized meanings of the film. On and under the bridge, embodiments of the many transnational forces and interests coexisting in *Frantic*'s Paris come finally together as US American, Middle Eastern and French bodies all collide over the restless waters of the Seine.

Yet beyond their bordering signification, the rich spatial connotations Shiel notes, and the ambivalent sense of continuity and change the Seine itself brings to the images (always there, never the same), the main significance of the location resides in that it allows the film to play in its final scene while framing in the background two particularly significant Parisian monuments: the distant Eiffel Tower, built precisely as the entrance to the 1889 Universal Exposition, and the 22-meter-tall replica of the Statue of Liberty installed on the Île that same year. The presence of both monuments points of course to a long history of Franco-American relations. They were built by the same team of engineers, that of Alexandre Gustave Eiffel, and at a specific period in which France and the US saw themselves, albeit not always eye to eye, as the world's beacons of democracy, culture and economic progress (see Roger 2005, 101-104). As is well known, the Statue of Liberty now standing in the New York Harbor and designed by French sculptor August Bartholdi was a gift by France to the US in commemoration for the 1886

centenary of its independence, while the replica in the Île was given to Paris three years later by the US American expatriate community living in the city.

Less known is the fact that the statue's genealogy connects also with another instance of pre-global transnationalism and the West's capitalistic production of world's space; that of French colonialism.[8] As Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby details (2005), Bartholdi had originally projected his statue to stand as a lighthouse at the entrance to the Suez Canal, built and exploited by the French during its late-nineteenth-century sway over Egypt. In this first incarnation, the monument was to feature an Arab *fellah* (or peasant) woman the size of the Egyptian colossi and carrying a lantern symbolizing the 'Enlightening' of Asia and the Orient (Grigsby 2005, 42-43). The project eventually fell through and ended up substituted some years later by a massive statue of the canal's French developer, Ferdinand de Lesseps. In the meantime, Bartholdi recycled his design of the Egyptian woman and resold it as the now famous Statue of Liberty, meant to greet migrants arriving in the USA. Back in Egypt, Lesseps' image would remain at the canal until it was blown up by the Egyptian resistance during the 1956 Suez Crisis, also known as the second Arab-Israeli war, an armed conflict through which France, Britain and Israel attempted to take back control of the Canal, which had been nationalized that same year by the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, then backed by the Soviet bloc.

Frantic offers connections between these spatial configurations interweaving the statue's rich transnational trajectory and the Arab-Israeli conflicts engulfing Michelle and the Walkers. Although the film continues here to favor the Franco-American signification, it is a (neo)colonial narrative, more than a fraternal or 'cosmopolitan' one, that emerges in the film's use of the statue in its climactic scene. Here, Michelle, who in the most hopeful of the film's images had moments before rejected Walker's money and

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[8] I want to thank my supervisor Celestino Deleyto for bringing the statue's 'hidden' history to my knowledge.

Figs. 2.12-2.14. Franco-American relations.

109

chosen to help him out of pure affection, is used once again, this time by Walker himself, to take the nuclear device to the terrorists in exchange for Sondra. The exchange is initially a success and the Walkers reunite. Yet as Michelle, penniless again, demands from the captors the money she had been promised for her services and threatens to throw the device in the river, a messy shootout unfolds. Walker regains some of Ford's heroics and knocks the captor keeping Michelle hostage down, but only to see him shoot her in the back moments later. The two Arabs are gunned down by the agents standing on the bridge and Michelle finally dies under it in the Walkers' arms.

Despite the messiness of the scene, the film is careful to stage the events in such a way that the vistas of Tower and Statue are constantly present in the background of the framings, sometimes breaking the 180º axis, and thus, the whole visual organization of the action and the cityspace [figs. 2.12-2.14]. Visually, spatially and discursively opposed, French and US American monuments are at no point framed together in the scene, with each one featuring in virtually the same number of shots (12 and 11 respectively). While screen time favors the Tower (53 seconds against 39, approximately), geographical proximity, and thus size, gives prominence to the Statue. Moreover, as the scene approaches its resolution, and particularly after Michelle is shot, the allocation of the shots leans ostensibly towards the representation of the US American symbol. Conversely, as Michelle's inert body is carried in Walker's arms, it becomes framed by the faraway figure of the Eiffel Tower auguring a somber future for the city both she and the monument represent.

Views from Above

After abruptly cutting to the desperate embrace between the Walkers back in a taxi after the shootout, thus seemingly closing the narrative circle and solving the film's initial

'spatial problem,' a dissolve takes us back to the city streets as the camera gracefully ascends from ground level to a god-like view of the cityscape as the sun begins to rise above it [fig. 2.15]. Then, the final credits begin to roll. If only for its apparent gratuitousness, *Frantic*'s concluding shot draws attention to itself not only as a marvelous technical feat (there is nothing simple about having a camera film steadily while soaring hundreds of meters above the ground), and thus maybe as a comment on the medium's exceptional spatial possibilities, but also as an ambiguous, if not contradictory, corollary to the film's meta-cinematic journey through the city. On the one hand, the breathtaking view of Paris the shot produces, the first in which we are able to see the horizon, does seem to underscore the film's (relative) happy ending and, at the same time, insinuate the city's final fulfillment of its traditional role as the vehicle for US American narratives of self-realization and patriarchal love: Walker has found his inner hero, 'solved' the city and saved his significant other, even if at the expense of Michelle's sacrifice. Paris has, in other words, returned to Hollywood's spatio-narrative fold. On the other hand, and in contrast with the sense of resolution and regained coherence this closing shot conveys in

its move from the micro to the macro, from the 'comic space' of reunited couple to the whole narrated space of the city, there is a sense in which the shot works, at least at some level, as self-consciously deceptive, if not openly ironic. For not only has the narrative been solved in a rather hurried, sloppy way; in spatial terms, the very articulation of the shot reminds us how much of the city's physical expanse and social intricacies has remained outside of the purview of both Walker and the camera itself.

Looking down at Manhattan from atop the World Trade Center, Michel de Certeau famously reflected on the theoretical fantasy that subtends such "celestial" views of cities (1984, 91-93). These images, he argues, work to make "the complexity of the city readable" while detaching the viewer from all the "murky intertwining daily behaviors" that constitute it as a lived space (1984, 92-93). The disembodied ascension of the camera in *Frantic*'s final shot physically performs this separation, and therefore also the spatial fantasy it produces, but it also points to what Stephen Heath would, after Edward Branigan, refer to as "the impossible place" of the camera (1981, 49-50). By placing the viewer in an impossible viewpoint, "the narration questions its own origin" (Branigan qtd. In Heath 1981, 49) and disturbingly exposes, if only for a moment, its own formal and ideological contradictions, particularly its reliance on creating the type of spatial excess it then continuously works to contain (1981, 52).

The origin is here Hollywood, and the spatial excess is that of Paris. But this is not any Paris—certainly not the frozen, domesticable Paris of popular cinematic imaginaries and rationalistic projections. What we have instead is a socially fragmented, symbolically saturated and spatially disorienting postmodern metropolis seemingly impervious to cinematic apprehension. It is a city 'unbound,' as Soja would put it, a global and transnational space whose social, cultural and economic limits greatly exceed its physical ones, themselves in constant process of anxious expansion and reconfiguration.

Seen in this light, what we may find in *Frantic*'s aerial shot is not the deceptively 'readable' urban space de Certeau talked about, but an obscure, densified and continuous cityscape that extends as far as the eyes can see and beyond what the frame can contain, while leaving the sky above only a marginal space for the image to breathe. In this, the shot finds an interesting counterpoint in the analogous, more uplifting ending of *A Tale of Two Cities* (Jack Conway, 1935), whose final shot has the camera ascending from the guillotines in revolutionary Paris to the heavens until it leaves the city completely behind. No such visual, metaphysical transcendence is allowed here; in *Frantic* the city's uncanny geographical expanse continues to haunt, almost victoriously, the film's images even after the narrative is abandoned.

In this way, the final shot becomes a specific reference to the irrepressible social dynamics unfolding at every instant down below; to the ever-sprawling physical expanse of the Parisian city-region; to the border-crossing global cultural and economic connections traversing and connecting Paris with the ungraspable totality of globalization; and, in more temporal terms, to the uncertain, if not very promising, future awaiting a post-modern*izing* European metropolis at the dawn of a new geohistorical moment.

Sex and the City: *Bitter Moon*

Having engaged in such a dedicated and intense exploration of the city and keeping in mind the constant changes in themes and location that had characterized his career until then, it is remarkable that Polanski would turn again to Paris as a setting for his next film. That this was to be his first post-Hollywood production could denote a desire to revisit the city away from the restraints of the US studio system and, possibly, to update, expand or complicate some of the ideas presented in *Frantic* in the less interfering and auteur-

friendly environment of a $5 million French-British co-production. The stark aesthetic disparity between both films would seem to point in that direction, and the casting of Emmanuelle Seigner (by then already married to Polanski) once again as the Parisian companion to, again, a US American in the city inevitably incites comparison. Yet perhaps it should be noted also at this point that *Bitter Moon* had been floating around the industry for years (Anne Andreu 1992), something which may curb one's initial urges to read the film as an outright Polanskian *affair*, as has been the case so far (see, for instance, Andreu 1992; Bernard Bénoliel 1992; Roger Ebert 1994; Janet Maslin 1994; Jonathan Rosenbaum 1997; Izabela Kalinowska 2006; Morrison 2007). Being a transnational director—auteur or not—in 1990s Europe also meant working with what was on offer.

Director aside, *Bitter Moon* is in many ways a direct product and testimony of its time and place. The film's script was penned by Polanski himself, Gerard Brach and John Brownjohn, but it was also an adaptation. Alain Sarde, the producer, had bought the rights to Pascal Bruckner's 1981 French novel *Lunes de Fiel* with the idea, at least at some point, of having its adaptation directed by André Téchiné and with Alain Delon and Isabelle Adjani in the leading roles (Andreu 1992). The move was risky but calculated. The novel had been a success and a scandal first in France and then in the Anglophone world when it was translated to English under the duller title of *Evil Angels* six years later. In it, Bruckner related, with meticulously detailed sexual imagery, the unhinged, degrading and ultimately destructive relationship of a Parisian couple in what many took, not without the author's assent, as a cynical attack on the liberal, emancipatory ideals behind the 1960s and 1970s sexual revolution.

But *Bitter Moon* also needs to be seen as part of the explosion of sex and eroticism that swept Western screens, and the whole public sphere for that matter, as a result of that same revolution. Linda Ruth Williams locates the film as a part of the rise of the so-called

erotic thriller and as an "auteur-helmed" example of the genre's sensational and often fatalistic approach to sexuality (2005, 351-352; 395). Looking at hundreds of other examples, from *Cruising* (William Friedkin, 1981), through *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven, 1992) to *Eyes Wide Shut* (Stanley Kubrick, 1999), Williams offers several reasons for the success of this generic crossover at the time. She mentions the loosening of censorship codes, the cultural unease around changing gender relations, namely the increasing independence of women and visibility of homosexuals, the spread of AIDS and the popularization of new, more private, ways for consuming cinema (and sex) like VHS and Cable/Direct-to-TV productions. She places a central paradox in this cycle, one that is not new in the cinema: while these films exploited carnal spectacle for profit, they tended to act as cautionary tales on the damaging, often deathly, consequences of sexual excess and transgression.

In any case, by the time *Bitter Moon* was made, sex was in the air, not only as a pressing cultural and political concern, but also as a popular, and profitable, ingredient of mass culture and cinema. So much so that, once 'normalized,' sexual desire and performance not only began to stand for what they are—whatever the limitations—but also gained the capacity to act as the graphic and narrative signifiers of something else. It is in such symbolic or metaphorical terms, rather than in strictly 'Freudian' ones, that the sexual rhetoric of *Bitter Moon* shall be explored in my analysis. My aim, in line with the concerns exposed so far, is to reframe the 'libidinal economy' of the film, and to explore how its various signs and dynamics can be mapped, from the coordinates of space and transnationalism, onto concerns with the effects of globalization over Europe, France, and Paris in the 1990s; the personal here being political, in more ways than one.

For all its crude sexual content, much tamed in the film, Bruckner's novel itself touched on the allegorical potential of its *amour fou* tale when it presented its Parisian

couple, formed there by a white French doctor and a Moroccan Arab-Jewish coiffeuse, as nothing less than the coming together of three continents, religions and cultures (1996, 47-51), only to then gloat over its disastrous falling apart. No less scathing in its outcome, *Bitter Moon* deviates from the novel's Gallic postcolonial subtext, makes all the main characters white and Western and translates the result into a more globally marketable Anglophone product. Significantly, now it is she that is French, though fluent in English, while he is refashioned as US American. Meanwhile, acting as their prudish counterpoint is no longer a French, but a British couple. This new transnational constellation of characters may relate, as Jonathan Rosenbaum argued in his review, with the very production geography of the film and its target audience, or with Polanski's desire to exorcise some personal demons from his past and his now-defunct "American experiment" (1997; see also Mazierska 2007, 152-154). However, I would suggest, it also works to dramatize a multilayered critique on the transatlantic cultural, economic and geopolitical relations of the late twentieth century.

This takes us back to the question of the representation and significance of Paris. The first, and lasting, impression is that, in contrast to *Frantic*'s daunting, ever-sprawling metropolis, Paris has in this film receded once again gently into the background and taken up its role as a romanticized backdrop for the imaging of Franco-American affairs. Here there are no tramps, terrorists or pushers; the streets are cozy, clean and readable; the city's monuments are right where they should be, never far from sight; and the whole city seems to glow, also at night. Even the lurid, eventually tragic, excesses of the narrative can be said to find their pretext in that other 'Paris' in which the drives of love, sex and death appear so often inescapably bound together.

However, *Bitter Moon*'s Paris is framed within a self-consciously postmodern*ist* text, by which I mean that its concerns and connotations are at least as much as aesthetic

as they may be sociological and, therefore, less directly concerned with the spatial, historical and political. The film can best be read as a planned showcase of postmodernist "poetics" (Linda Hutcheon 2004 [1988]), including explicit sexuality, an unreliable narrator, intertextuality, self-reflexivity, ironic parody, cynicism, symbolic doubling, ideological double-talk and a pinch of existential nihilism. Looking for Paris in *Bitter Moon* thus requires thinking through layer after layer of formal, aesthetic and narrative signs and devices in the hope of finding its discourse on the city. The form is here (a great deal of) the message. Let us then start with some considerations on the first of those layers, which concerns the narrative and spatiotemporal structure of the film.

Frames Within

As noted by most critics, *Bitter Moon* presents a case of the old 'story-within-a-story' structure. Following Mieke Bal's formulation and terminology (see Bal 2009, 48-74), this technique works by having a "primary" or "framing" story and at least another one "embedded" within it, usually springing from a character's utterance or mental recollection. To define the relationship between stories and the text as a whole, theorists speak also in terms of narrative "levels," so that hierarchies, parallels and exchanges can be better pictured and interpreted. *Bitter Moon*'s diegesis functions in this sense at two relatively distinct levels, each with its own narrative, spatial, temporal, and, to some extent, ontological associations.

So, the film's framing story, which we may relate, in the absence of any cues suggesting the opposite, with the film's present and the 'real,' takes place on a cruise sailing on the Mediterranean on its way to Istanbul. It is here, on board of this ship, that *Bitter Moon* begins and ends. Contained within this primary level and space is the so-called embedded narrative. This narrative is not presented in the film as a continuous
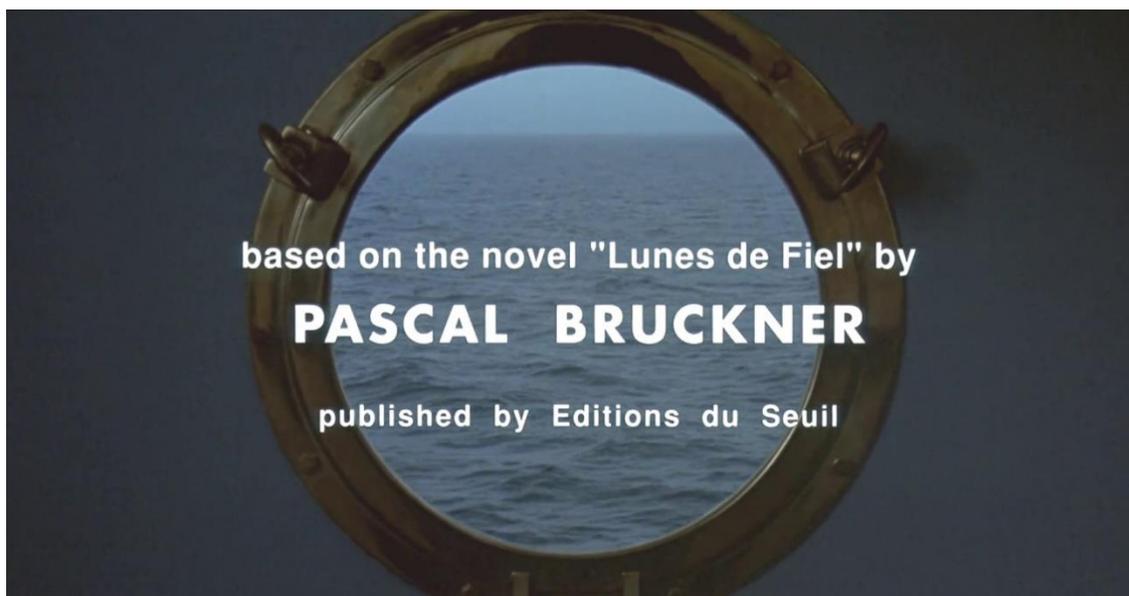
Figs. 2.16. Bitter Moon *credits. Mise-en-scène and/as mise-en-abîme*

whole, but through a series of six separate flashbacks, all of which are set in Paris and, we assume, a not too-distant past—the film's production papers indeed indicate that only a few months pass between the end date of the flashbacks, running from 1986 to 1991, and the ship's 'present,' set in Christmas 1991.[9] These flashbacks enact the narrated memories of Oscar (Peter Coyote), a middle-aged, paraplegic US American would-be writer that recounts various episodes of his increasingly sordid love story with a Parisian woman by the name of Mimi (Seigner), now his wife and travelling with him on the cruise. Listening to the whole thing is Nigel (Hugh Grant), a bumbling, all-too-British Eurobonds dealer also on board with his wife Fiona (Kristin Scott Thomas), but captivated by Mimi's curvy figure and mysterious past.

Throughout the film, then, we will move back and forth between both levels, spaces and temporalities, between 'reality' and recollection. This rolling dynamic is advanced in the film's minimalist credit sequence, in which the camera slowly zooms out, and then in again on the frame of a ship's porthole facing an undulating sea as Vangelis'

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[9] I refer here to the to the detailed chronology included as part of the film's shooting script (John Brownjohn et al. 1991), available at the collections of the *Cinémathèque Française* in Paris, ref. BAUDROT-GU4-B2.

oneiric, new-age synthesizer piece plays over it [fig. 2.16]. This narrational strategy makes for fairly dynamic storytelling, contributes to the generic credentials of the text, its desire-teasing tactics and its suspenseful tone; as well as echoes a series of conceptual binaries—man/woman, reality/representation, national/global, reason/desire, love/lust— and resolves them in various ways.

Crucially, this structure sets up a spatial opposition, one which can be interpreted to extend the film's signification into the plane of aesthetics, the historical and the geopolitical. This is so in part because, in contrast to the novel, the film's plot involves only two locations, or rather chronotopes: the ship in the present, and Paris in the past. This tightens up the diegetic universe of the text and intensifies the relationship between the two settings. Yet a peculiar effect results also from where and how each setting is allocated in the spatio-narrative structure of the film: while the utterly fictive space of the cruise (built from scratch in a soundstage) is assigned to the first narrative level, that which by convention we tend to accept as a text's objective 'reality,' Paris, on the other hand, the only actually-existing, extra-textual location of the film, remains confined to the secondary, deeper, level, which, as mentioned, concerns Oscar's subjective reminiscences from his time in the city. No alternative vision is offered, and the film at no point engages with the city 'directly' in the way, say, *Frantic* did. The result of all this is a sealed spatio-narrative system with no genuine or 'raw' social reality to turn to, with no outside to the fiction, and in which Paris features only as a memory and a narrative; a place suspended, or rather trapped, in representation.

It is here that Oscar's nationality and profession (both changed from the novel) become significant. If we recuperate the argument that spatial representation is a (geo)political matter, and that the imaging of Paris in particular has been at the core of anxieties around the US cultural hegemony over France and Europe as a whole, then the

film's very form appears to be saying something more here. Simply put, in the geographical microcosm of the film, Paris *only* exists in the mind and stories of a US American writer, and not a very likable or reliable one at that. Hardly an accidental maneuver on the part of the film, the move brings up questions regarding the place and fate of the city in globalization, the unfolding of Franco-American relations, the rise of postmodernist representational ethos, and the film's very stance with regards to its own material. "You mustn't believe all he says. He's a sick man," Mimi warns Nigel at one point. Such questions will be picked up below when we move to the figuration of Paris itself. Before that, it might be appropriate to look into the film's articulation of its 'primary' narrative location, the cruise, acting as it does as the film's social, aesthetic and discursive ground-zero, as well as Paris' single spatial 'other,' and container, in the fictional world of the text.

Float On

Bitter Moon's primary or frame narrative, then, stages the encounter of the two protagonist couples on the moving space of the cruise. The first couple we meet, formed by Nigel and Fiona, is a young and loving upper-middle-class British couple travelling to India, via Istanbul, in celebration of their seven-year anniversary—the parallel between their journey and its colonial antecedents picked up repeatedly throughout the film. An idyllic opening scene with the couple strolling on the cruise's deck suffices to provide this much information and to introduce the vessel as a social and narrative space [fig. 2.17]. After an initial shot of the happy couple, wind in their hair, and with the ship's various national flags waving behind them, Fiona excuses herself and goes into the ladies' bathroom while the camera stays outside with Nigel. This moment, as Rosenbaun has noted, works to establish his as the "controlling viewpoint" in the framing story (1997),

Figs. 2.17- 2.20. Space puzzles.

but also to present the (male) gaze more generally as a central formal and discursive mechanism, both at this and, as we shall see, at the film's secondary narrative level.

Left alone, Nigel spends the time waiting for Fiona looking around, not at other women (yet), but at the space itself. What follows, devoid of any real narrative content, can be seen as a miniature exercise in what Jameson calls "cognitive mapping" (1988; 1991, 51-54), an attempt to both outline the space of the ship and to locate it, as well as the film more generally, within and in relation to the world space at large [figs. 2.18-2.20]. Thus, Nigel looks first at a maritime map of the Mediterranean which details the cruise's journey and stops; exchanges friendly nods with a besuited Indian passenger later presented as Mr. Singh (Victor Banerjee); follows the commanding sound of a horn to the figure of a distant fishing boat sailing in the horizon; and, as he approaches the door of the ladies room in search for Fiona, faces a plan of the ship's various compartments.

As narrative motifs and locations, ships and boats are often imagined as extra-ordinary, figurative spaces in which social order, conventions and identities are questioned, suspended or completely turned around. From Plato's "Ship of Fools" to James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997), the cultural permutations of the trope are endless.

Fig. 2.21. "Entschuldigung and all that:" Trans-European relations on board.

Michel Foucault (1984 [1967]) himself would describe the ship as the West's "greatest reserve of the imagination" and use it as the utmost example of those "other spaces" he famously called "heterotopias:" built spaces that, owing to their loose, ambivalent position in relation to the wider social space, had the capacity to act as breeding grounds for all kinds of subversive and liberatory practices. In this case, however, the scene seems designed to undermine from the get-go any notion of the cruise as some kind of autonomous, liberated realm floating outside socio-spatial order, history or relations. Both the inner space of the ship and its geographical trajectory are shown as meticulously regimented, as one guesses most passengers would want them to be. In the meantime, contemporary tourism is cynically equated with its colonialist foundations and the sea is presented as just another natural resource exploited and 'produced' by that same industrial civilization cruises are sold to leave behind for a few weeks.

As the film's primary narrative unfolds, in fact, the cruise will gradually lose all its utopian promise. The bad weather, for one, restricts most of the action to the tight strictures of the interior. There, Polanski's trademark low-angle framing, whereby the ceiling of rooms and corridors is constantly shown looming over the characters, results in

a heightened sense of confinement and claustrophobia that the constant movement of the camera turns nauseating [fig. 2.21]. The decoration is tacky, the lighting coldly artificial and the photography, dwelling on pale, anemic colors, seems conceived to suck all life out of the images. Not that what happens inside the ship is particularly lively or colorful. Entertainment appears reduced to card games, small talk and the regular consumption of alcohol. As for the cruise's population, most of the characters appear as little more than flat embodiments of various European stereotypes. We have of course Nigel and Fiona with their uptight Britishness and Mimi as an enigmatic French bimbo, but also a slimy Italian womanizer named Dado (Luca Vellani) and a group of Greeks and Turks who get into a fight when the opportunity arises. With a few exceptions, the rest of the passengers, mostly relegated to the silent background of the scenes, are the type of similar-looking white middle-aged and elderly tourist couples that populate such voyages. The resulting image is one of boredom, certainly, but also of agony, entropy and decay. As a microcosm of late-twentieth-century European ethos, barely months before the signing of the Maastricht Treaty and *de facto* founding the EU, the ship imagines a society sailing not into emancipation, as Foucault's theory would suggest, or even escapism, but oblivion. In this, the Mediterranean, a tempting candidate to symbolize the promises of the global in the film, a shared and fluid nexus between countries and continents, is turned into a stygian abyss [fig. 2.22]. Even the hopes that, once at the other side, the Orient might revitalize the (here literally) Old World as it did in times prior, and as Nigel suggests early in the film, are politely debunked by Mr. Singh as "poppycock." India, he claims in an immaculate British accent, is "all flies, smells and beggars."

Given the circumstances, it is not surprising that sex soon becomes a necessary distraction. Thus, the first encounter between Oscar and Nigel is preceded by the latter's timorous approach to Mimi, barely six minutes into the film, after watching her

Fig. 22. Sailing in troubled waters

sensuously dancing alone to Peggy Lee's "Fever" in the cruise's lounge. Some initial flirtation and a few awkwardly bad jokes on Nigel's part later, she mockingly rebuffs him. Gathering himself on the deck, Nigel is then interpellated by Oscar's husky voice as his figure emerges rolling in his wheelchair from the shadows. He presents himself as Mimi's husband and quickly tells him to beware of her: "Look at what she did to me," he says as he discloses his crippled legs. Leaving no time for Nigel to process, Oscar asks him if he would like to "fuck her." Nigel's anxious non-response is telling enough, and Oscar effortlessly lures him into his cabin on the tacit promise that, if he listens to their whole story, he may have a chance.

Space and sexuality are thus already joined as the two main signifying systems and conceptual forces to guide what is to follow, which could be seen to reframe Oscar's narrative not only as story within a story, but also as a film within a film. It comes as no surprise then that Paris, the most eroticized cinematic city, is revealed to be the chosen destination. As Oscar begins his sermon, the camera pans left following his evocative, faraway look as the crudest of dissolves takes us from the cabin's walls into a close-up of Mimi's young, angelic face floating over the moving streets of Paris behind her.

Fig. 2.23. Mimi and Paris: otherworldly visions.

Paris Belongs to Them

Accompanied by the romantic notes of an accordion, Mimi's airborne vision remains there for a few seconds, unclaimed by any subjective looker, as the bustling Parisian boulevards, later discernable as the southern bank of the Seine, silently unravel in the background [fig. 2.23]. Cut, and we see Oscar sitting next to her in a bus and marveling at the scene from behind the pages of *The International Herald Tribune*. Not a strict POV arrangement (Oscar is sitting left and further from where her image is framed), this two-shot sequence does much to encapsulate the visual, scopic regime to be guiding the narrative and, through style and mise-en-scène, conflate the sexual, spatial and geopolitical discourses that will operate through it.

One goal of this segment is clear enough: to present Oscar as the one in charge of the looking and responsible for its distortions. This would seem a logical move considering that it is his subjective narration, voice-over included, that is being reenacted in this level. Yet at least since the seminal work of Laura Mulvey (1992 [1975]), we have learnt to see in the look not just one more narrational or aesthetic strategy of the many available to film, but an essential catalyst of power relations in the cinema, especially

those based on sexual difference. In this first silent exchange, broken by the arrival of the bus inspector, Mimi is not allowed to look back, or anywhere meaningful for that matter. Contrasted with Oscar's penetrating gaze, her blank, downcast stare transmits a sense of passivity and void, meanings that do not stop in her but impregnate the whole image. The joint use of soft-focus filter and high-key lighting are here not only glamourizing; they also work to blur the edges of her contour and bind her with the inaudible urban background a single, unified composition. Mimi and Paris, woman and city, are in this way introduced as twin objects, and products, of Oscar's narrative, subjectivity and gaze.

The visual and conceptual equation of female and space is nothing new, and certainly not in the case of Paris, where women have long been central to the erotic, economic and architectural spectacle of the city (Harvey 2003a, 2017-212). Hayward, who finds this trope amply reproduced in French imagery and literature, attributes it also to the ambivalent combination of attraction and fear that the modern city brings to the male unconscious (2000, 24-26). A feminized city, she argues, can be more easily imagined, and sold, as a place of individual freedom, sexual promiscuity and consumption, and at the same time be blamed for the failures and crises of what is, in reality, a male-designed and dominated space (see also Barbara Hooper 1998). In urban societies, then, women and the city act together as a socio-spatial Other through which to reaffirm the masculine rule and sense of self. Yet apart from male, *Bitter Moon* is bent on underlining Oscar's gaze as distinctly US American. Coyote's articulate tone and accent leave no doubt as to the character's nationality, but even so the film decides to present him conspicuously reading, and 'looking from,' *The International Herald Tribune*, a long-standing symbol of the US émigré community in the city. News of its recent closure were met in the US, less so in France, with nostalgic remarks about its connection of the Lost Generation writers and its iconic presence in Godard's *A bout de souffle* (1960), a

film often read as a French cinematic love letter to Hollywood and US American culture in general (Ross and Walker 2009, 169).

Much like Godard's, however. and that of a large portion of the French cultural establishment, the film's take on Franco-American relations will turn, from this fleeting moment onwards, more and more corrosive following the development of the relationship between Oscar and Mimi. We will move from ironic parody as they fall in love, through sexual debauchery and sadomasochism as their romance decays, and finally into violence, acrimony and self-destruction. All throughout, and accompanying his omnipresent and elaborate voice-over, Oscar's will remain the dominating gaze, navigating between female and city in a symbolic search for masculine self-affirmation, one which is at the same time an apt cinematic metaphor for the activities of the US cultural imagination and apparatus over Paris as a whole [figs. 2.24-29].

Fig. 2.30. Oscar's frozen view of Paris.

In tune with such imagination, it does not take long before we are treated with the first of several panoramic views of the city, Eiffel Tower included, as seen through the rain-spotted window of Oscar's cozy studio on the Left Bank and carefully composed to avoid the neighboring Tour Montparnasse, a 210-meter brutalist skyscraper built to much controversy in the 1970s (Fierro 2003, 47) [fig. 2.30]. The calculated atemporality of the image is underlined by its sepia tones, flat, grainy photographic quality and the notes of an accordion, but it also has to do with the location itself, the *Rive Gauche* having by this point long ceased to be the transnational artistic hub it once was, brain-drained by economic crises (home and away), urban renewal, a blooming University district and the rise of the cinema and mass media industries (Nicholas Hewitt 1996). Yet the critique here, and in much of what is to follow, is not so much on the actual city, its present realities suggestively kept out of frame, as it is on the looker. This time it is camera movement instead of editing that exposes the origin of the view. Retreating from the cityscape, the camera pans across the studio's walls, bookshelves and desk before finding Oscar not looking but typing on his computer part of the same florid soliloquy on his first encounter with Mimi we had heard him recite to Nigel moments before. If this exposes

the 'fictionality,' or at least performativity, of his account and the imagery springing from it, the whole scene also makes it clear that the fiction is not even entirely his own. As the camera creates a continuum between the nostalgic Parisian landscape, pictures of US expat writers in the city, a completely Anglophone book collection on the shelves and his writing, Oscar's voice-over admits to having lost any originality as a writer, "too determined" to follow in the footsteps of his literary idols into that "dream city" he had imagined while reading them. The fact that he is living not from his own work, as he is yet to publish anything, but from a family inheritance, cements his character as a pseudo-subject, an ironic, decadent reverberation of the past.

Revealing at this point is the highlighted presence on Oscar's desk of John Fowles' novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1987 [1969]), one the most iconic exercises in postmodernist literary aesthetics, particularly of those of intertextuality and what Linda Hutcheon has labeled as "historiographic metafiction" (2004 [1988], 105-123). With this term, Hutcheon refers to those narrative texts which in an ironic and self-conscious manner play with the limits between historical record and literary fiction. Fowles' novel may thus be seen to act as an ironic bridge between Oscar's great modernist literary referents and the dominant aesthetic currents of his time. But it also works as a metatextual cue to some dynamics working at the level of the film text itself, namely the questioning of a genuine sense of truth, reality and relations existing outside representation and, more critically, the looming dissolution of (certain notions of) place and history, here specifically referred to Paris, into an array of images, narratives and discourses with a latent ideological agenda. Before all this literature trumps the film's eminently visual concerns, Mimi's vision magically reemerges over the word processor on the computer screen, only to be interrupted by one of Oscar's flings asking him for help fastening her bra.

Oscar's relationship with Paris is not limited to enjoying the commanding vistas of his apartment, drafting clichéd novels nobody wants to publish or sleeping with the plethora of anonymous women he so effortlessly takes home, even if the three make an important part of how he occupies his time in the city. Street life is after all a key component of the whole Parisian mystique he is so eager to recreate. When outside, however, and as if fearing ruining the fetish, Oscar remains strategically uninvolved with the social realities of the city. As Mazierska notes, we barely see him moving in public spaces or engaging with others, and when he does, it is only as preamble for his next sexual conquest (2007, 78). His field of action, and vision, even while spanning only single-digit *arrondissements,* eschews any significant marker of the recent social or architectural changes to the city center (see Fierro 2003). Similarly, signs of the cultural and economic sway of the US around the city, so conspicuously exposed in *Frantic*, and surely increased since then, have here all but disappeared. In contrast to that film's depth of field cinematography, *Bitter Moon's* focal shallowness suggests a superficiality of vision and engagement. Overall, and after eight years in the capital, Oscar's appears the outlook of a seasoned yet complacent tourist: a proud connoisseur of the main geography of landmarks, streets and hangouts of the city proper, but one who consistently avoids stepping beyond the protective spatial bubble of white bohemian self-indulgence and outsider distance. More generally, Oscar's vision appears to reflect the kind of historical "laundering" Jameson finds in many US postmodern films at the time, whereby they systematically abstract themselves from their present and from the more unpleasant social realities of which they participate and whose contradictions their narratives and forms, often grounded on previous historical conditions, simply cannot tolerate (1995, 119).

In this sense, what we would seem to get by following Oscar's moves, words and gaze is not a journey through the city, but a highly selective journey through the history

of its representation, always as envisioned by a US American. The question, again, becomes how the film itself treats such vision and such history. Clearly, here they are not blandly celebrated as in the more recent *Midnight in Paris* (Woody Allen 2009), nor are they confronted with the grittier realities of a late 20th century metropolis as we saw in *Frantic*. Instead, *Bitter Moon* takes the path of ironic parody; a critique by excess by which all those timeless, idealized meanings and images associated with Paris, and which Oscar's narrative shamelessly appropriates, are lumped together and taken to such extremes as to expose them as not only superficial or silly, but also rancid, degrading and, as we shall see, latently violent. Here I would like to look at three early episodes between Mimi and Oscar that exemplify different facets of the film's particular elaboration of aesthetic parody and/as socio-spatial critique.

The first is the long, irony-dripping scene that precedes their first sexual encounter. It begins with Oscar picking up Mimi from her class at a small dance school at night and taking her to a flashy Thai restaurant full of plastic vegetation and phony waterfalls. Then they move to an empty café followed by a game of hopscotch in a nearby street. At dawn, the early morning singing of birds finds the couple arriving at the gardens

at the back of Notre-Dame, where Oscar massages Mimi's feet before the camera tilts to reveal the cathedral's spire in all its phallic glory [fig. 2.31]. The film's kitsch musical leitmotiv and lowbrow sexual innuendo accompany the couple to Oscar's apartment, where Mimi is shown carrying an oversized *baguette* between her legs and with the tip constantly close to her face and mouth. As she lights the fireplace, Oscar goes to prepare breakfast, while the camera self-consciously focuses on the plate of *croissants* being reheated behind the metacinematic frame of the microwave door. Finally, the ensuing sex scene by the glowing fireplace, its images blended thorough constant dissolves and mellow synth piano music, ends by characterizing the whole thing as little more than arty softcore pornography.

A later scene with the couple at the fairground at the Tuileries Garden elaborates on the over-the-top artificiality of Oscar's narrative and vision, while already hinting at its darker implications. This time it is not only that the film treats the images with its recurrent soft-focus photography, pastel colors and an elated synth-piano piece. The scene's dream-like extravaganza also taps into the fair's meanings as a carnivalesque space and its historical connection to the development of the cinema and mass visual culture more generally. Thus, we see Oscar at the fair's shooting gallery aiming and firing directly at the camera, an indication of the violence implicit in his look; then, an extreme close-up of the couple's hands reaching for one another in the spinning carousel produces a moving, impressionistic quote of Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*, with Oscar in the place of God 'creating' Mimi (Niels Niessen 2012, 139); and finally, the scene is capped off with a 'face-in-the-hole' montage of the couple getting married being captured by a replica of an old dry plate camera from the late nineteenth century. The symbolism of the moment is patent. As the couple remove their faces from the holes of the fair's wooden wedding tableau and reveal the black void left behind, the film signals both the banality

of their relationship and the transformation of Paris into sheer décor; a collection of still images—a bohemian studio, a rain-spotted cityscape, a café at night, the Notre Dame gardens and so on—at the service of corny fantasies, visual spectacle, male desire and commodity lust.

Finally, the transnational dimension of their relationship surfaces in a short but memorable sketch ostensibly built around the erotic potential of food and everyday routines. One morning, as the couple is having breakfast, Mimi provocatively pours liquid yogurt over her naked chest and, after offering Oscar her breast to lick, proceeds to give him a blowjob from under the table. Seconds later, as Oscar is reaching his climax, two burnt loaves of bread jump from the toaster unmistakably signaling his ejaculation. Behind the gaudy artifice of the scene lurks a caustic comment on transnational cultural relations and the fate of the French city within them. For a start, the whole scene unfolds to the tune of George Michael's 1987 erotically charged hit "Faith" blasting, loudly, from a Cadillac-shaped radio. The song, apart from offering an ironic comment on Oscar's self-image as a macho artist—Michael's homosexuality was at the time a matter of wide speculation (see Steve Pond 1988)—, engulfs the diegesis within a markedly Anglo-American form of cultural imagination. The mise-en-scène of the fellatio the song informs, particularly the utter disappearance of Mimi under the table in favor of the isolated view of Oscar's *jouissance*, can be therefore reframed as a fantasy of not only sexual, but also spatio-cultural subordination [fig. 2.32]. The argument in favor of this symbolic ambivalence is reinforced by the poster on the wall behind Oscar, one of the many at his place, and which bitingly captions the sequence of his orgasm with the text "*Art du XXème Siècle.*" [10]

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[10] I want to thank Roy Janoch for his help tracing the original poster.
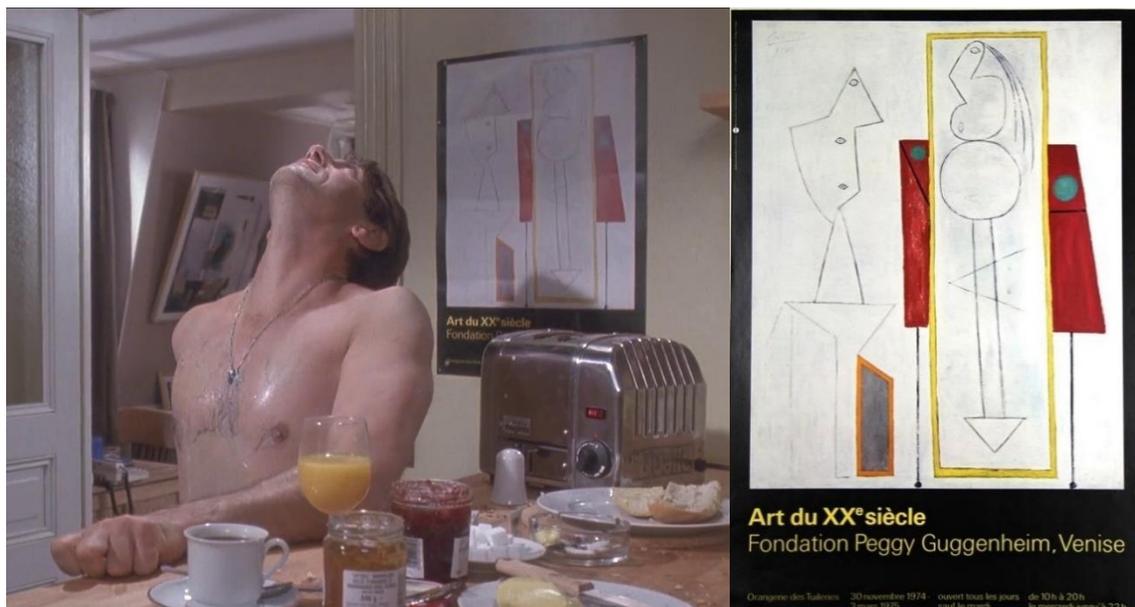
Fig. 2.32. L'Atelier, *redux.*

Publicizing an exhibition of 20th-century art, the poster features a painting by Picasso entitled *L'Atelier* made in 1928 during one of his various stays in Paris. If the reference to Picasso already points to the tradition of the foreign male artists in the city Oscar incarnates, the painting reproduced, a minimalist depiction of a painter's studio with a three-eyed bust and a (phallic) portrait of a woman in it, takes us back again to the dynamics of visuality, abstraction and feminization that dominate his narrative. In this way, the film seems to connect not only Picasso and Oscar in their chauvinism and toxic masculinity, but also the painting and the blowjob scene as part of a single, ever more decadent aesthetic and rhetorical continuum with Paris and the female body at its center. But it is no less significant that the exhibition advertised on the poster would belong to the Guggenheim gallery in Venice, the first, and at the time of the film the only, satellite opened by the US cultural foundation on foreign soil. As the work of a Spanish painter, made in Paris, exhibited in Italy but owned by a US private company, turned into an advertisement, reproduced endlessly and returned to the city now in the form of a commodity, the poster epitomizes the global postmodern cultural market and 'imagescape' of sexuality, urban aesthetics and the artistic consumption framing the

134

Figs. 2.33-2.36. Mimi's 'bodiliness' in display.

scene, the city and the film as a whole. In this, the reference to Venice, already in the 1990s the archetype of 'creative city' turned empty scenery, suggests the anxieties around the fate of Paris within such a market and the toll that its commodifying logics may impose on the social, emotional and material relations of the city.

If, as suggested, the film, guided by Oscar's dubious gaze, keeps the everyday realities of Paris consistently out of view—save, perhaps, a visit to one of the many sex-shops then proliferating at *Les Halles*—its fears of urban reification do find a displaced outlet and confirmation within the micro space of the couple and, especially, projected into the figural trajectory of Mimi. Thus, Seigner's exuberant physique, displayed in numerous nudes, postures and performances, and notably at odds with her much leaner, and concealed, figure as Michelle in *Frantic*, works to parallel and quite literally 'flesh out' the rhetorical excesses and deceptive readability that pervade Oscar's urban imaginary [figs. 2.33-2.36]. That the name Mimi is also short for Michelle may already hint at the abridged, artificial version of Paris we are being offered this time. Here, Mimi's impossibly immaculate skin and long golden hair, twin mirrors for the glowing, luminous photography of the film, become indices, both in their hyperbolic, transcendental purity

and whiteness and then their eventual degradation, of the 'representational' violence being inflicted on both herself and the city.

Before this violence turns physical, which it inexorably does, its effects manifest themselves in social and psychological terms. The process could be summarized as one of growing subservience and dependency. According to Oscar's narration, as soon as they meet, both become utterly devoted to one another. Yet while he continues to work his novels, now with Mimi as muse and most enthusiastic listener, she leaves her job as a waitress, thus surrendering her economic independence, and abandons her dance classes, renouncing her main identity marker, avenue of creative expression, as well as, one supposes, her hopes of becoming a professional artist in her own right. Her moving in with Oscar into the masculine space of his studio, with room of her own, parallels again the city in her total submission to his desire, craft and field of vision.

But the truth is that Oscar's infatuation with Mimi does not take long to fade. Once Mimi has completely conformed to his Parisian fantasy— and, as psychoanalysis tells us, there is nothing more lethal for a fantasy than to be fulfilled—and her halo of innocence and mystery is gone, Oscar's passion gives way to indifference and eventually disdain, only temporally palliated by their engagement in ever kinkier sexual practices, from role-play, through bondage to sadomasochism. There is no room here to discuss the complex psychosexual, historical and sociocultural implications of such practices, but it is more than safe to say that, in this case, they are hardly invested with the radical, emancipatory meanings many at the time attributed to them (see Jeffrey Weeks 1986). Instead, here they are made to play, in a crass and cynical way, into the dynamics of fantasy and disavowal that already permeate the whole narrative. Ultimately, however, these sexual games do nothing but postpone Oscar's ennui, his eventual repudiation of Mimi, and his return to his old philandering ways around the city. Unable to get rid of

Fig. 2.37. Mimi looking back.

her, however, and seeing that simply throwing her out the house won't do, Oscar resolves to make her life "a living hell." He mocks her intellect, use of English and looks and at one point even beats her, giving her a conspicuous black eye. More physical signs follow as his abuses lead her to cut and dye her hair and her skin develops rashes and spots [fig. 2.37]. Finally, after forcing her to have an abortion, Oscar abandons Mimi in a flight to Martinique where she almost dies from an infection that leaves her barren.

Both promotional and critical writing on the film have described Mimi's perversely fierce retaliation for all this, which includes turning Oscar into a paraplegic from the waist down and then remaining with him as a tyrannical nurse, as an ironic, in some sense fair and logical, reversal of what Oscar has done to her. According to Kalinowska, "Mimi and Oscar's relationship reveals the common denominator of all human interaction: a struggle for control that leads to exploitation and abuse" (2007, 142). Whatever we think of such a statement, there is no denying that the film does much to favor it as an interpretation.

At any rate, the social cannot be separated from the spatial, and Mimi is here not reacting only to some abstract, inborn power-dynamics or even misogyny at its vilest, but

also to the Parisian spectacle at its most alienating. Guy Debord, a Parisian himself, famously described the "spectacle" not simply as a collection of images, but as a "social relation between people that is mediated by images;" not "mere visual deception [but] a worldview that has actually been materialized" (2002 [1967], 7). Later theorizations, significantly contemporaneous with the film, ratify his take. Baudrillard's writings on the "simulacrum" captured what he saw as our complete immersion in an "aesthetic hallucination of reality" (1993, 74), while Jameson directly quoted Debord to reinforce his arguments on the connivance of the economy and the cultural market in the rise of the postmodern spatial pastiche; the random, but highly profitable, reproduction of identical images for which, he wrote, "no original has ever existed" (1991, 18). Such is the cultural and theoretical zeitgeist guiding *Bitter Moon*'s approach to Paris and the relationships the city mediates. The film performs and exploits the Parisian 'spectacle' not only in its literal sense as a visual feast for the eyes, but also by using and abusing its various associated myths manufactured by decades of high and low artistic imagery, most notably the enduring idea that both the city and its women are "something to be taken possession of by men" (Roland-François Lack 2010, 135). Add to this urban spectacle the (male) fantasies of personal discovery, creative realization, sexual elation, consumption and raw, irrepressible emotions, be they love or hatred, and Mimi does not stand a chance.

Yet it also follows from this that the social and the spatial cannot or should not be understood as separated from the historical. This is, after all, the early 1990s, the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the GATT negotiations, the time of the waning of radical left (i.e. class) politics and of Francis Fukuyama's infamous proclamations of *The End of History* (1992), as well as the 'spectacular' opening of the Euro Disney Resort east of Paris, and the concerns around the US material and symbolic colonization are everywhere to be felt. *Bitter Moon* lays out its aesthetic and geohistorical coordinates early and

plainly. In this sense, it has already been suggested that Oscar and Mimi function as a disturbing allegory of turn-of-the-century Franco-American relations and that it is mainly through his gaze, and the parallel it establishes between woman and city, sexuality and space, that the geopolitical subtext of the story operates. The analogy the film articulates in this way between patriarchy and imperialism is simple, if not simplistic: here Paris is to the US what woman is to man. That is, an Other where to project its desires, fantasies, and fears, in short, its very self, and, then, have it back justified and reinforced. The collapsing of Mimi and Paris under Oscar's gaze and narrated experience thus allows the film to play out the anxieties around the 'materialization' of the US 'Othering' worldview; to dramatize what happens when the social relations and imaginaries that make up the essence of a place are colonized by the 'soft power' of a regime of narratives and images that are all surface, commodity and spectacle. In short, and translated to the film's specific meta-cinematic concerns, *Bitter Moon* seems to perform what happens when Hollywood becomes our sole window into the world, others and ourselves.

Perhaps less explicitly, however, the film's transnational Othering dynamics can be seen to work also the other way around, "the American enemy" (Roger 2005) operating here as a dialectic, self-exonerating foil where to displace the patriarchal, capitalist and colonialist foundations of Paris' many historical, architectural and artistic riches, and from which the city, and its cinema, continue to live off to this day. The image thus projected onto Oscar, who has a lithography reading "Vampire" at the entrance of his studio, is nothing short of that of pure evil, a decadent, death-driven figure only able to subsist through the cannibalization of other bodies and spaces. Coyote would in fact retake this transnational villainous role one year later, again in the form of the lurid American writer abroad, this time in Madrid, in *Kika* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1993), where he is even more scathingly imagined as a serial killer who uses his murders in the city as

material for his writing. Looking back, however, Oscar's most significant cinematic referent may be found in Marlon Brando's Paul in *Last Tango in Paris* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1972), a likely, if in some ways antithetical, antecedent in the transnational, psychosexual and metacinematic staging of the city's 'post-modernist' anxieties (see Shiel 2008)—Jean Pierre Léaud romantic *Nouvelle Vague* clashing there with Brando's declining studio-era Hollywood over the body and soul of the city. In our Parisian fable, however, there is no Léaud courting Maria Schneider's Jeanne on the side, and no Jeanne finally shooting and killing the decadent American either and thus ending the film on an open note around her and the city's future. Here, instead, Mimi's trajectory, conditioned by a very different cultural and sociohistorical context and arguably also ideology, is left with the burden of embodying, in painfully literal terms, the only two possible stances this film seems to envision for victims to the US cultural, economic and geopolitical hegemony: servile compliance or lifelong animosity.

Closing the Horizon

Returning to the boat, the film offers little solace. In the final scene, Oscar, emasculated again in his role as Mimi's de facto pimp, shoots and kills her and then commits suicide. For her part, Fiona, who has just had a brief sexual encounter with Mimi returns chastised to Nigel's "stuffy British arms" in a final embrace on the boat's deck (Renee C. Hoogland 1995, 471). Already New Year's Day, the sea calm again, and the distant, foggy contours of Istanbul now 'sealing' the horizon, the shot suggest less the chronotope of a new beginning than that of a new closure [fig. 2.38]. In this sense, these final shots, from gun and camera, make up a scornful resolution to both the film's sexual concerns and its transnational subtext, working together in (re)locating, and confining, future, meaning,

truth, safety and love within the admittedly dull, but safer bounds of heterosexual marriage and national relations.

But the 'final embrace' motif also suggests a final point of convergence with *Frantic*. Although building from a shared thematic base—that of the US American in late-twentieth-century Paris—and resorting to similar formulaic spatio-narrative resolutions—the coming together of a threatened married couple—the films' imaginary responses to the postmodern and globalized urban space are notably dissimilar if not antithetical. Where *Frantic* confronted Paris as an ineffable cosmopolis which defied cinematic mapping, *Bitter Moon* imagines a city frozen in time, reified and held hostage by its own mythology. The disparity in the critique is formal, from gritty realism to parodic over-the-topness, but also conceptual. What was tragic in the former is farcical in the latter. What was then marginally hopeful is now simply naïve. And what was precariously open is now, for better or worse, irredeemably shut down. For all their differences, both ways of seeing Paris are complementary responses to not only the immersion of the city in the global and more concrete anxieties over the Americanization threat, but also to a more general change of paradigm, a dislocation of sorts, in the

relationship between social space and its representation. More specifically, these films appear to evidence, from their respective angles, a wariness of cinematic imaginaries as bearers of reality, truth, aesthetic value or even pleasure (both films are decidedly 'ugly' in their own way), favoring instead anxieties about their potential for control, spatial abstraction, alienation and deception.

In both texts, the 'Real' city, the lived space, remains thus always, and necessarily, beyond the edges of the frame, but while *Frantic* refuses to come to terms with it, painstakingly testing the heuristic capacities of its medium and exposing its limits vis-à-vis the social world, *Bitter Moon* appears to have completely given up. Instead, what it presents, and always from a self-assuring ironic distance, is a claustrophobic socio-aesthetic universe in which everything has already been said and done and where cinema's possibilities are reduced to an endless, ever-more caustic performance of what already is. Such nihilism at work in the film both at the levels of sexual and spatial relations, can be seen to relate not only to post-modern claims about the end of history and geography in globalization, but also to what cultural theorist Mark Fisher has called "capitalist realism" (2009), a cultural phase whose jump-start he locates precisely between the release of our two films: in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall. With this term, Fisher refers not to a mere aesthetic counterpart to the 'socialist realism' imposed from the Soviet institutions. Rather, he points to the instauration of a more generalized cultural ethos, a pervading, all-informing "*atmosphere*" under which global capitalism and its logics, the foundation of what already is, freed from any competing 'actually-existing' alternatives, material or symbolic, become the only coherent, realistic and even imaginable way for humans to relate with others and the world and thus establishing "a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action" (2009, 16, emphasis in the original). Fisher highlights fear and anxiety as the increasingly dominating affects

resulting from this situation and, building on Jameson's take on the relation between postmodernism and late capitalism, to cynicism, irony and nostalgia as the key cultural responses and distancing mechanisms from which to look at something we may know is there, but cannot do anything to change—the move from engagement to spectatorship, from ideals to aesthetics, held as one of the main virtues of capitalist realism (2005, 9).

In this sense, prey to all of the above, *Bitter Moon* represents a dystopia of the worst kind; not that which confronts us with an undesirable future, thus suggesting, indirectly, which paths to avoid in our moving forward, but the kind which, while set in the present, consistently works to debunk any future alternative, hope or possibility of change. The endless loop of self-referential representation that pervades the postmodern cultural and political economy of globalization, and that the film appears so bent on criticizing, comes up in this way as not only destructive and paralyzing, but also inescapable. So much so, it could be concluded, that *Bitter Moon* itself ends up trapped, self-consciously or not, in its own intertextual rhetoric and the performance of the same alienating discursive history it aims to expose. In this sense, one cannot but criticize *Bitter Moon* in its own terms as yet another one of those mirrors in the postmodern hall which, for all its playful refractions and hyperbolic distortions, still keeps us one more step away from finding an exit.

3. New World Borders

In a recent interview apropos of her exhibition on the Pérez Art Museum in Miami, visual artist Sarah Oppenheimer was asked about her work on built environments and, in particular, her creative interventions on the spatial arrangement of museums (Alexander Galloway 2016, 33-43). Thinking through the rhetoric of openness and flexibility that dominates modern museum architecture her works aimed, among other things, to make spatial boundaries conspicuous, often interrupting or redirecting the seamless, but in her view deceptive, continuity of the visitor's movement and perception. Hence, she devises mirrors, cavities, columns, walls, windows and lighting patterns that act on the "Euclidean coordinates" of the museum as a way to expose and rework the myriad divisions, material or conceptual, that, however concealed, mediate the articulation and practice of such a space (2016, 37).

Oppenheimer's concerns in her work resonate with those of past and present architects, urbanists, geographers, political theorists, historians and philosophers, as well as other artists, including filmmakers, interested in the evolution of human spatiality and, more specifically, in the once-assumed waning of boundaries and borders under what Castells famously called "the space of flows" (2010 [1996], 407-460). She shares with many of them the important awareness that spatial divisions are not disappearing. If anything, her work aims to demonstrate, they are being disguised, relocated or transformed, sometimes by means of their very dispersal and multiplication. While Oppenheimer does not go so far as to suggest a 'sociological' rationale to explain this

trend, or her own interventions on it for that matter, her approach to museum plans, aesthetics and the built environment in general is responsive to dynamics and debates that extend beyond the purely architectural. At a time, under globalization and postmodernity, when questions around the production and organization of space are said to infuse as never before every aspect of our social and mental lives, the divisions, boundaries and borders that make up and regulate the spaces we inhabit and imagine have acquired a new, critical centrality, from the intimate to the geopolitical. Somewhere in between, art and cultural production have indeed proven crucial arenas in which these dynamics are being played out, if not always in such directly palpable ways as, say, those of a building. One may find, for instance, a close fit, *mutatis mutandis*, between the contradictory interplay between architectural division and flow noted by Oppenheimer and recent developments in film aesthetics, particularly in the phenomenon David Bordwell has called "intensified continuity" (2006, 121-138). As Bordwell explains, Hollywood cinema has been steadily increasing the pace of its editing since the 1960s, so that nowadays, in the digital era, the number of cuts per film is higher than ever before. This growing fragmentation, however, has not done away with the "continuity" effect; on the contrary, Bordwell argues, it has "intensified" it. Due to their ever-quickening pace, shots have become ever more difficult to process cognitively and now tend to dissolve into an undifferentiated and boundless perceptual continuum. What Bordwell, much like Oppenheimer, describes as a matter of stylistic and technical development, others have expanded into the sign of a changing spatial, or rather spatiotemporal, experience and imagination (see Brown 2013, 42-46).

Though far from marginal, such editing patterns are just one way in which current social spatialities, their dynamics and contradictions, have found their way into the language of film (and back). Various formal techniques and devices, including

explorations of the long take (Lutz Koepnick 2017), digital aesthetics (Brown 2013) and the increased use of split and multiple screens (Anne Friedberg 2006), for instance, can be equally related to the emergence of new spatial imaginaries, at the same time that film narratives themselves become increasingly infused with issues of space, place and mobility—including boundaries and borders. The latter are the subject of a special issue of the journal *Transnational Cinemas* (2015), recently made into an edited volume (Mendes and Sundholm, 2018). In the introductions to both, editors Mendes and Sundholm signal the growing recurrence of the concept and 'motif' of the border in contemporary cinematic spatial imaginaries and their study. They refer to "hard," physical borders, such as walls and fences, but also "soft" or symbolic ones such as those generated intersubjectively by language, migration and the encounter with difference. The essays included deal with borders at the level of film narratives and forms, as well as with those at the level of film production. Their publication adds to a growing body of work in the humanities that locates in the concept of the border a critical vantage point from which to interpret contemporary cultural forms and to better understand their responses to and involvement in the dynamics of an increasingly global, though far from borderless, social space (see Johan Schimanski and Stephen Wolfe 2007; 2017).

Our two 'Polanskian' case studies in this chapter, *Death and the Maiden* and *The Ghost Writer*, each coming from one side of the millennial divide, offer two contrasting examples of how the figuration of borders and 'border thinking' have come to pervade films' spatio-narrative systems and discourses in different ways and to different effects. Before delving into their analysis, however, we will cross some disciplinary boundaries and chart, briefly, some of the theoretical paths opened for and by the border so far.

On the Borderscape

So why 'the border' and why now? Part of the answer to this question implies the attempt to grasp one of the chief paradoxes of contemporary globalization, namely that the planetary intensification of transnational mobilities and relations exists side by side with the multiplication of territorial partitions. Geographers David Newman and Anssi Paasi, for example, already noted at an earlier stage how the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR, symbols for many at the time of an impending borderless future, had in reality resulted in the creation of at least twenty new boundaries (1998, 190). Signs of the enduring and in many cases heightened prominence of the old territorial border in our so-called "mobile times" (Sybille Frank and Lars Meier 2016) are hard to ignore. There are, to name a few examples, the massive concrete wall of the Gaza barrier and the rising barbed-wire fences built around Syria by Turkey and Iraq, between India and Bangladesh, Bangladesh and Myanmar, and between South Africa and Zimbabwe; the US-Mexico border and Trump's infamous, if scarcely original, project to build a wall along its more than 2000 miles; the closure and militarization of the Venezuelan borders with Brazil and Colombia; or the heightening tensions, airstrikes included, in the long-disputed border region of Kashmir between India and Pakistan. And while Europe's inner borders appear more permeable than ever, except for Brexit, its Southern and Eastern outer edges harden and sharpen as a response to the arrival of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers from Africa and the Middle East. These and many other border histories, experienced directly or, in very a different way, through the media, have forcefully inscribed certain 'facts' and images of the border in our collective imaginaries—which is to say also our identities, ideologies and worldviews, and, consequently, our modes of cultural expression and interpretation. As Newman put it more recently, "it is not possible to imagine a world which is borderless or deterritorialized" (2007, 27).

But there is more. Borders, geographers and social theorists argue, are all around us, whether we see them or not. "We live enmeshed in thick webs of borders and boundaries," writes Soja (2005, 33). Behind this and other claims of this type lies a different, broader understanding of the border from that of a fixed geopolitical line—a notion generated in early modern Europe and disseminated with colonialism, decolonization and the globalization of the nation-state (Étienne Balibar 2002, 77). At the same time, borders are being increasingly regarded as more than repressive and exclusionary mechanisms as adjectives such as "uncertain" (Noel Parker et al. 2009, 584), "equivocal" (John Agnew 2008, 183), "double-sided" (Soja 2005, 44), "Janus-faced" (Henk van Houtum et al 2005, 12) and even "cosmopolitan" (Chris Rumford 2014) infiltrate their conceptualizations.

Étienne Balibar begins one of the foundational texts of what is now called 'border theory' asking from its title "What Is a Border?" (2002, 75-86). There, he mentions three key aspects subtending what he sees as the complex, "dialectical" characters of borders, making a case for their growing rather than decaying relevance. He notes their "polysemy," that is, their capacity to acquire different meanings, shapes and functions depending on who experiences them, and their "ubiquity," referring to their material and symbolic diffusion across the social space, from airport security checks to whole territories (2002, 81-84). All these different borders are for him also "overdetermined," meaning that they never exist or act on their own. Rather, they are interconnected, always "sanctioned, reduplicated and relativized by other geopolitical divisions" in what he calls their "*world-configuring function*" (2002, 79, his emphasis). Balibar also touches on a more abstract notion of the border as a kind of identity, a way of life and a mode of thought, especially in the case of migrants, but he remains mostly concerned with changes

related to nation-state territories, polity and sovereignty, the unjust regimes of mobility they enforce and the emergence of other 'bordering' institutions such as the EU.

Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson build on Balibar and investigate the ways in which the "proliferation" of borders and what they call "border struggles" (2013, viii) relates to the new, denationalizing cartographies of capitalism, migration and labor. Since the gradual decoupling of capital and state began in the 1980s, they argue, a more variegated, uneven and shifting constellation of boundaries and demarcations has been taking shape across the world space, one that includes but also transcends and inhabits national ones (2013, 5-6). Their research and fieldwork on this new "borderscape," as they call it, leads them to re-conceptualize borders as mobile, discursive and ambivalent, able to divide and connect, exclude and include, impede and impose movement (2013, 4 and *passim*). As sites of struggle but also resistance, where the spaces and times of capital are produced, regulated and opposed, borders are for these authors not only objects of research but also platforms from where to both study and act on the world (2013, 17). In their work, this translates into their notion of "border as method," an idea not too distant from that proposed by sociologist Chris Rumford when he suggests the heuristic and political potential of "border seeing" (2014, 50). In his view, borders form today a global "connecting tissue" linking individuals with others and the wider world (2014, 20). While this idea resonates in some ways with those of Balibar and Sandro and Mezzadra, Rumford goes a step further by defending the "vernacularization" of the border (2014, 18). That is, the fact that bordering—the ongoing construction, shifting and dismantling of borders—is a spatial practice carried out also, if more modestly, by ordinary people in their everyday lives and not necessarily driven by the needs of the state. Rumford calls this practice "borderwork" and regards it as a key means through which individuals and collectives engage with the world and negotiate their place in it (2014, 22-38).

Much of what Rumford argues from the realm of the social sciences—i.e. the potential of borders as dynamic sites of practice, encounter and engagement—others have explored in the realm of culture. Anthropologist James Clifford, for example, has defended the border as a key site for culture and identity, "chronotopes" where to explore their hybrid and transitory nature (1992, 109). Like many others, he mentions the unique breadth of critical thought and art springing around the US-Mexico "borderlands" as pioneered by Chicano artists and intellectuals. There, authors like Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and Guillermo Gómez-Peña (1993) have reflected on what it means to inhabit, carry and *be* a border; the perils and struggles as well as the possibilities and joys of a life of in-betweenness. Also inspired by Anzaldúa, among others, 'decolonial' theorist Walter Mignolo proposes the notion of "border thinking" to describe the kind of "double consciousness" and epistemology that emerges at the various edges of the "modern/colonial world system" (2000b, 49-88). Famed postcolonial authors such as Homi K. Bhabha (1994, 1-18), Salman Rushdie (2002) and Kwame Anthony Appiah (2017), for their part, have mused over the boundary-probing ethos of art, narrative and human cultural practice more generally. If it is true that borders, limits and frontiers are essential to our cognitive processes, the formation of identities and the production and interpretation of meaning, as psychologists tell us, these writers find in the interrogation of such boundaries an essential function of cultural expression and critique. This function is especially significant today, all three suggest, at a time in which the transnational production, circulation and consumption of culture does so much to erode some borders and erect others.

To summarize then, and to cite an oft-repeated refrain in the field, borders are everywhere; not only in the form of nation-dividing lines but also as an intrinsic function of any and all processes of production and organization of social space. As the "uneven

geographical development" of globalization (Harvey 2000, 68-94; 2014, 146-163) incessantly transforms the spaces we inhabit and imagine, borders change, move and proliferate, not just as means to order life or to guide economic flows and the movement of things and people, but also as sites of contact, struggle and negotiation as well as privileged *loci* of spatial, cultural and political performance. This includes evidently any form of spatial 'concretion,' or, in other words, the production of locality and 'place,' however unstable, relational and "global," to recall Massey's theorization (1991; 2005), our sense of place may be. (It can be argued that the mere act of naming a place implies an act of differentiation and, therefore, of bordering.) From all this follows that borders, like places, should not be regarded as simply 'good' or 'evil,' progressive or reactionary, abstract categories to defend or do away with regardless of the specific social relations and "power-geometries" they mediate and realize (Massey 2005, 166). As with most other spatial practices and concepts, borders must be addressed critically, including when they are, or appear to be, absent. This implies recognizing their 'world-configuring' role, now and in the past, while remembering that they never operate or 'mean' in a vacuum. Borders are the expression and mediators of an array of social, spatial and historical processes and discourses that, today more than ever, often transcend their purported edges—even when it is there, at those edges, that such processes and discourses become most intense and manifest and, therefore, most amenable for critique and intervention.

How to translate all this into the study of film is part of the subject of a recent methodological proposal by Celestino Deleyto, who suggests interpreting film texts "from the border" (2016). Drawing from social theories on cosmopolitanism and the "borderliness" of life and thinking in globalization, Deleyto makes the case that films should be considered as part of the bordering dynamics and discourses spreading across society, that they also perform their own kind of "borderwork" (2016, 6). By this he refers

not only to the representation of real, interstate borders in the movies. More crucially, he points to the structural role that bordering in general plays in shaping the spatial systems and messages of films as well as their involvement in the production of social space. As he explains, borders are at the center of "'how' films produce meanings in our globalized societies" (2016, 16). Rather than propose a taxonomy of border and bordering tropes in films, Deleyto suggests decoding each text according to its own particularities, forms and conditions. His two case studies in particular, of the films *Io sono Li* (Andrea Segre, 2011) and *Margaret* (Kenneth Lonergan, 2011), deal with issues of place, mobility, identity, cosmopolitanism and interpersonal relations in a transnational world, and how these are articulated through various kinds of borders, involving the mechanisms of narrative, location, mise-en-scene, editing, framing and sound.

Death and the Maiden and *The Ghost Writer*, two transnational political thrillers, engage with broader scenarios. As arguably the most prominent examples of Polanski's geopolitical cycle, these two films explicitly integrate their personal dramas in the context of a real, historical event contemporary to their making and crucial in the trajectory of contemporary globalization. While the former involves the tragic events and trauma-ridden aftermaths of the Latin American dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s, the latter deals with the socio-political origins and repercussions of the 2003 invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq. In both cases, the plights of their characters act as vehicles for concerns that go beyond the private and reach up to the social, cultural and geopolitical dynamics of an increasingly transnational and globalized world.

In parallel to their narrative and characterological developments, I shall argue that these concerns find expression, elaboration and, to some extent, even resolution in the articulation of the films' respective spatial imaginaries. Notably, these imaginaries are in both cases constructed around a similar 'borderly' location, an isolated house by the sea,

and played out through the negotiations between a number of cognate conceptual binaries. These include those of inside and outside, space and place, local and global, openness and closure, unity and fragmentation, mobility and immobility, safety and danger. From the houses' walls to the transnational socio-spatial universes that unfurl around and within them, a constellation of borders and boundaries emerge. These function as the membrane framing, segmenting and structuring the films' spatio-narrative systems but also as integral part of their meanings, discourses and worldviews. More specifically, an approach to these two texts 'from their borders,' and at the links between their narratives and forms with the social, historical and geographical conditions under which they came into being, reveals the instauration of a particular mode of socio-aesthetic and political imagination, one grounded on the tense fluctuations between the logics, promises and fears of a 'borderless world' and those of a 'world of borders.'

At the Edge of the Land: *Death and the Maiden*

Released in 1994, Polanski's *Death and the Maiden* is an adaptation of the theatrical play of the same name by Argentinian-Chilean-US American author Ariel Dorfman. Although originally written in Spanish in 1990, the play was first published one year later, in English, on the magazine *Index on Censorship* (1991, 5-20), a liberal British publication devoted to the promotion of universal free speech and whose transnational roster already featured the illustrious likes of Rushdie, Samuel Beckett, Noam Chomsky, Václav Havel, Arthur Miller, Kurt Vonnegut and Nadine Gordimer. As for the adaptation, there is, to my knowledge, no openly available report detailing its production history, but it seems clear that it was originally a Warner Brothers project, that the US major backed down somewhere along the line and that its production and distribution duties ended up spreading among a transnational array of US independents (Mount/Kramer, Fine Line

Features), British (Capitol Films, Channel Four) and French (Canal +, Flach Films, Les Films de L'Astre) film companies. Remnants from its Warner Brothers days, however, included both Polanski and the script adapted by Dorfman himself and US American novelist Rafael Yglesias, which kept the premise of the original piece virtually intact: a former political prisoner, now married to a human rights attorney, encounters the man she believes tortured and raped her while captive and resolves, much to her husband's dismay, to make him confess by any means necessary. He will deny everything—or will he?

In formal terms, the script retains also some of the more 'theatrical' features of the original, including a dialogue-driven arc, a three-character cast and the *huis clos* of a seaside house, while it concentrates the main events, originally spanning little more than a day, into a single night. The comparison reveals also that the film's vague localization in an indeterminate South American country was not a total invention of the film script. The play does not generalize in exactly the same way, but it does present its location ambiguously as "a country that is probably Chile, but could be any country that has given itself a democratic government just after a long period of dictatorship" (Dorfman 1991, 5). This ambivalence responds to the dual vocation Dorfman would declare having envisioned for the play: on the one hand, a vehicle for collective reflection for a wounded post-Pinochet Chile, "an instrument through which we explored our identity and the contradictory options available to us in the years to come;" and, on the other, "a piece of fiction [that] addressed problems that could be found all over the world, all over the twentieth century, all over the face of humanity through the ages […] a bridge across our divided world" (2000, 352-354).

Before it was made into a film, the theatrical run of the play proved the difficulty of balancing both ambitions. Robert A. Morace remarks the contrast between the disastrous opening of the play in Chile, where many found it painfully out of touch with

the country's delicate sociopolitical realities, and the massive success it experienced first in London and then almost everywhere else, soon being hailed as the "international play of the decade" (2000, 139). By 1995, he details, *Death and the Maiden* had performed in fifty-seven countries, with its myth-like simplicity allowing for changes in tone, form and content depending on each local context and particular production. The results were not always beyond reproach and Morace echoes also the criticisms around the "Americanization" (sic) of the text in Broadway under Mike Nichols' direction and its shift of focus from politics to marital melodrama. If, for some, Dorfman's original piece, the first by a Latin American writer to play in the Great White Way, had succumbed to "the terrors of Broadway" and turned from political drama into "consumer spectacle," this critic also laments the cinematic fate of the text, suffocated in his view under the weight of Polanski's stylistic mannerisms and public persona (2000, 148-150).

Missteps and criticisms included, the prolific transnational circulation of *Death and the Maiden* is significant because it embodies much of the changing cultural dynamics of globalization, most notably the blurring of the boundaries between local and global matters, narratives, spaces, identities, imaginations and meanings bound to define the years and decades to come. Its trajectory evokes what Arjun Appadurai described at the time as a "text-in-motion," a traveling cultural artifact capable, at least potentially, of re-producing notions of locality while also offering the materials for a transnational, or even "postnational" cultural and political imaginary (1996, 8-23). Polanski's eventual cinematic rendition, his first and only directorial foray outside the West, may be taken as a direct outcome of such evolving landscape and the ability of Dorfman's text itself to successfully navigate its currents, but it also responds also to a more decidedly, if not unrelated, cinematic trend: the epochal fascination by Western filmmakers and audiences with Latin American politics and military regimes in particular. Examples include

Bananas (Woody Allen, 1971), *État de siège* (Costa-Gavras, 1972), *It's Raining on Santiago* (Helvio Soto,1975), *Missing* (Costa-Gavras, 1982), *Under Fire* (Roger Spottiswide, 1983), *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (Héctor Babenco, 1985), *Salvador* (Oliver Stone, 1986), *Sweet Country* (Michael Cacoyannis, 1987), *Moon Over Parador* (Paul Mazursky, 1988), *La amiga* (Jeanine Meerapfel, 1988), *Verónico Cruz* (Miguel Pereira, 1988) and *The House of the Spirits* (Billie August, 1993). An account of these films' various production, thematic and stylistic intricacies falls out of the scope of this work, as does any suggestion as to the ideological forces driving the cycle as a whole. It will suffice here to note their sheer number and to hint at their responsibility in (re-)producing what Mignolo has called "the idea of Latin America" (2005) for a globalizing cultural and political imaginary.

Polanski's *Death and the Maiden*, then, sits at the confluence of various cultural, historical and economic dynamics spanning borders, making it a complex transnational artifact at almost every level. Almost every level, it would seem, except for that of its very content, built, again, around the tense confrontation between three bourgeois, non-migrant characters, with little in the way of mobility, a single, minimalist setting, and no actual, interstate border being crossed, figured or even mentioned. Against this initial impression, however, one of the aims of the analysis that follows is to unveil how the transnational conditions, background and aspirations of the film *do* inform and manifest themselves in its form and content and, more specifically, how they are inscribed into the pared-down spatio-narrative fabric, structure and trajectory of the text. It is there, in the spatial system it constructs, I will contend, that the borders and bordering operations of the film are to be found and mapped out; and it is also there, in, through and from the very borders that the film sets up for itself and builds around, that its political, geopolitical and ideological messages and meanings are most decidedly at work.

Death by Landscape

Neither critics nor scholars writing on *Death and the Maiden* have devoted much, if any, attention to the discussion of space in the movie. In the few exceptions that do mention it, the usual take has been to allude to Polanski's penchant for secluded, claustrophobic spaces, simply adding this film to the count (see Orr 2006, 21; Maximilian Le Cain 2006, 122; Caputo 2012, 216). This lack of concern is not without reason. After all, there may be nothing exceptional or remarkable about a setting mostly limited to a house's interior and a nearby cliff in an unnamed country when you have a story that, underneath a gritty rape-revenge plot, involves nothing less than the moral foundations of liberal justice and democracy. Although perhaps there is. If, as Deleyto suggests (2017), films work and signify spatially and, in a transnational context, particularly through borderwork, perhaps there is a relation to be found at play between the grand moral and political ambitions informing the film and the system of spaces and borders, however spare, that it as a whole delineates.

Indeed, in the brief but memorable introduction to its main location, the film already appears to foreground spatiality not only as crucial to the understanding of the events and meanings to follow, but also as a self-consciously distinctive element in its engagement with its sources. So, after a credit sequence spent at a theatre, specifically at a concert performance of Schubert's String Quartet in D minor, subtitled 'Death and The Maiden,' a sudden, disorienting cut, coinciding with a high point in the musical piece, confronts us with a full-frame shot of a wave violently crashing against the rocks of a shore and flooding the screen [fig. 3.1]. As the water begins to recede, the film cuts to a second, extreme long shot of the whole coastline. Looking down from a hill, the view reveals a picturesque, well-nigh Romantic landscape in which a small promontory, occupying the lower half of the image, defies a dark, menacing sky and a sea in turmoil [fig. 3.2]. A lone
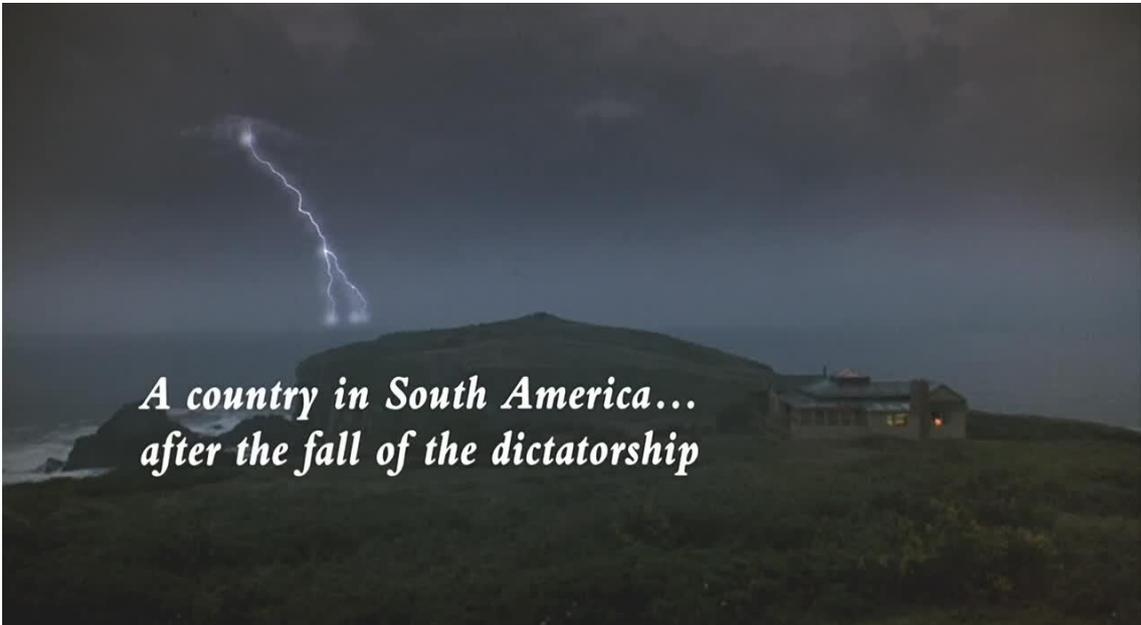
Figs.3.1, 3.2. Hell and high water: micro and macro, spatial abstraction and concretion, spill over each other in the shore's introductory shots.

wooden house rests on top not too far from a cliff. Next to it, a written sentence— "A country in South America… after the fall of the dictatorship"—captions the otherwise unmarked scenery the moment a bolt of lightning descends from the clouds and into the sea. The ensuing thunder gives way to the soothing soundtrack of the summer rain.

Genre codifications aside—we are no doubt in for a thriller—arguably the most salient of the meanings thus assigned to the location has to do with the film's deliberate eschewing of national identifications in favor of the larger scale of the continent as

referent. This could be read as an aftereffect of the play's Chilean fiasco but also as a more general testimony to the wavering state of late-twentieth-century geographical and cultural imaginations, caught between the epochal belief in the waning of the national as the 'master' territorial source of meaning, on the one hand, and the lingering need for some 'situated' frame of reference below the global from where to encode and decode cultural texts, history, politics and the social world, on the other. This double-bind between spatial abstraction and concretion can then be discerned, aesthetically, in the twofold figuration of the landscape itself, as the film juxtaposes the tight framing, sensorial blow and resulting dislocation of the first shot, reminiscent of what Gilles Deleuze called "any-space-whatever" (102-122; 1989, 1-24), and the classical extreme long establishing shot that follows, its cartographic or, to stay with Deleuze, 'reterritorializing' function reinforced by the insertion of the caption. Geography and history, along with politics, are thus stylistically intertwined from the outset, as if, reworking the dualism in Schubert's music itself, famously astride the Classical and the Romantic (see Leon Plantinga 1997), the film was placing us, 'formally,' at the confluence, both clash and overlap, between not only two periods, but also two spaces, two aesthetics and, more generally, two ways of looking at and engaging with the world.

As for the shore itself, that most elemental divide between land and water, solid and liquid, fixity and change, it is of course an apt metaphorical setting for such a play of binaries. Before the semiotic apparatus of the narrative takes over, these two shots already imagine it as a site of liminality and flux, division and contact; a physical and ontological border. At the same time, they suggest also something crucial about how this and all borders tend to work: clean and stable when pictured from a distance, as in a map, blurred and messy when up close. Once we leave aside the likely subjectivist dimension of such a scenery—that is, the feelings of schism, isolation and unrest it conveys being an

Fig. 3.3. Finis Terrae: the limits of the space double as the limits of the narrative, and vice versa.

expression the protagonist's troubled psyche and inner self—an underlying surplus of formal, narrative, aesthetic and ideological functions readily comes to the surface.

For one thing, in drawing a fundamental, in a way "foundational," border at the center of the spatial imaginary of the film (Parker et al. 2009, 585), the shore, as figured here and throughout the film, works 'structurally' as an ambivalent framing device or what Fredric Jameson calls a "strategy of containment" for the text (2002, 198-199). Thus, on the one hand, the shore sets up an organic and very tangible limit to the unfolding of the action—one conducive at once to hold together the closed allegorical unity of the play in face of the expansive urges of cinematic space (Heath 1981, 45-46), struggling as it is to abide by the strict domestic bounds of the original text, and to ward off any unruly sociohistorical realities it would threaten to expose if left unchecked. Small wonder, then, that it is precisely the rough waters below the cliff that cancel out the only means of transport in the film, a car, connecting the house and characters with the rest of society [fig. 3.3]. In other words, the shoreline can be seen to work, from within the text, as the picture frame did for George Simmel: a means to secure a sense of inner wholeness and

coherence and "that island-like position which the work of art requires vis-à-vis the outer world" (1994 [1902], 12). The open political investment of the text makes the severity of the enclosure—which involves also the very isolation of the house, the stormy and nightly setting and a timely power cut that takes away lights, radio and telephone—all the more significant and pressing, as if working to sustain, if not force, the epistemic illusion that the serious personal and ideological conflicts on display could, in spite of their origin in the messy dynamics of society and history, find expression and even resolution from within the admittedly narrow confines of a fiction film. Only when such containment threatens to become fatally stifling (that is, around 70 minutes into the film) and curb the progress of the very narrative and conflicts it was meant to nurture as some kind of cinematic Petri dish is this enclosing backdrop gradually lifted, starting with a *deus ex machina* phone call—from the country's president no less—that announces the arrival of a police detail from the city and effectively works to precipitate arguments and actions and the denouement of the plot. (A crude class-based reading, meanwhile, would surely have something to say on the ideological workings of such an enclave, arguing how the kind of self-contained, allegorico-political rhetoric of the film could only play out as it does from one of those escapist natural retreats from genuine society, mass urbanization and corporate land grab only available to the affluent. And that, in this respect, the film can scarcely amount to more than a self-serving bourgeois fantasy, or nightmare.)

On the other hand, as the largest, most manifest expression of the various strictures that corral the film's diegesis, the shore cannot but evoke that openness Rumford (2014) locates, actualized or repressed, in the existence of every border, and Simmel in every artistic frame (1994 [1902], 17). Right from that very first panorama, the immensity of the sea works as a dramatic counterpoint to the film's minimalism. That this is no empty aestheticism, that there is meaning invested in their contrast and symbolic interplay,

Figs. 3.4, 3.5. Demarcated by its cliff and lighthouse, the shore evokes closure and openness, danger and hope.

seems evident looking at the film's sheer imagery, from the various shots of waves breaking into the land to, specially, the recurrent, and otherwise purely ornamental, mise-en-scene of a lighthouse presiding the horizon [figs. 3.4, 3.5]. Once its sheer decorative value has been noted, the building reemerges as what it is, a topographical sign: a beaming warning for sailors, yes, but also an index of travel and commerce and, more figuratively, a silent reminder of an outside, interconnected world looming beyond the edges of the film—an off-screen, incommensurable totality onto which its social microcosm and political messages are, as we shall see, ultimately meant to be projected.

Yet perhaps we should recall at this point that all these rapidly accumulating meanings or functions—the shore as metaphor, landscape and scenery, an ambivalent and precarious border, a primal site of division and contact, a structural limit and an opening for the spatiality, temporality and politics of the text, the margins of society and so on—are brought to bear in the film in direct relation to a concrete, if extensive, geopolitical 'place' in the world and its history, namely South America. This enigmatic one-to-one connection between continent and landscape remains, by virtue of its written imposition

from 'outside' or 'above' the diegesis, the most straightforward of the meanings attached to the setting. As that initial caption proclaims, *this* is South America, after the fall of a dictatorship. The question then becomes how the use and figuration of such an overdetermined signifier as the shore may relate with the geographical, sociohistorical and political realities the film so conspicuously declares to be engaging with. Whatever readings one is tempted to extract from this association—a most suggestive one being an oblique, 'spatialized' relation between the continent's colonial history, which had in its "endless coasts" its foundational space and image (Eduardo Galeano (2009 [1971], 15), and the neo-colonial involvement of the US in the *coups d'état* and military dictatorships whose aftermaths the film sets out to address—they however fall apart as soon as we put the film's overall spatial system under critical examination.

For what basically transpires from such an operation is that, in a word, and *pace* what that initial caption claims, this is *not* South America. Perhaps the least apparent but nonetheless symptomatic part of this is the fact that no foot was set on the continent for the shooting of the movie. The coastal landscape whose figuration has occupied us so far is not located in America at all but in northwestern Spain, specifically in a small Galician town by the name of Valdoviño—facing the ocean, yes, but from the other side. Meanwhile, the house was built and shot inside the Parisian studios of Boulogne-Billancourt, entry yard and driveway included, with its windows opening to a matte painting of the sky and landscape (Stephen Pizzello 1995, 58-59). Much more blatant are the lax casting choices of the film, having Sigourney Weaver, Ben Kingsley and Stuart Wilson shamelessly play three Latin American characters while speaking nothing but English except for a few, oddly mispronounced Spanish names. Their discussions about Nietzsche, Freud, Schubert and the like work in a similar delocalizing direction, establishing a whole cultural framework to envelop the narrative that, like the house itself,

seems wholly sundered from its geopolitical context. (At least the *paella* that figured as dinner of choice in an early version of the script was changed in the final one to a less incriminating roasted chicken and salad (Dorfman and Yglesias 1992, 1; 1994, 4). At any rate, a poster of Pablo Neruda, a few Andean tapestry props and Kingsley's ambiguously 'marked' ethnicity is ultimately as far as the film will go in sustaining any notion or sense of place.

Of course, much of this could be justified in purely artistic and pecuniary terms, and it could be argued that it was cheaper or more convenient to film in Europe, that shooting on location could never offer the freedom and control the studio allows for filmmakers to articulate their vision, and that only doing it in English and with Hollywood stars would open the film to the kind of global audience needed to secure the very viability of the project. Polanski's interviews have let on that much (Laurent Vachaud 2005, 161-162; David Thompson 1995, 8). For the most part, however, both he and the critics and scholars looking at the film have been content with pointing to the 'universality' of the conflicts in display. This—the case of a victim confronting her victimizer and of a country leaving dictatorship behind—can happen anywhere in the world, it is said, and so whatever liberties the film takes with its particular location are either deemed warranted or simply overlooked. Not said, but nevertheless implied, is that it is not only the conflicts but also the 'solutions' presented for them, explicitly articulated in the language of Western liberal democracy and human rights legal order (see Orit Kamir 2005), that are, in the same breath, assumed as universal, both by the movie itself and, tellingly, also by its interpretations.

It is in this sense that the spatial system of the film, including the coastal border that frames and regulates it, reveals much of its ideological substance. In its own aestheticized way, and in a constant interplay with the dynamics of its medium and

industry, the film builds for itself, and then the world, the kind of abstract, empty and utterly conceptual or "conceived" space, to use Lefebvre's terminology (1991, 38-39), on which Western liberal ethical and political principles, narratives, theories, dilemmas and crises rely to build their claims of universality, their condition of possibility. As Harvey has written, it is this kind of virtual, free-floating spatial imaginary, safely detached from what he calls, ironically, "the banality of geographical evils" (2009, 98-121), that has lain behind the global promotion of liberal democracy, from Locke to G. W. Bush, and its role in the historical production of that transnational social space some label globalization and others the world system. *Death and the Maiden* can be seen to partake, however modestly, in this process and in doing so evidence one of its main contradictions, caught as it appears between the lofty egalitarian aims of the global democratic project and the more questionable flattening of local difference on which it relies.

Still, there is some crucial sense in which the history and 'identity' of South America do matter or 'work' in all this. Here I refer not only to the tragic historical reality of the dictatorial past of many of its countries, whose causes and conditions are barely touched upon but against whose atrocities democracy's prospect of a non-violent future is explored in the film. I refer, also, to Mignolo's insightful point about the "geohistorical" location of "the Americas" in the modern global imaginary and order (2000b, 51-60; see also 2005). According to this author, ever since their discovery or rather "creation" set off the world system, the Americas, contrary to Asia and Africa, have been "not Europe's difference, but its extension," a peripheral yet intrinsic part of the very notion of the West (2000b, 51). This 'borderly,' in-between, semi-peripheral position, symbolic but also very real, he writes, has for centuries marked the identity and fate of the continent, first as a whole, then of its central and southern regions, from the colonial period to its role as the privileged laboratory for the neoliberal project. It is precisely this historical ambivalence

of South America's location with respect to the West that I suggest the film is tapping into here and what, in effect, enables it to solve or rather work around its geographical slippage: that is, to pass what is essentially a Eurocentric fantasy as universal, as seemingly 'grounded' and 'functioning' somewhere else in the world, while, at the same time, ensuring that the hollowing out of virtually all signs of local social, cultural, ethnic and historical singularity is not seen as preposterous. Wouldn't we writhe in our seats, now or in the 1990s, at the mere sight of three fair-skinned, English-speaking, Nietzsche-quoting, Schubert-listening characters standing in for the society of some Asian or African country, named or unnamed? In short, South America does feature in the film, but through the convenience of its evacuation.

And so, after Chile—where, per the IMDb, the film was never released theatrically—it is the southern continent as a whole that succumbs to the film's discursive necessities and limitations. The move is of course hardly original and its critique, details aside, is low-hanging fruit. After all, to a degree, the film simply builds upon that generally subordinate role allotted in Western cultural and political imaginaries to the non-West, Global South, Third World or whatever overarching term one chooses for those various other(ed) places and societies where the centers of the world continuously project their anxieties and crises, promises and hopes, but whose actual conditions and realities they rarely account for or care about—too often to disastrous consequences (see Harvey 2009; Samir Amin 2009). If anything, what is truly remarkable in this case is how instructively the geographical and ideological sides of this equation are integrated in this text. At some level, just like the shooting itself, we never truly leave Europe; our cultural narcissism, geopolitical paranoia and our vertigo towards a fully globalized, interrelated and interdependent world, all can be found mapped onto the film's imaginary. Even the de-nationalization of the film's narrative space with which we began this section can be

seen to be channeling its particular kind of wish-fulfillment or anxiety. Political geographer David Newman noted at the time the harsh irony of how Europe and the US were exporting "narratives of globalization and deterritorialization" to regions that were in many cases still adjusting to modern notions of national identity, sovereignty and borders (1998, 7). But it may be even more ironic, and telling, that such narratives of deterritorialization should be coming from places which, as the Balkans dramatically reminded a 1990s, unifying Europe every day, still had their own very serious issues with nationality and territory to figure out and deal with.

Of Walls and Windows

For all the significance of the landscape and overall setting for the workings and meanings of the film, *Death and the Maiden* wastes no time—merely the credits sequence and the two initial shots discussed above—in relocating to the house as its signifying and gravitational center. To this transition and to the building's opening characterization is devoted one the most sophisticated shots of what is, on the whole, a relatively restrained cinematography, at least by Polanski's standards. What will amount to a forty-four-second-long take starts some four meters away from the house, in a slightly high angle and looking from the outside in through an open window [fig. 3.6-3.9]. A woman, the same woman we have seen attending the concert in the credits sequence (Weaver/Paulina), is cooking dinner while listening to the radio. As if wanting to come close to her, the camera slowly pushes in, but only to see her walk rightwards and disappear beyond the window's frame. Thwarted, the camera follows her movement from the outside to find her again, through another open window, setting the table. The camera then retakes its forward motion, this time sliding through the window frame and finally penetrating the interior. Once inside, the radio broadcast, in English, becomes louder and

Figs. 3.6-3.9. The initial intrusion of the camera establishes early on a spatial dynamic of insides and outsides.

clearer as the camera rushes to reveal, through a medium close-up, the character's reaction to the breaking news: the president of the country has declared the appointment of a human rights committee to investigate the crimes that took place under the country's military *junta*. Transfixed by the report, she walks deep into the house, marking the end of the take. The following shots, the camera now confidently placed inside, will follow the character moving around the space as she listens to the broadcast. As will transpire later on, the broadcast involves her personally: not only was she a victim of torture and rape under the dictatorship but also her husband (Wilson/Gerardo), a famous attorney "in the short list for Minister of Justice," has been appointed chairman of the committee.

In the crudest of formalist analyses, the purpose of that first crane shot is simple: to integrate interior and exterior as part of a continuous diegetic space, to establish the realm of the action and to place the protagonist and spectator within it. The complexity of the take, however, reminiscent of Welles or Hitchcock, but certainly also of Polanski, begs for a more nuanced interpretation. For a start, compared to, say, the longer but static 'shower shot' in *Frantic*, which helplessly registered Sondra's body vanishing off-screen,

this one appears, in its ability to follow Paulina, uncannily in control, an early display of the camera's omniscient grasp over the spatio-narrative universe of the film. The coincidence of its surgical incursion in the house with the breaking of the news, as well as its timely capturing of Paulina's reaction to it, hints at its absolute synchronization with the overall rhythms of the drama. Space, as a result, appears already here not as that ineffable external reality working against the representational limits of the cinematic form, as was the case of Paris in *Frantic*, but rather as happened in *Bitter Moon*, as an intrinsic, disciplined function of its formal, narrative and discursive system. The effect is that of a cohesive, precise and well-lubricated textual machinery being set in motion.

At a more figurative level, on the other hand, a pyschological reading might be offered in which the hovering and penetrating camera would become an embodiment of Paulina's sexual trauma coming back to haunt her, and thus potentially taking us back, by way of allegory and some inflection of Cherríe Moraga's notion of the "double-rape" (1993, 229), to that interpretive dead-end which is in this film the colonial history of South America. Somewhere between the formalist and the symbolic, however, a perhaps less dramatic but still effective geographical dimension subtends the spatial workings of the shot. For it is not just outsides and insides, public and private spaces that are being mobilized and integrated here but also, and through them, the whole topography of the film's production: its (purported) South American setting, the Spanish coast used to double for it, the Parisian studio interiors and, finally, the anglophone, Hollywoodesque world of the fiction; all readily weaved together and fastened in one single camera stroke. Even without its transnational import, Heath would probably warn us about the formal and ideological deception ingrained in such a move: how the sense of seamless continuity and realism that emanates from it works, like a fetish, to mask the artifice of the spatial unity of the film and the world, to cover up their gaps, excesses and negations (see 1981,

42-46). But then again, he would say this about most devices in this and most narrative films. What is unique for us here is precisely how the camera's trajectory at once enacts and smooths over the cross-border activities of the film itself and how this plays into the 'sanitized' geographical *gestalt* that sustains its political imaginary and discourse: how a complex act of 'borderwork' on the part of the film, involving a transnational array of real, artificial and surrogate spaces and a meticulous production and mise-en-scene to match, is sublimated, aesthetically, into the camera's unhindered crossing of the single, conveniently open border of a window frame.

This introductory shot sets indeed something of a pattern for the whole spatial rhetoric of the film, which will predicate narrative, form, mood, meaning and politics around the fluctuating relation, difference and interplay between interior and exterior spaces. Much of it hinges on the design of the house itself, easily one of Polanski's *least* claustrophobic domiciles. Conceived by scenographer Pierre Guffroy, who had collaborated with Polanski's in films like *Tess, The Tenant* and *Frantic*, *Death and the Maiden's* house has the makings of an upscale holiday bungalow, now turned into Paulina's permanent retreat—Gerardo, we are told, also has an apartment in the city. Its design and setup echo the liminality and open/closed ambivalence that pervades the surrounding landscape. While the back of the house is entirely walled, the front, facing the shore, is mostly made up of windows, transparent sliding doors and a glazed porch, all encircled by an open deck acting as an intermediate or transitional space [fig. 3.10]. Inside, partitions are reduced to a minimum, with most of the building's single-floor plan taken up by a wide-open space integrating the living and dining areas, the kitchen and a library. There are no corridors, and only two bedrooms with their bathrooms and a pantry stand separated from the rest. With the exception of a brick hearth, wood and glass conspicuously predominate.

Fig. 3.10. Roberto and Miranda catch some bonding time on the bungalow porch.

If it is true that borders and "border thinking" are major forces in shaping spatial discourse, meaning and practice in globalization and the postmodern (Agnew 2008), such an argument must necessarily extend to architecture, cinematic buildings included. From this perspective, *Death and the Maiden*'s house, whatever its other functions—among them to accommodate the shooting of a whole movie—can be read as the built expression of or metonymy for the whole geographical imaginary and context of the film, one which is not (yet) completely unified and borderless, but in which spatial divisions feature as porous, unstable and prone to transgression. Apart from the very irruption of the camera, and with it the narrative, sound, light, rain, wind and the eventual arrival of a stranger (Kingsley/Dr. Miranda) all breach at different moments the admittedly fragile boundaries of the house—which, at one point, if only for a second, the film threatens to set on fire.

Similarly, vision itself, of both characters and camera, constantly cuts across its boundaries in both directions—a significant and signifying feat in itself if we consider the sheer geographical incongruity involved. Throughout the film, there is an impressive number of compositions linking visually interior and exterior, impeccably held together

Figs. 3.11-3.18. Death and the Maiden (re-)staged as a tale of two spaces.

by Polanski's virtuoso orchestration of camerawork, framing, mise-en-scene, blocking, lighting, sound, a repertoire of wide-angle lenses (see Pizzello 1995, 58) and the very set of the house [figs. 3.11-3.18]. This relational impulse reaches its particular apex during a conversation midway through the film between Paulina and Gerardo: while the couple stands talking on the deck on the foreground, Miranda, tied to a chair inside, is kept in sight through a visual pathway made of no less than three window frames [fig. 3.14]. Color design adds to the dialectic between both spaces in the form of a starkly dual but

'complementary' palette, split between the vibrant, candle-lit oranges of the house and the hazy bluish tones of the landscape. More significant in all this is however the way in which the narrative of the film itself relies on, contributes to and exploits such an ambivalent relation; how the concatenation of episodes and scenes and the very progress of the story are fueled and structured by the sequential crossings of the house's borders, up to the point that its eventual resolution cannot but coincide with the characters' and the camera's abandonment of the building altogether [fig.3.18].

We can find in this, I think, more than an example of the inherent spatiality of cinematic storytelling or, more precisely, of its reliance on arranging, managing and overcoming "spatial difference" to develop and resolve itself (Mark Garrett Cooper 2002). According to Cooper, who builds on Heath, the modern search for spatial unification lies, even when unfulfilled, at the core of the form but also of the content and ideological messages of narrative films. His favored example is that of Hollywood romantic comedy and romance plots in general, driven as they are by the effort to produce the kind of homogeneous, secure and visually unified space in which (usually white and heterosexual) love can flourish free of obstacles extrinsic to the couple (see also Deleyto 2009). Once such a utopian diegetic space is produced and secured, when "spatial difference" is "abolished," the narrative, he argues, is conventionally brought to an end (2002, 151). Moving from the personal to the ideological, as Cooper suggests we do, cannot this same formal principle be related to the more overtly political inflections of *Death and the Maiden*? After all, does not democracy, liberal or otherwise, national or global, rest its very project or "promise," as Jacques Derrida once defined it (1992, 78), also on producing its own kind of secure, unified and potentially boundless space, one that transcends the borders of class, culture, geography and so on? Cooper makes in his theorization the further crucial point that in romance narratives the protagonists are not

just placed "within" an already safe diegetic space, but that they are intrinsic to its production, that the space would not exist as such if devoid of their affection for one another (2002, 150). Albeit from a different generic angle, *Death and the Maiden* adheres to this precept in that the bringing of the characters together under the same roof hardly suffices to solve the problem. The change must be "qualitative" (Cooper 2002, 140), and much of the film and its powerful allegorical significance is predicated precisely on dramatizing the anxieties and struggles for the three characters to relate and coexist in an increasingly unified, interrelated space at a particular moment in history in which, in so many places around the world, boundaries and borders no longer seemed to work as they used to. Slavoj Žižek has described the nation as the major modern incarnation of what Levi-Strauss called a "zero-institution," meant to provide "a neutral all-encompassing space in which social antagonism is obliterated, in which all members of society can recognize themselves" (2012, 268). In the post-dictatorial and de-nationalized imaginary of the film, and in the context of looming globalization, it is instead the shared loyalty to, or at least compliance with, the principles and institutions of democracy and universal human rights that promises such a space. "In a democracy," Gerardo tells Miranda, "the midnight knock on the door can be friendly."

Friendly or not, the fact is that such a safe, neutral and democratic social space is only arrived at and formally articulated as such in the last scene of the film, and only once the house has fulfilled its 'differential' spatial, narrative and ideological functions and been subsequently cast aside. Before that, an intense personal, moral and legal drama plays out within, through and around its walls: Paulina, sure of recognizing in Miranda's voice that of the doctor that tortured and raped her, whose face she never saw for being blindfolded, kidnaps him armed with a gun and resolves to get a confession out of him, while he desperately denies everything. Meanwhile, Gerardo, loving husband but also

Fig. 3.19. Low angle, low key lighting turns the seaside house into a precarious Platonic cave.

devoted supporter of human rights and due process, clumsily tries to mediate between the two while struggling, like the spectator, to discern how much truth there is in their respective accounts and how to act and pass judgement when reason, ethics and the law simply offer no definite answers.

Previous readings of the film have done much good work in dissecting the intricacies of what unfolds between the three; how the changing roles, anxious (at times decidedly stagy) performances, lies, inconsistencies and lack of direct, factual evidence are used in the film to test our notions of truth, justice, violence and power (Gordana Crnkovic 1997). Casting has often been highlighted, pointing at the way in which an angular Weaver fits into the divisive role of a resolute but neurotic woman (Mazierska 2007, 133; Crnkovic 1997, 43), how Kingsley's good Samaritan façade is employed throughout the film (Kamir 2005, 81), and how Wilson's affable non-persona matches the humdrum blandness and well-intentioned gullibility of the liberal law (Crnkovic 1997, 41-43). Also considered by Kamir and Crnkovic is the role of mise-en-scene and camerawork in articulating the shifting alliances and power-play between the characters.

The building plays no small part in all this. It is Guffroy's interior 'open-plan,' for one, that allows for the waltzing around of the three bodies (and the camera) in space, the fluid dollyings and trackings, framings and reframings that capture them and the resulting play of shapes, depths and backgrounds that modulates the mood and meanings of each scene. It is such a plan also that allows the noirish, expressionistic shadows cast by the candles and flashlights around the room to attain their ominous dimensions, evoking not only the characters' inner dualities and secrets but also the larger, ideological projections of what they do and say [fig. 19]. Meanwhile, open doors, windows, the transparent porch and the deck work to broaden the space, enabling the trio to be episodically broken-up and dispersed across the edges of the house while still allowing for those elaborate compositions that keep their bodies consistently bound to one another, the building, the camera and the frame.

Aside from the material basis it provides for the very shooting and expressive visual iconography of the film the house finds its ultimate significance for us in the structural role it is made to play within the spatio-narrative system and political discourse of the film. Bakhtin's old notion of the literary "chronotope" may come to mind, particularly the kind he identified as the "threshold:" a condensed spatio-temporal *locus* of crisis and change, of opening and closing of paths and worlds (1981, 248). Such mediatory function would seem here most manifest in the bungalow's entry deck and porch, architectural 'third spaces,' neither fully interior nor exterior, where movement is managed and registered and where encounters, negotiations and exchanges recurrently take place. At the same time, the visual and narrative preponderance of these spaces serves to foreground something intrinsic to the building as a whole, namely a sense of liminality and transitoriness that extends from its coastal location to its nature as a holiday residence. This function persists as the house transforms into an improvised court room, another

threshold itself, a kind of secular purgatory in which certain social evils or disorders, in this case mainly the persistence of violence, are exposed, condemned and, ideally, disposed of on the way to a better, more harmonious collective future. That this whole textual process hides not only a historical but, as argued so far, also a deeply geopolitical component—i.e. the transnational advance of a certain political order, moral values and worldview—suggests that the chronotope or space-time at play here may best be understood, rather than through the metaphor of the threshold, through the prism of the border, itself more readily evocative of the discursive imbrication of textuality and politics, social and narrative spaces in a transnational context (Schimanski and Wolfe 2007).

Read as a border, then, the seaside house of *Death and the Maiden*, doubles as the outer edges of an expanding global democratic culture, institutions and "administered society" (Morrison 2006, 12). This applies, at one level, to its role as Paulina's personal hideaway, suffused with her *ressentiment* and distrust of the newly implemented legal and political system, her trauma, paranoia and enduring desire for truth and retribution, through violence if necessary. But it also applies to the house's more allegorical vocation, as encapsulating the predicament of that marginal 'any-country-whatever' somewhere in the world struggling, perhaps with good reasons, to let go of the past and History, embrace the liberal democratic ways and adjust to the precepts of what Richard Rorty labeled at the time as the "global moral community"—and for which, incidentally, he envisioned "we Westerners" as model and sole regulators (1998, 56). As a space-time of liminality and transition, as an in-between (e)state, the house agglutinates indeed a great deal of the functions attributed to border spaces in recent theorizations. Thus, it is an ambivalent site of contact and encounter (Rumford 2014), "struggle" (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) and "transition" (Newman 2007, 38-41) as well as a hotbed of political action (Balibar 2002,

220) where different spatialities, temporalities, identities and ideologies collide, are performed and negotiated, if not always peacefully, at least successfully or for the best. Yet as a fundamental marker of spatial but also political difference in the film, and as permeable as it proves to be, the bordering role of the house here may imply its existence as only temporary: a space to be inhabited and dwelled upon, learned from even, but ultimately only a preamble to be eventually overcome, both physically and symbolically.

Seen 'from the border,' the drive for spatial unity Heath and Cooper contend lies at the core of (mainstream) cinematic form and storytelling, channeled here mostly through Paulina's personal journey, her seclusion, departure from the house and eventual return to society, acquires a distinctly geopolitical bent. Its implications include but are not reduced to the moral or legal compromises her trajectory involves—provided one assumes, or rather recognizes, that Western liberal values, democracy and universal human rights never travel alone when promising freedom, justice and a peaceful coexistence the world over. While not part of the ostensible narrative content and polemics of the text, it takes only a little zooming out in our analysis to see how it is the structural position of late (global) capitalism itself that must also, inevitably, be at stake, especially at a unique historical juncture, post-Soviet, post-dictatorial and/or post-colonial, where so many places and societies in the world craved for tools with which to assess, or simply begin to imagine, the paths or futures available to them. Had the film retained the play's Chilean setting, the critique would now be rather straightforward. It would point to how the country's criollo elite-orchestrated, US-sanctioned transition to democracy, which upheld Pinochet's 1980 constitution, was biased to secure the neoliberal economic program and its capitalist and military establishment (see Gabriel Salazar 1992; Rosalind Bresnahan 2003) and how this, cloaked under a conciliatory banner, led, human rights committees notwithstanding, to the self-granted amnesty and

non-prosecution of most of the regime's leaders and enforcers, Pinochet included. (If nothing else, the current events in Chile and much of Latin America, from mass anti-neoliberal protests being met by brutal, murderous state repression to the resurgence of the military coup, demand a critical reconsideration of such democratizing processes.)

Unbound by strict national attachments and the accountability for 'grounded' sociopolitical and historical nuance these would entail, the film appears today in fact significantly more explicit in its formal and ideological layout than Dorfman's messier, more tentative play. Its spatial, temporal and narrative cogs have tightened up, with much of the work made on adapting the script directed at refining its three-act structure and ending (see Vachaud 2005, 159-160). By design or in effect, the result is also a clearer political outline, where the paths and futures of its fictional country appear now articulated through a rather stark and spatialized system of binary oppositions, underlying which is no other than the opposition between violence and civilization, which has been democracy's great historical promise to resolve (Adrian Little 2006; John Schwarzmantel 2010). As for competing alternatives, meanwhile, they are either left out of the picture, as in the case of class or cultural difference, or confined to the 'violent' side of the equation, as in the case of political ideology, whose only yet highly significant trace can be found in that scene in which Paulina, gun in hand, whistles the socialist "Internationale" as she forces Miranda to urinate under her gaze. In essence, then, the choice ends up neatly reduced to one between global liberal democracy or totalitarian barbarism—a binarism which, to be fair, should be read less as some crude conservative mystification on the part of Polanski or the film (for what it is worth, Dorfman, co-writer of the script, had been an advisor of Allende's Marxist-leaning government), than a sign of the kind of generalized, late-twentieth-century ideological appeasement or fatigue

commonly related with the end of the Cold War and, after Fukuyama, with the so-called 'end of History.'

To be sure, despite its didactic vocation, the film is clever enough to avoid doctrinaire idealisms as counterpoint for past and present brutalities; Gerardo, as direct an incarnation of the new legal and political order as one could imagine and, as an ex-dissident himself, also representative of the kind of ideological taming or conversion expected of Paulina and the left as a whole, has his fair share of flaws and contradictions. It should be stressed also that it is hardly thanks to some direct, heroic intervention on his part—Wilson is no Fonda or Stewart, and Polanski is no Capra—that the film's resolution comes about. Nevertheless, in the face of violence, it is still to him that our Western liberal sensibilities turn, however reluctantly, and if only to find in his ignorance, bewilderment and distress some support or solace for our own. So even if Gerardo comes out as bland or irresolute, his remains the main, if scarcely comfortable, diegetic position and ideational compass from which to navigate the events and dilemmas of the film.

Given the absence of some truly transcendent action on his part, physical or rhetorical, something which would compromise the film's apparent impartiality, it is space itself that is mobilized to articulate a resolution. When, at dawn, after a whole, exhausting night of quarreling and a nasty three-way scuffle the characters finally leave the house little seems to have changed: Paulina is still vengeful, Miranda continues to reject her accusations and Gerardo remains as doubtful and unassertive as before [fig. 3.20]. Not even a last-minute call to Barcelona apparently confirming Miranda's residency at a hospital there at the time of the torturing amounts to much. Many in the regime had arranged similar fake alibis, Paulina retorts. What this international call does, however, like that of the country's president before it, is to further the dissolution of that minimalist spatial framework which had kept the film's conflicts alive and operational

Fig. 3.20. The sudden abandoning of the house heralds an imminent, but still uncertain, resolution for the narrative.

just when, left to the characters' interactions and development, the whole thing was nearing a narrative and discursive deadlock. In this sense, if anything is being truly left behind as the three characters cross the boundaries of the house and move outside, into the open, it is "spatial difference" as such (see Cooper 2002)—only this might prove enough to engender an effective resolution.

Their departure means, first of all, the end of the conflict between interior and exterior which has allowed, justified and mediated the film's development until this point. With its abolition and the moving of everything and everyone to the outside goes also a great deal of the film's room or need for narrative progress. With no other, different or competing space to "contain" or "narrate" (Cooper 2002, 151), a more or less conventional cinematic narrative has quite literally 'nowhere to go' and can only postpone resolution so much. The point here is again that, in *Death and the Maiden,* what may be an inherent function of cinema's spatio-narrative system and conventions—the arranging and then (attempted) solving of spatial difference—is given the function of sustaining the whole allegorico-political rhetoric of the film—just as in *Frantic* it sustained the film's discourse on postmodern Paris and Franco-American relations. Paulina's secluded

seaside house is not just some private hideaway or a metaphorical expression of her social and psychological alienation. It works also as a container for a lingering sociopolitical unrest—a disjointed pocket of memory, dissent and violence within a pressing new society unfolding beyond its walls. Around the opposition between these two spaces, the house and the world 'out there,' has taken shape not only a fully-working cinematic narrative, but also an intriguing cobweb of conceptual oppositions, among them those of closure and openness, the personal and the political, individual and society, local and global, past and future, and, most notably, again, violence and democracy.

In other words, the resolution or, more precisely, the 'removal' of the spatial difference embodied in the house involves more than a strategic way out of the impasse for the plot. How the ensuing scene plays out certifies indeed that such removal also supplements a formal solution for the sociopolitical antinomies of a film that has bitten off more ideology than its narrative could chew. Paulina does not push Miranda off the cliff, as she had threatened to do. Instead, a sublime, epiphanic moment between the two takes place outside, one in which not affection, but reason, truth and forgiveness finally materialize as a form of rediscovered, essential ground-zero of human interaction. That such an elevated finale, wholly absent in the play, is reached at this point, after what has been meager narrative and characterological development, can scarcely be explained except through the spatial operations of the movie. Couched by the liberating mystique of nature, this moment caps off ecstatically what has been an all-out, painstaking struggle against spatial difference on the part of the film, from the excising of all geographical 'evils' in the production of its setting, to the final abandonment of the house.

The 'genealogy' of the ending could be deconstructed thus: first the removal of spatial difference diligently guides, or pushes, the narrative into closure, producing in turn moral and ideological resolution. This suggests that it is space itself that has somehow

Figs. 3.21-3.22. At last, a close-up shot-reverse-shot, set in the open, conjures an affective space of recognition, and truth.

been the problem all along; that spatial difference has not just been a formal conduit for the narrative or even a metaphor for politics, but an essential obstacle genuinely keeping the film's conflicts from being resolved. Expanding the implications beyond sheer cinematic formalism, spatial difference thus emerges in the film as co-constitutive of social and political discord, even violence, hence establishing that if that difference were to be abolished or contained, through politics or perhaps even through cinema itself, peaceful coexistence would be not just possible but likely. In other words, it is, in the film's discourse, precisely the "divided world" Dorfman argued he was attempting to bridge with his text (2000, 354) what, in an otherwise transnational and globalizing context, precludes our honest engagement with one another and the past and a potentially harmonious, democratic future living together.

In both form and content, the next-to-last scene of the film textualizes such a unifying message. True, the cliff is still very much there, physically and symbolically splitting a now single, autonomous outside space in half as Paulina brings Miranda to his knees at the edge of the precipice. A couple of overhead shots clearly underline its 'differential' threat and narrative possibilities, namely the killing of Miranda. At the moment of truth, however, almost every aesthetic device activated so far by the film is recapitulated towards minimizing the cliff's presence and producing the kind of unified,

abstracted, almost metaphysical space in which the film's morals can finally, almost naturally, spring from within the characters and bring the narrative conflict to an end.

Such a space is however mainly articulated through the only new formal gesture the sequence mobilizes: the close up shot-reverse-shot between Paulina and Miranda, where she kneels in front of him and, holding his face between her hands, calmly asks him to *truly* look at her and confess. Having removed Miranda's blindfold just seconds before, their now direct and unmediated look, what Heath understood as the main force of spatial unity in the cinema, "a veritable drama of vision" (1981, 44), is thematized as a marker of genuine ethical engagement and recognition [figs. 3.21-3.22]. Soft and shallow focus is used to neutralize perspective and blur the background—in Paulina's case little more than a black and white haze—while Wojciech Kilar's gentle but haunting extradiegetic score, built as a drawn-out violin crescendo, dampens the still audible roaring of the sea. Paulina's question "isn't it bright enough to see me?" underlines almost self-consciously the motif of vision and the fact that also in formal terms differences have largely dissolved. The morning light is soft, diffused and uniform, the mist is gone, shadows have all but disappeared and so as has the film's chromatic duality, resolved in favor of a sweeping blue palette. Visual and spatial barriers removed, Miranda's climactic revelation cannot but ensue. Probably less pure "quality" or "affect" than Deleuze would have it (see 1986, 95-97), given the terrifyingly detailed content of Miranda's confession and Kingsley's richly layered, three-minute-long monologue, his and Paulina's close-ups still work towards abstracting the exchange from its spatio-temporal milieu, momentarily conjuring up that any-space-whatever or "very special deterritorialisation" (1986, 96) where, according to the author, genuine "choice" could take place; the same conceptual space where, translated into our present concerns, what he and Félix Guattari would later

call the "becoming-democratic" of the world could find a potential foundation (1994, 85-113).

Deleuze and Guattari's "geophilosophical" notion of global democracy, of a utopian space of true choice and collective "becoming," was bound up with the struggle against capitalism and its uneven territorial operations, logics and constraints, "even to the point where this calls for a new earth, a new people" (1994, 101). No such radical or open-ended propositions or potentialities appear in Polanski and Dorfman's much more moderate (geo)political text—one in which Western liberal democracy appears *de facto,* whatever its shortcomings, as the only existing, rational and viable expression and its embracing the only horizon for the political future of any country in a globalizing, increasingly borderless social space. Coming to terms with this is indeed the ultimate discursive function not of Miranda (the right), who seems comfortably adapted to life in this new reality, even though he admits missing the old days of indiscriminate torture and rape, but of Paulina (the left), on whose shoulders narrative and form place the responsibility of sealing the deal. The black and white background enveloping her close-up suggests that, in the moral and epistemic universe of the film, this is a clear-cut ethical decision. In this sense, it is not Miranda's revelation, however cathartic, that is the crux of the film. Rather, the ultimate lesson of *Death and Maiden* has to be found in Paulina's arriving at the truth—her particular glimpse into History—and in her subsequent rejection of violent retaliation, her releasing of Miranda and her return and effective assimilation into society at large.

All the World's a Stage

The closing scene of the film takes us back to known and, as it were, safe territory: the concert hall where the film started. Again, Schubert's 'Death and the Maiden' is in the

program and, again, Paulina and Gerardo sit in the audience. Whether this is the same recital as the beginning or not, and what this may imply for the story's overall structure has been discussed by Caputo (2012, 218). I have suggested above that, sheer chronology aside, it is in this last scene that we should look for a final glimpse of what the film imagines might be to live in a democratic society. It is here and now that the film's vision of a unified social, moral and political space obtains some proper cinematic representation. While it would be delusional to label this scene as representing some kind of realized Utopia, it would be equally reductive to argue that the film's bookend structure implies, as it is often said about Polanski, a full circle, a frustrated and frustrating return to the beginning; that, as one critic put it, "we end where we began" (Morrison 2007, 101). This would not only mean downplaying whatever effect the bulk of the film may have had on us as spectators and on our interpretation of both concert scenes. It would also be turning a blind eye to what is a glaring discrepancy between the two scenes in terms of film language and cinematic space.

Indeed, if both scenes, first and last, open similarly, with an extreme close-up of a cello playing the blaring introduction of Schubert's piece [fig. 3.23], this only underlines how differently they unfold. If the former was organized, and contained, around a tight eye-line-match structure, linking straight-on the musicians and the attending couple, the latter evolves into a flowing, continuous, highly mobile long take (1'42'') shot with a crane and redolent of the one which introduced us to the seaside house [figs. 3.23-3.32]. The motif of vision remains paramount, but this time with no ostensible formal or physical constraints or divisions, thresholds or borders, curbing its energies. The effect is sweeping and totalizing. The camera retreats, turns away from the players and gracefully leaves the stage, gliding over the jam-packed auditorium where, among the crowd, it finds, softly illuminated, the protagonist couple. Moved but composed, we see how Paulina's pensive

Figs. 3.23-3.32. Death and the Maiden's closing shot: an enfolding tapestry of looks, space and music.

upward, off-screen look freezes. The camera, which had barely stopped, soars left, tracing the axis of her gaze and reveals Miranda staring at her from the balcony, where he is sitting with his family. Another look is then embedded into the mix as one of Miranda's

sons turns to his father, distracting him for a second. As the doctor looks back down again, the camera follows cue and returns to the couple, showing that Gerardo is now the one looking back. Then Gerardo turns his head away from Miranda and both he and Paulina stare ahead, stone-faced, as 'Death and the Maiden's' opening theme nears its end. Cut, and we are back to a neutral, disembodied view of the stage where, after a brief pause and a turn of the page, the quartet moves to the second theme. The credits roll. Life goes on.

Even if we stick to Polanski's subjectivist register, such an elaborate change in form demands elucidation. Taken as what Bruce Kawin (1978) long ago termed a "mindscreen," that is, as the cinematic expression of a character's subjectivity or consciousness, in this case arguably Paulina's, the inclusion in this last scene of not only Miranda and his family, but also the theatre space and audience in general conjures an expanded, more organic and integral, if probably not totally harmonious, psychological relationship with a social totality—a larger cognitive mapping. Reverse this perspective, however, and the social space thus articulated becomes a message in its own right, a whole of which Paulina is now a part or function. The seamless and comprehensive movement of the camera, the diversified and relational play of looks and the communal space of the theatre itself can be seen to finally evoke that unified social space the film has been struggling to produce. The "unity of a collectivity" is, after all, according to Jameson (2002, 281), the ultimate (Utopian) drive of any and all ideology, which is to say also of culture, politics and, in the final analysis, of human History itself, at least as understood from a "Marxian" point of view (2002, 271-290). *Death and the Maiden* seems aware, like Jameson, that the belonging within such collectivity, in this case that of democracy, won't be without its frustrations and that what philosophers call our 'sad passions,' those antagonistic interpersonal affects like envy, hatred or resentment won't simply wither

away. The repressed tension that pervades Paulina and Gerardo's looks at Miranda and his picture-perfect family bring this point home.

But while the camera's trajectory and final "tethering" to the charged looks of the characters, to use Caputo's term (2012, 40), ostensibly re-locates attention, difference and meaning back into the strictly personal, it is again a focus on space itself that offers one final glimpse into the historical and the ideological. By space I mean now specifically the concert hall; architecture as well as music. It is here and now after all that Schubert's quartet is granted its longer and more significant rendition of the whole film, as its fascinating mixture of Classicism and Romanticism, its formal discontinuities and sudden swings in mood and intensity, can now be seen to fully reveal its roots in another moment of not only aesthetic but also social and historical transition, namely the turn of the nineteenth century; which is to say at once the Enlightenment, modernity, industrialization, nation-states, urbanization, the rise of the bourgeoisie, liberalism and, while not necessarily in Schubert's Austria, also the first shades of democracy around Europe (Waltraud Heindl 1997, 36 and passim). That Schubert's piece and ingrained *zeitgeist* should serve to characterize not just Paulina's personal experience and inner conflicts, but the sociopolitical conjuncture of a region half a world away and two centuries later is in sync with the 'cosmopolitan' aspirations and Eurocentric bent of the film (and play): Latin Americans, we Westerners are led to think, reassuringly, are now like us, or at least catching up—with our institutions and sensibilities, as well as our contradictions. But even if we ignore the geohistorical discrepancy being 'musically' papered over, the fit remains intriguing. For as a string quartet, essentially a chamber piece, 'Death and the Maiden' sits oddly enough against the background of a big, naked stage and a crowded auditorium. The incongruity, spatial and aesthetic, is also sociologically charged. If music historians locate the birth and very rationale of chamber

music within a rather specific enclave, the private aristocratic salon (John Herschel Baron 1998), its transfer into the (semi-)public realm of a concert hall, already under way in Schubert's time—just when, ironically, the quartet form was, like the salon itself, beginning its decline—spells a peculiar assemblage of spaces, sensibilities and publics. A two-fold social problematic seems sublimated in the process: on the one hand, the uneasy accord between private and public affairs, spaces or "spheres" in modern societies (see Habermas 1991 [1962], 31-51) and, on the other, a changing system of social hierarchies and class antagonisms having to be culturally reworked, mediated and contained; whether under the Enlightened despotism of early nineteenth-century Europe, or the emerging liberal democracies of late twentieth-century globalization. In this sense, the vertical allocation of the protagonists along the two levels of the auditorium might respond again to subjective or interpersonal meanings (Miranda, still free, having metaphorically come out on top) or to a sheer aesthetic flourish (since we hired a crane, we might as well make the most of it), but it would be hard not to see in it also an architectural stand-in for the structural divisions that linger, however tamed, within democracy's sociopolitical edifice.

It would probably be a stretch at this point to retreat to our original theoretical preoccupation, the border, and re-frame in its terms all these minor shades of 'socio-spatial difference' that crisscross the otherwise unified bourgeois collectivity that *Death and the Maiden* places, as a mirror, in front of us. It seems less unnatural however to do just that in relation to the theater building itself. If the border assisted us in making 'geopolitical' sense of the seaside house, the porosity and ambivalence of which read as a figure for the liminal and transitory state of a post-dictatorial country vis-à-vis an outside, globalizing world, what can it then tell us about the concert hall, the single other building featured in the film, and the sole representation of that hitherto absent social

totality the film has for ninety-plus minutes intimated but zealously warded off? In the first place, it instils that totality with a unique sense of closure and finitude. Gone, the border tells us, are the openness and contingency of the house, its undecided, dialectical negotiation with an external world rife with danger but also possibility, as gone is the irreducible immensity of that outside world. Instead, both are now collapsed together inside the airtight walls of the theater: globalization imaged as a singular and foreclosed space or system, *fait accompli*. As for spatial difference, with no outside to the theater's interior, with no genuine 'other' space in sight, it has gone from an existential political contradiction to a minor, internalized incongruity, something to be kept in check by interpersonal ethics and the cultural and, if necessary, legal *dispositifs*. The result is an ethos that is not triumphant, but neither is it rebellious. Nor does it, except superficially, attain the sort of inspiring ambiguity Polanski has suggested he was after (Vachaud 2005, 160). Rather, the message seems quite plainly one of, first, resigned realization and, then, sheer acceptance; a solipsistic certitude that appears, for a political fable such as this one, more confining than any naïve optimism or frenzied critique ever would, suggesting that the theater's borders are after all as much spatial as they are ideological, and that underneath the end of the film's narrative may loom indeed the end of History.

Moving Bodies*: The Ghost Writer*

Sixteen years separate *The Ghost Writer¸* released in 2010, from *Death and the Maiden*. Much could be said at this point about Polanski's personal and professional trajectories in those years, and about how the inevitable entanglement of both gave way to some of the highest and lowest moments of his career, from worldwide praise and recognition for *The Pianist* to his house arrest in Switzerland during the post-production and release of *The Ghost Writer*. Beyond its anecdotal or even interpretive attraction, which few critics

were able to resist, such 'biographical' entanglement holds in fact material sway in some of the questions of production, aesthetics or reception addressed in what follows, including such decidedly spatial issues as those of location and shooting. We shall go back fleetingly to Polanski when deemed relevant in such terms, but it is again a broader set of issues that concerns us here.

Those sixteen years were also quite momentous from a larger, 'sociological' lens. As those who champion, condemn or simply assert the 'acceleration' of life in late modernity and globalization suggest, the turn of the millennium was one of the more intense and tumultuous epochs in human existence. Out of this mounting "overabundance of events," as Marc Augé once described it (1992, 28-31), it is difficult not to single out the larger and more calamitous: the Balkan wars, Rwanda's genocide, the second Congo War, the Chechen Wars, 9/11, the War in Darfur, the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars, the Gaza blockade and the 2008 global financial crash, to name a few, punctuate in rather catastrophic fashion a decade and a half at which, globally, it is difficult not to look back in awe. In fact, rather than spelling a reactivation of History after the fall of the Berlin Wall—Western liberal democracy remains very much the dominant political ideology and form of government in the planet—most of these events would suggest what Hardt and Negri, writing in the midst of it all, would denounce as a "global state of war" (2004, 1-35). Even in those places not directly affected by one of the many sustained armed conflicts composing such a state—around two thousand around the world, according to their estimations (2004, 31)—or by the sporadic terrorist attacks that were to become one of its main upshots and justifications in the relatively more peaceful West, its effects would and continue to be felt. This includes the likely arrival of thousands of foreigners, migrants and/or refugees displaced by those conflicts, the increased securitization of national territories as well as all manner of public and private spaces, the rebounding of

nationalist sentiments and movements, including many of a markedly xenophobic character, and, overall, Hardt and Negri would write, a general climate of "fear, insecurity and domination" (2004, xii). The socially, politically and culturally integrated cosmopolitan world space envisaged by *Death and Maiden* appears to have been replaced, at least from this perspective, by an increasingly disjointed, compartmentalized and "striated" one, as Deleuze and Guattari would have called it (1987, 353 and passim). It is precisely in the intervening years between these two films that the border would surge with such force not only as a discrete material reality, but also as a conceptual tool with which to make sense of early twenty-first-century society, space, politics and culture.

Not surprisingly, the border figures much more explicitly in *The Ghost Writer* than in *Death and the Maiden*. *The Ghost Writer* has 'the border' writ large, in its form no less than in its content. For this to become apparent, however, it should be explained what kind of border, of the many that globalization has produced and reproduced, we are talking about here. For this is not Rumford's "quilting point;" a site of connectivity between others, a portal into the world and a potential engine of self-reflection and cosmopolitanism (Cooper and Rumford 2011, 261; Rumford 2014). Nor is this *Death and the Maiden*'s legal and geopolitical metaphor, a formal as well as ideological barrier, a spatial residue from the past to be overcome and erased on the way to a new and unified social space and order. Nor even is this merely the old interstate division returning with a vengeance, even though its resurgence is to be sure part and parcel of the world *The Ghost Writer* is reacting to.

Instead, more generally, what we encounter in the film comes closer what Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) call a "borderscape"; that is, a border that is less as a fixed, material "thing," as Balibar once put it (2003, 81), and more a dispersed, shapeshifting regulatory apparatus spreading across, segmenting and policing the world space and the movement

of people. A similar understanding of the border as a loosely integrated, all-encompassing environment has increasingly permeated the imagination of social theory (see Maribel Casas-Cortés and Sebastián Cobarrubias 2019), whether expressed in terms of system, grid, regime or network, of spaces, practices, policies, technologies, discourses or logics. The term borderscape, with its etymological ties astride geopolitics and art, seems however a most apt way to account for its translation into the language of film, while at the same tapping into its connection with the transnational, fluid and uneven flows of peoples, culture, information and power Appadurai wanted to capture in his famous reworking of the suffix "-scape" (1996). My use of the borderscape here is however somewhat narrowed down to the shaping, or 'scaping,' of an increasingly globalized social space for the purpose of control by various, not always easily discernable forces. Such a control, particularly poignant in what concerns the movement of people, and the atmosphere of uncertainty and paranoia it generates, became a topical reality after 9/11 and the US-led War on Terror began to take over not only, once again, the Middle East, but also, under the preemptive logic of 'security,' much of the planet's surface. As Hardt and Negri have worded it, "only an actively shaped world is a secure world" (2004, 20).

The Ghost Writer, a French-German-British co-production and a much-improved adaptation of Richard Harris' bestseller *The Ghost* (2008), tackles such a world head-on and is in this sense a prime example of what Tom Zaniello has called "cinema of globalization" (2007). That is, a cinema that attempts to bridge the (in many ways spatial but also cognitive) gap between, on one side, the vicissitudes of contemporary individual and collective everyday experience, relations, labor, mobility and consciousness, and, on the other, the often hidden world of transnational geopolitical and economic power play and machinations, which in the case of this film involve quite specifically those behind the (by all means illegitimate) invasion of Iraq in 2003. Although it is barely mentioned

by name—the novel does so only late and in passing—and despite a few preemptive name changes, there is no doubt that it is that invasion and ensuing war that serves as the main, if in a purely geographical sense remote, framework for the narrative. Even the surname of Tony Blair's thinly veiled avatar here, Adam Lang (Pierce Brosnan), seems cheekily referential: Ian Lang was a former conservative member of the British parliament who, as president of the Board of Trade, became the main spokesman against the accusations around the infamous "arms-to-Iraq" scandal involving Britain's sale of military equipment to Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s (James Cussick 1997). (As political irony would have it, (the real) Lang was instrumental in 2010, just as *The Ghost Writer* was about to be released in the UK, in exposing Blair's lucrative involvement with a South Korean oil company with interests in Iraq (Jason Groves 2010).)

As for the film's ideological stakes in all this, there is, on one hand, a clear enough critique of US foreign policy, political and military hegemony and blatant disregard for international justice and the sovereignty of most other countries in the world. On the other, if comparatively tamed in the film—the novel had the Union Jack spread all over both its original hardcover and paperback editions—is what one cannot but call a 'nationalist' counter-rhetoric, which, crystallizing in a startling final revelation, can be seen to reframe the whole text as an elaborate, self-exonerating excuse for the tormented British morale after the calamitous war in Iraq. *The Ghost Writer*'s fictive solution to the country's trauma—namely that PM Lang had been manipulated all along by his wife Ruth (Olivia Williams), in reality a CIA spy—is, Shakespearian undertones aside, in fact not too different to those offered by most films within that transnational micro-cycle we could call the 'British Iraq war cloak-and-dagger,' including the likes of *In the Loop* (Armando Iannuci, 2009), *Green Zone* (Paul Greengrass, 2010) and the more recent *Official Secrets*

(Gavin Hood, 2019). A similar broad conviction exudes from all of them: the UK was, one way or another, tricked into the war.

But *The Ghost Writer* offers more than the face-saving narrativization of Britain's geopolitical subservience or a vehicle for Polanski to vent his personal contempt for the US and the political establishment as a whole—just as *The Ghost* and *Green Zone* offered more than expiatory pieces for Harris' and Greengrass' early support of Blair, Blairism and, in the latter's case, even the Iraq war itself (see Jack Doyle 2014; Steve Rose 2010). Above all, *The Ghost Writer* paints a bleak but reasonable picture of twenty-first century globalization as an age of generalized displacement, fear, control, loneliness, uncertainty and alienation; a socially and spatially disjointed world in which, as the film shows early on, even publishing houses have metal detectors and frisk outsiders.

The border stands at the center, rather than the margins, of this new world, but not always or necessarily as a self-evident, palpable reality or, in literary parlance, a narrative 'actant.' Whatever instances of border or border-like walls, dynamics or practices one may find dispersed across the film's geography, they give momentary material shape to what is otherwise, everywhere and at all times, already, somewhat paranoidly, intuited. Indeed, if the border's spectral (omni)presence is most consistently discerned anywhere in *The Ghost Writer*, I contend, it is at the level of aesthetics and cinematic space in particular. Take as an example the prefatory shot of Mike McAra's body, Lang's aide and original scribe, washed ashore [fig. 3.33]. Narrative implications may take a different route, but it is impossible not to sense in that shot the conscious or unconscious mark of the dozens of circulating images of nameless migrants drowned attempting to cross all manner of aquatic borders across the world. This is not to suggest a radical change in Polanski's familiar thematic and stylistic repertoire. On the contrary, his usual visual and spatial mannerisms appear uncannily suited to account for the restrictive, coercive and

Fig.3.33. A body washed ashore sets up a world defined by loneliness, anonymity, danger and the border.

very often punitive logic enforced by the border over a globalizing world space and the subjective, psychological toll this exacts on individuals and communities, whether mobile or not. Let us then begin our journey across *The Ghost Writer*'s borderscape by considering one exemplary scene in which both sides of the border's spatial equation, mobility and control, are kept in the kind of tense, contradictory relationship that galvanizes not just this film but also our contemporary experience and the cartographies of a globalizing world space in general.

Strangers in a Strange Land

The scene, set around the twenty-minute mark in the film, takes place along the dunes of Martha's Vineyard island, a popular summer retreat for the rich and famous located south of Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and the principal setting of the film. Summer season it is not, however, and a menacing cloud-cloaked sky looms over the vacated coastal landscape. By this point, the basic groundwork of the story has already been laid: the film's eponymous and all throughout anonymous ghost writer (Ewan McGregor) has just been dispatched from London to the island to assist in the re-writing of Lang's memoirs. Along with the former British PM himself, his wife Ruth and whole entourage, they are

all set to work at a swanky safe house by the beach owned by the publisher. Considering the sensitive and copyright-protected content of the memoirs, the recent accusations against Lang for sanctioning illegal arrests and tortures of Arab British citizens on behalf of the US, and the mysterious drowning of the previous ghost writer, the whole affair is to be treated with the utmost secrecy. The island appears in this sense an appropriate, functional choice in terms of the task at hand and the story's spatio-narrative development as a whole, lending itself to be turned into that haunting, uncanny natural scenery non-urban thrillers tend to rely on and build upon. At closer inspection though, the island also proves to hold some significance with regards to the historical and geopolitical concerns of the film as a whole. For not only is the Vineyard island a piece of land literally floating between the US (mainland) and the UK. It is also the case that the whole region it belongs to, not for nothing called New England, was a historical arrival point for British colonial settlers in the 1600s—and then, of course, two centuries later, once emptied of its indigenous populations, for waves upon waves of disenfranchised European émigrés lured by the promises of the rosy new country. The appropriately 'ghostly' bleakness of the weather and photography and the fictional name given to the place itself (Town of Old Haven) would seem to echo the stories of those travels and the transnational sediment of the place and thus, perhaps, to instill into the film a veiled corrective to the ethno-nationalist discourses that 9/11 had reignited across the US: remember, this is a land of immigrants, or, as Franco 'Bifo' Berardi has put it, "'America' is not the name of a territory, but rather the name of a deterritorialization" (2017, 119).

Now, considering how much they meant for our previous analysis, a word should be devoted to the 'deterritorializing' workings of the scene itself and the film's production as a whole, since most of what we are to see of Martha's Vineyard, and the US for that matter, was in reality shot somewhere else. In fact, except for a number of driving

Fig.3.34. Framing and/as bordering: Despite moving in the open, the camera keeps the characters well in check.

sequences and exterior shots filmed there by the second unit, the North American Coast was shot in an assortment of European locations, from the German islands of Usedom and Sylt supplying the film's eerie landscapes, to the Studio Babelsberg in Potsdam where the interiors of the villa were built and shot. There are however two main reasons why such maneuvers will not be held here to the degree of accountability and critique they were in the case of *Death and the Maiden*. Firstly, Polanski's impossibility of stepping on US soil without being arrested is enough of a 'material' imperative to dismantle whatever heady cultural or ideological readings one may throw at the film's topographical deceits. Secondly, contemporary Euro- or Anglo-American relations simply do not carry with them the kind of massively one-sided historical imbalance of power and representation, including the cinema, that the ones between Europe and South America, West and Non-West do. Spatial difference matters also in this sense; there are differences between differences, and this is not one I shall be reading much further into.

The scene, then, shot in northern Europe, but set in the Eastern Seaboard, has two of the film's protagonists, the ghost writer and Ruth Lang, taking a walk on the beach under the watchful eye of Barry (Tim Faraday), one of Lang's bodyguards. Narratively, the sequence may seem rather innocuous, something of an interlude in the story before

the ex-PM's awaited arrival. The conversation, led all the way by Ruth's nervous pace and chatter, serves nonetheless to introduce some of the character traits and roles at play within the film's insulated community. Thus we get an early taste of Ruth's sharp, moody personality and sway over her husband ("you were my idea"), while the ghost writer is presented as little more than an open ear and soft-spoken foil for other people's stories and frustrations, in this case Ruth's homesickness and disdain for her husband's nosy assistant (and mistress), Amelia (Kim Cattrall). Contrasting with the relative banality of the conversation is however a slyly sophisticated formal arrangement [fig. 3.34]. Divided into two 30-second takes, each introduced by a panoramic view of the landscape, the scene feels at once restless and meticulously self-contained. Both takes unfold in the same way: a backward moving camera frames the talking characters in the foreground in close-up while the figure of the trailing bodyguard remains constantly between them in a not-too distant background. As they advance, the large, empty and monotone expanse of the shore gradually reveals itself behind them thanks to a wide-angle lens and deep focus that underscore the unreachable flatness of the horizon.

When Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) describe the nature of twenty-first century borders and their role in the mapping of globalization, they claim that their veritable function is the articulation and regulation of mobility, not its mere impediment. This facet of the contemporary border, its simultaneous logics of mobility and control, inclusion and exclusion (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, 7) are encapsulated in the very aesthetics of the scene and in its peculiar interplay between filmic and the pro-filmic spaces. For, on the surface, the beach appears as open, boundless, flat and "smooth" a physical space as any Deleuzian nomadic fantasy would have it (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 380-387), while the use of a tracking Steadicam and long take to record the scene at once parallels and stresses the seemingly casual wandering of the characters across that very space. Curbing

the openness of the space and the latitude of the characters, however, the border figures here in the form of a close, tight, self-enclosing framing which suggests that, in reality, none of them is or feels 'free' in their movement. The ghost writer, relocated and soon confined to the island by his employer, is here all the way steered by Ruth, who is just as dislocated and subjected to her husband's security detail as he is. But even Barry, the bodyguard, representative of that same security and physical enforcer of its bordering practices, is also a British expatriate worker himself and is merely following orders when he dutifully shadows the couple across the beach. The noticeable struggles of Faraday, the actor, to keep up with the blocking and framing pattern of the scene, having to constantly sidle left and right to occupy the space available between the protagonists' bodies, offer an almost meta-cinematic parallel to his character's plight and that of the masses of drifting labor forces he represents; moving, yes, but not on their own terms.

Mobility, its enforcement and regulation just as much as its restriction, the film appears to be suggesting, has become a perversely democratized form of alienation. Here, it is politician, artist and blue-collar worker that are as characters and symbols connected by the mise-en-scene in their displacement and subjection to the border, but a wider look at the film's dysfunctional community of characters reveals that almost every single one of them with a minor say in the story is a transnationally uprooted individual at one level or another. It is quite often indeed that this same formal motif, the deep-focus shot, serves to connect the bodies and experiences of various characters within the frame. From the unspeaking, unobtrusive Vietnamese housekeepers looking after the Vineyard's villa, to Lang, the ex-British Prime Minister practically exiled there, none seems to belong where they find themselves. Accent-wise, even the local folk (played by Europeans) appear or 'sound' out of place (Fionnuala Halligan 2010). Now, David Morley has warned us against the "cruel nonsense" of suggesting that mobility means today one single thing and

that it affects or is experienced by everyone in the same way (1999, 158). Even conceptual distinctions such as those between "tourists" and "vagabonds" (Bauman 1998, 77-101), exiles and nomads, voluntary and involuntary cosmopolitans, "those who 'circulate capital' and those 'whom capital circulate,'" while useful, still neglect an "enormous, unclassifiable, intermediate mass" being daily "differentiated" by the border (Balibar 2002, 82-83). It could well be argued in this sense that *The Ghost Writer* appears less concerned with the differences that define each experience of mobility and their role in the contemporary configuration of social class, and more with articulating a shared, universal, all-encompassing "structure of feeling," as Naficy (2001), after Raymond Williams, would call it, defined by displacement, fear, solitude and alienation.

All this said, meanings and implications do still vary. In this sense, it is worth devoting some space to the case of Lang, the ghost writer's main object of study, and one the biggest selling points of the film by virtue of his association with Blair. He is also arguably the most complex and intriguing of the characters on offer. For on the surface, Lang, a former G8 world leader, and as much a war criminal as his real-life referent, would seem to fit the bill as one of those distant, rarified elites ruling today over the lives and deaths of millions. For those "high up," Bauman writes, unfettered mobility, along with a strict regulation of the "boundedness" of others, has gradually become a defining vector of power and privilege (1998, 85-89; 2000, 120). Lang himself suggests that much late into the film in what are in effect his last words:

> Do you know what I'd do if I was in power again? I'd have two queues at airports. One for flights where we'd done no background checks, infringed on no one's civil bloody liberties, used no intelligence gained by torture. And on the other flight, we'd do everything we possibly could to make it perfectly safe. And then we'd see which plane the Rycarts of this world would put their bloody kids on!

Logical fallacies aside, the link between power and mobility is established plainly enough. Not only does Lang pinpoint here the importance of mobility as a major focus of

social regulation and policy making, and of borders and customs into key sites where and through which these are concretized. He also lays bare the underside of mobility's symbolic pre-eminence for the neoliberal pantheon (Peter Adey 2017, 107-109), where its supposedly innate relation to freedom and human nature is turned into a dangling ideological carrot capable of disguising the most vicious sticks: if you want to travel, as you should, accept that, sometime, somewhere, some violence might be needed. Of course, the cruel irony is that Lang delivers his whole whiskey-soaked rant (and roundabout confession) from the comfort of a private jet. It is precisely upon leaving the aircraft, and the bubble of nomadic privilege it represents, that he is shot dead by an anti-war protestor – the father of a soldier killed in Iraq.

While there is undeniably a sense of poetic justice and comeuppance to this whole sequence—Lang confronted with perils of life 'on the ground,' perils he himself is responsible for creating—his assassination is also a befitting finale for the ever-worsening life scenario the film has painted for the character. By this point, we have witnessed the ex-PM being prosecuted by the International Criminal Court (ICC), ostracized by his own country, betrayed by his former allies, harassed by protestors, hunted by the media, and, again, all but banished to an isolated borrowed house in a foreign land. In these circumstances, even the jet itself seems, ironically, a token of the character's deprivation. Not only does the jet, like the house he now inhabits, belong to someone else, in this case a North American military consortium, Lang's usufruct of it a bonus for his services to their business prospects in Iraq, but also the free, uninhibited mobility it was built to provide is here effectively restricted to within US borders—certainly not because of some sort of nationalistic territorial restraint on the part of the consortium, which deals precisely in the opposite, but because, as we are told, the US is the only country in the West not recognizing the jurisdiction of the ICC. Underneath this cobweb of transnational spaces

Fig. 3.35. Fallen from grace: a titanic image of entrapment and defeat. The bronze replica of the Sutton Hoo helmet on the bookshelf stands as a symbol of past (Anglo-Saxon) glories and the void they have left behind.

and forces, the jet does little but punctuate the fact that Lang cannot fly home, or, worse, that there may no longer be a home for him to fly back to.

If there is Power, with a capital P, operating in the film, *The Ghost Writer* is bent on suggesting that it is scarcely embodied by Lang. That seems the property of more evasive parties, namely Tom Wilkinson's character, Paul Emmett, Ruth's tutor at Harvard, military lobby member and undercover CIA operative; or, more symptomatically, the effectively absent figure of Marty Rhinehart, the billionaire media mogul who owns the publishing house funding Lang's memoirs and the Vineyard estate where the bulk of the film unfolds. If there is a true signifier in the film of those ultra-mobile, "exterritorial" elites Bauman fittingly compares to the "absentee landlords of yore" (1998, 10), and of the nebulous, ungraspable and faceless nature of global capitalism in general, that must be the (invisibility of the) latter. In the contrast between Emmett and Rhinehart resides indeed not only the solution to the central mystery of the plot—what did McAra find out, and who killed him?—but also, ultimately, the film's answer to the old question of what the true nature of Power and domination in the contemporary world system really is: geopolitical and/or corporate (Berardi 2017, 133).

In the meantime, everything about Lang, from his behavior to the way he is photographed, screams loss and alienation [fig. 3.35]. Critics have pointed out his constant, almost schizophrenic mood swings and found in them symptoms of the fragile, disturbed ego of a public man geographically stranded and psychologically adrift (see Manohla Dargis 2010; David Denby 2010; Ronald Paulson 2011). "How does it feel to be so cut-off," the ghost writer asks him at one point. As with Paulina and Gerardo in *Death and the Maiden* though*,* there is more to unveil in Lang than spatial dislocation and existential angst. Our first thoughts inevitably turn to Blair, as the film, feeding back on mid-2000s British discontent (James Naughtie 2016), devotes one scene after another to retroactively dismantle all the merits and achievements of its fictional stand-in before spelling out that by the moment of the Iraq invasion he had essentially been the political puppet of the US for decades, whether he knew it or not. "He was not a politician, he was a craze," recalls the ghost writer about Lang's very first election in what seems a veiled jab by the film at Blair's 1990s post-ideological, Clinton-inspired, Third Way turn for "New Labour" (see Robert Busby 2009, 113-139). Later, as both characters sit to work on the memoirs, and we witness the brazen rewriting of his past and recent world history with it, we get an aftertaste of what really went on in such a turn: an exercise in mediagenic marketing and personality cultism with little in the way of ideals or policies behind it. Appropriately, where Blair had had a short stint as a rock singer while in Oxford (Channel 4 even made a TV docudrama about it in 2005), the film fancies young collegian Lang, here in Cambridge, as an amateur but enthusiastic thespian; someone who, as he himself recalls in one of those sessions, "pretends to be somebody else and [is applauded] for it."

The film's spotlight on Lang's performance—theatrical, political, quotidian—makes the felicitous casting of Brosnan all the more suggestive. Halligan (2010) and

Denby (2010) have celebrated in their reviews Brosnan's efforts to avoid impersonating Blair. However, they do not mention Brosnan's own creative ambitions and very interest in the part. One paradoxical, yet probably intended, effect of his good work in the film is that we are reminded of the actor's very presence and persona—our postmodern minds wired to replace one celebrity for another, if not to conflate them altogether (see William Babcock and Virginia Whitehouse 2005)—which in the case of Brosnan means necessarily to think of James Bond. In contrast to the bland, Everyman commonality a virtually unknown Wilson brought to Gerardo, a larger-than-life decadence emanates from Brosnan's Lang, as if the whole, brutal decade and a half of global politics that stands between the two, the idealistic future minister and the dejected ex-PM, was encapsulated in these casting choices. Similarly, where Wilson's nationality was made a non-factor under *Death and the Maiden*'s cosmopolitan longings, Brosnan's remains here very much in play, albeit with a twist. After all, if there is no escaping Brosnan's four-film, eleven-year tenure as Bond, for him or us, neither should be the fact that Brosnan is not really British but Irish and since 2004 also a US American citizen, and that he is playing here a former Prime Minister of proud Scottish descent, of which we are, again, appropriately informed. The effect of all this is at least twofold. On the one hand, the memory of Brosnan's Bond, with his suave demeanor and globetrotting quests in the name of Queen and country, works to emphasize Lang's limited agency and mobility—while tapping also into the decline of Brosnan's acting career itself. On the other, the transnational composite of 'Anglo' identities and personae that make up our disgraced ex-PM conjures up an ambiguous comment on British chauvinism and post-imperialist nostalgia. However, maybe due to the bi-vocal nature of the adapted script, and the thinly veiled nationalism of Harris' original novel, this is a dimension about which the film seems unsure what to do: whether to treat as tragedy or mere history.

At any rate, we can still climb one more step in what Jameson has called the "ladder of allegory" (2019, 1-48), reconnect with our borderly concerns, and suggest that it is not only the decline of Lang, Brosnan, Blair or even (pre-Brexit) Britain that are in question here, but also, the crisis of a whole long dominant geopolitical vision or map of the world. Put bluntly, said map or worldview has historically rested on two main pillars. Firstly, there is the fundamental assumption of some essential "isomorphism" (Massey 1999, 7) or timeless correspondence between national territories, societies, cultures, identities, economies and sovereignties, all framed by a planetary grid of relatively stable borders and finite spaces. Secondly, there is the necessary accompanying view of international relations as a kind of neutral, levelled playing field for the various countries to interact with each other and to have their various merits (institutional aptitude, socioeconomic progress, commercial competitiveness, military muscle and so on) soberly and rightfully determine their respective fortunes and overall well-being. That such a vision, the so-called Westphalian order, was far from innocent, fair or even 'realistic' to begin with may seem self-evident today but this is in part because the new world dis-order under globalization has made it more and more untenable. Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) place the increasing emancipation of capital from the state and the accompanying transnational movements of labor forces at the 'material' root of the change in paradigm, while Hardt and Negri have famously, and controversially, revamped the term "Empire" to evoke the emergence of a new and, in their view, post-national and anti-democratic world order and form of power (2001; 2004). Other, more 'idealistic' accounts, like that of Arjun Appadurai (1996), have focused on the intensification of cross-border flows and cultural exchanges as a disruptive force against the ideational strictures of the national framework. For the film, however, it is the "new Imperialism" of the US, as Harvey has labelled it (2003), ironically impersonated here by two Brits in Ruth and Emmett, that seems to lurk

behind it all, leaving most other countries in the degraded position of defining themselves by their degree of allegiance or resistance to a US hegemony over which no supranational institutions appear to hold much sway. Lang's newfound powerlessness, spatial dislocation, manufactured past, shady relationships, existential crisis, fragmented identity, ideological vagaries and eventual demise would seem to offer a figuration of not only the declining condition of the UK in a new world order but also, through one of its foremost incarnations, of that of the notion of the old sovereign 'nation-state' as such.

Despite their differences of approach and even ideology, these theorizations coincide with the film in that, whatever the power changes in the world system, and whatever the precarious conditions of most countries not named USA (whose supposed exceptionality is itself a highly debated matter), territoriality and borders may be changing but not disappearing, that they matter as much as ever, if not more, and that most individuals and communities, whether mobile or not, remain strictly bound by them. Lang, while a substantial and most memorable player in many respects, mobility included, is only a relatively secondary presence in the film—his appearances, with the notable exception of the jet scene, being mostly concentrated on the first half of the movie, with his overall on-screen time amounting to less that eighteen minutes—and nobody would blame the spectators for not being particularly affected by his troubles or even death. The ghost writer is another story. He is present in virtually every shot; it is his dislocating journey and controlled mobility we follow; his limited perspective and knowledge that we share, and it is around and through him that the film's unsettling aesthetics, afflicted structure of feeling and perilous borderscape take shape.

Fig. 3.36. The ghost writer alone in an empty motel parking lot: a non-subject in a non-place.

Writings on the Wall

And yet, our identification with the ghost writer is not without its caveats. While his basic condition as a Western, white, straight, middle-class, English-speaking and good-looking male in his thirties positions him as the traditional cinematic protagonist, the kind of default movie character we have been taught to worry about and root for, if nowadays with increasing suspicion, almost everything about him beyond those initial premises appears to function negatively—not by what he is or has, but by what he lacks. Another casting triumph, Ewan McGregor, with a career and (non-)persona built on blandly embodying such a type, could not be a better fit for the part—which may explain why he got the European film Awards for best actor for this film. As for the character himself, and as happened with the young hitchhiker in *Knife in the Water*, it all begins with him remaining nameless throughout the film, being interpellated instead through second-person pronouns, references to his job and nationality or simply as "man" by Lang. Then there is the fact that he seems to have no family, friends or relationships outside his agent (John Bernthal), with one of the very few substantial changes made to the novel being indeed the removal of his girlfriend from the picture—the other being the not insignificant decision to erase the bomb attack to the London tube of the opening chapter, maybe a

budgetary decision, but also one that shifts the whole repressive atmosphere of the story from one of justified concern to one more of paranoia. Not that he seemed to care about it that much anyway; his first-person account of the attack in the novel consists of a mere half-paragraph of impassionate description of the resulting scenes of chaos and then about one page detailing how much it all affected his route home (Harris 2008, 12-13). Even with no attack for him to gloss over, the film still shows him to have no political beliefs (he admits having voted for Lang simply because everybody did), no real identity as a writer (he has only 'ghosted' other people's memoirs), and, all in all, no discernable stance on life or the state of the world. As basic human motivations tend to go, not even money or sex seem that much of an incentive for him. When he is offered a quarter of a million pounds for a month working on Lang's memoirs it is his agent that ultimately brings him to accept, and when, halfway through the film, he and a jilted Ruth sleep together, she is the one visibly calling the shots while he simply lets it happen. Beyond his profession, nationality and some primal notion of survival, there appears to be frustratingly little in the way of substance or 'drive' to the character and his actions. He just goes with the flow(s).

Crucially, this inner hollowness gives much space for other forces to operate over him, especially his employers. After all, everything that makes him somewhat unsatisfactory or incomplete as a classic cinematic hero is what makes him also a perfect employee, not only a model ghost writer but also a model worker. With no attachments, responsibilities, ambitions or ideals, he is simply someone who will do the job, earn his wages and dissolve again into the anonymous world masses [fig. 3.36]. And, according to his résumé, he will do it fast. In other words, he embodies the kind of ultra-flexible, ultra-efficient, atomized professional worker neoliberalism has tried to make the norm; easy to hire, easy to move, easy to manage and, if or when necessary, easy to dispose of.

Small wonder in this sense that he is repeatedly encouraged to keep not only his assignment, but also his identity and presence on the island a secret. When he is eventually required to stay permanently in the villa, which he is forbidden to exit without the company of a bodyguard, it is on the basis that "eventually, they'll discover who you are, and that would be *horrid* for you." Who "they" are and what would be so "horrid" about it Amelia does not say, but her chiseled, sardonic smirk as she delivers these words suggests that there might be more to it than a contractual fine or some harassment by the locals. Not unlike Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the "order-word" (1987, 75-110), Amelia's mordant remark acts less as a joke than as an injunction; it implicitly marks a limit, a decidedly spatial one at that, and its effective function is none other than to induce fear. The same happens in a later scene when Emmett, visibly tense after being interviewed on his relationship with Lang, cautions the ghost writer not to take a wrong turn on the way out of his property lest he may get "deeper into the woods [and] never seen again."

If we follow contemporary social theory, it comes as no surprise that much of what characterizes the predicament and fate of the ghost writer should revolve so explicitly, again, around his mobility or lack thereof. The boundary between what could be deemed voluntary and involuntary becomes at this point diffuse, not least because, as Jonathan Crary writes, it is more and more the case under neoliberalism that "even in the absence of direct compulsion, we choose to do what we are told to do" (2013, 60). In terms of his mobility, this "abdication of responsibility," as Crary calls it, is made clear the very moment the ghost writer is hired for the job and his agent rushes to arrange with his employers his departure for the US that same night, to which he makes no objection. What ensues, over which he appears again to have neither say nor apparent complaint, offers a dispiriting but relatable account of our increasingly dysfunctional relationship with the

means of transport—something already intimated visually in the very first image of the film where, in the evocative words of critic Ronald Paulson, a frontal shot of the Vineyard ferry pictures it as "gaping mouth […] opening to devour" (2011, 129). To get to the island, then, the ghost writer has to take a plane, a light aircraft, that very same ferry and, at the exact moment the ship is docking, he receives a message from Lang's office saying a taxi is already waiting at the terminal ready to take him to the house, where, as it will soon become evident, he is expected to start working right away. Throughout the montage sequence of his journey, he is repeatedly shown in a state of half-sleep, dozing off but never fully resting—another major consequence, for Crary, of the workers' ever more depriving adjustments to the non-stop "24/7" rhythms of the market (2013).

If such a tight "harnessing" of his mobility, time and labor fits the kind of bordering "practices" Mezzadra and Neilson describe proliferating across the world space (2013, 115), and their notion that these respond today less and less to the old territorial rigors of the state and more to those increasingly fluid ones of global capital—congruent as the two still often are (see Sassen 2005)—a more familiar, yet so far unseen, kind of border eventually crystallizes as the taxi arrives at the fringes of the villa's premises. Spiked gates, security cameras, armed guards, car inspections and, indeed, passport checks await

Fig. 3.38. The Rock.

anyone daring to approach it [fig. 3.37]. It is as if even the material strategies of 'land control' we tend to associate with the state border had expanded or narrowed, relocated or returned, depending on which history book you look at, to the defense of private property. Aesthetics do in any case suggest a difference. If there are justifiably no national symbols here, widespread as they are all over the island, neither are there any other explicit signs or indications for the outsider that take their place. In fact, there is not even a number to the property. A bend on the road, a tastefully minimalist gray-brick cubicle and two tailored-suited sentinels—whose take on human interaction amounts to a single word, "passport"—seem enough to indicate that this is indeed the entrance to *somewhere*. In all its mysterious blankness, the ensemble is however far from silent; it emits its own kind of "order-word:" either you know where you are going or you do not; and if you do not, or are not expected, you better turn away.

Two spatial codes or logics appear to be converging at this juncture. One is the general tendency towards abstraction, the same that led Marc Augé to develop the concept of the "non-place" (1995), and the same Manuel Castells recognized in the "nudity" of contemporary architecture (2010 [1996], 448-453), and the same that, some decades earlier, Lefebvre claimed was colonizing our modern social environs and lifeworlds (1991 [1977], 49-53; 285-292). The growing influence of Lefebvre on critical theory since the

Fig. 3.39. The house's imposing, all-consuming façade leaves no room for alternatives or exits.

1990s may explain how similar most accounts on what he called "abstract space" look today. Notions of deterritorialization, placelessness and anonymity largely overlap, as does a common understanding of spatial abstraction as expression of the values and needs of the economy. That, as it is argued, such values and needs largely involve today those of mobility, flow and integration, i.e. globalization, would seem to be in something of a contradiction with a second spatial principle even more clearly at work at the borders of the property, namely that of closure and segregation. Although rarely so tightly encapsulated, such a contradiction, theorists tell us, is in fact recurrent and, on a larger scale, systemic. According to Lefebvre, his followers, as well as most of critical border theory nowadays, it is largely through boundaries, divisions and exclusions, material and symbolic, that power is concretized, control is exerted, class is structured and value is produced across an increasingly integrated world space. The Reinhardt estate, located in the already ultra-exclusive grounds of the island, embodies indeed what Castells describes as one of their most flagrant manifestations today, namely that of "gated communities:" private, fortified enclaves in which global elites wall themselves off from the same societies they "dominate" (2010 [1996], 446-447).

However, all this is merely an aesthetic and conceptual prelude to the moment the taxi is eventually allowed access into the compound and the "giant modernist shoe box" (Denby 2010) of the villa makes its ominous first appearance in the distance [fig. 8]. The tall iron fences of an adjacent tennis court give the view a carceral atmosphere, as the approaching camera, mounted on the car and suggesting the ghost writer's POV, literal and figurative, registers the rectangular contours of the building gradually taking over the screen to the point of swallowing the whole frame and field of vision [fig. 3.39]. Seen up close, the imposing, almost windowless façade, its materials, colors and overall exterior appearance, all suggestively at one with those of the security booth, transmit a sense of control and impassability, while its blocky, horizontal structure gives it an air of heaviness and motionlessness. The camera, in contrast with *Death and the Maiden*, now stops well before crossing the house's threshold. At the door, another guard awaits.

If "architecture in film is never just itself," as Peter Wollen once wrote (2002, 199), few fictional buildings in recent cinematic memory, at least outside the realm of the fantastic, come to mind that hold the kind of monumental expressive power this one does. Despite the little attention it has received from critics—especially considering the ink spilt on the no less impressive house of the recent *Parasite* (Bong Joon-Ho, 2019)—one can only imagine just how much thought, work and, presumably, money must have gone into its design, meanings and visual articulation.[11] However, my interest in the building goes beyond doing justice to the film's symbolic and monetary efforts, and involves also the heuristic potential that architecture, real and/or cinematic, can hold for the grasping of that so-called "liquid" (Bauman 2000) or even "gaseous" (Daniel Innerarity 2016, 32) world of globalization. For not only do our built surroundings suggest a relatively stable

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[11] A sample of conceptual designs of the Vineyard house can be found at supervising art director David Scheunemann's website: https://davidscheunemann.com/the-ghostwriter. For pictures of the full-scale sets built on the beach, see the website of art director Cornelia Ott: https://www.corneliaott.com/ghostwriter.

entry point into the material conditions structuring our everyday lives. They also offer a palpable measure of those needs, values, codes and contradictions that in such protean times are still prevalent enough to find themselves set in concrete. Now, the villa is admittedly not a real, 'lived' environment—it is a movie set, and it is definitely not made of concrete but of steel scaffolds and plywood boards. As such, its meanings must be weighed accordingly. Likewise, as a cinematic building, concrete or plywood, its meanings do not operate in a vacuum but rather as part of the spatial, narrative, stylistic and discursive totality of the movie. Shot differently or inhabited by other characters, for example, the whole character of the building, however conspicuous its form, would inevitably change—as our previous look at Paris showed.

In this case, a comparison with the significantly humbler bungalow of *Death and the Maiden*, also an isolated coastal residence turned precarious hideaway in a period of geopolitical turmoil, may help put the villa's meanings into sharper relief. To begin with, cinematic constructs as they are, both houses still bring, or impose, an unavoidable sense of physical 'certainty' into the hazy worlds of secrecy and lies that otherwise engulf the characters of their movies. In addition, both are also the undisputed spatio-narrative epicenters of their respective films and, as such, also something of a proof of concept; formal gateways into the creative, discursive and ideological core of the film. In *Death and the Maiden*, the porous design, visual rendition and eventual abandonment of the edifice was said to herald a perhaps reluctant but inevitable aperture to the outside world and, in this way, symbolize the struggles of a country negotiating its geopolitical transition to the global. As we move from a wooden bungalow to a postmodern brutalist reworking of a Corbusian villa, more than a substantial leap in terms of privilege and privacy confronts us. What Jameson (1983) would call the "political unconscious" of the building (see also Nadir Lahiji 2011) reads categorically now as one of boundedness,

Fig. 3.40. A land crossed by the border: the utility pole both connects and visually splits the island hut.

control and segregation. The spaces directly surrounding the two buildings, 'buffer zones' of sorts mediating and signifying the relation between inner and outer, play into the contrast. While, in *Death and the Maiden*, the bungalow was located in the seemingly unbounded expanse of a generic coast, with no limits or demarcations but those of nature, here the villa presides over a gigantic private property. Considering the unique, eventful history of the island and region, the process Harvey has called "accumulation by dispossession" (2003, 137-182) and Mezzadra and Neilson "the bordering of the common" (2013, 291-298) resounds here with a particularly painful geohistorical ring. For not only was this once communal land removed from its indigenous populations, but it was also then gradually cut up into that parcelled enclosure for the uber-wealthy it is today—incidentally, a process which the shooting of another film, *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975), is believed to have pushed significantly, shark notwithstanding. The brief but momentous appearance of a nonagenarian Eli Wallach in the part of a 54 year-long islander, with his own architectural counterpart in the form of a rundown wooden cabin, and, crucially for the plot, highly knowledgeable of the place, functions as a testament of both Martha's Vineyard's more or less distant historical past. The character is also a reminder of the place's dire present of its waning and, as journalist Tom Leonard

Fig. 3.41. Sharp angled surfaces, few windows and no protection against falls. The house is not only unwelcoming, entrapping and cold, but also dangerous.

(2009) denounced at the time, increasingly destitute local community [fig. 3.40]. Perhaps this is also part of the meanings of those deep, wide-angle, extreme long shots of the barren, forsaken landscapes of the island: the tragedy of an infinite, wide-open natural space reduced into a gated off, lifeless possession.

If a place-based interpretation suggests then that the daunting, fortress-like way in which the villa reigns over its share of the territory and those within it symbolizes the power that the Vineyard's billionaire owners have come to exert over the whole life of the island, other readings are available. A more general approach to both house and island chimes in with recent theories according to which globalization produces a "neo-feudal" world of lords and serfs in which the expropriation, privatization and hoarding of public land by a "global aristocracy" plays an ever-growing central role (Jodi Dean 2020, 5-8). Mezzadra and Neilson's research on the legal, historical and even philosophical complicity between the "bordering" of private property and the geopolitical partition of the earth (2013, 291-298) allows for yet another reading: the stark architectural contrast between *Death and the Maiden* and *The Ghost Writer* epitomizes, aesthetically, the contrast between the two geohistorical frameworks of the two films: the fall of the Berlin

218

Wall and the looming prospect of a unified, borderless future, on the one hand, and the post-9/11 disjointed world of reinforced, expanded and proliferating borders, on the other.

But maybe we have circumvented for too long the film's main mediator in all this, the ghost writer himself. As could be expected from a Polanski film (see Caputo 2012), his experience and subjectivity as the main protagonist are embedded in the spatiality of the film. Largely unconcerned with local, economic o geopolitical matters as he is, at least at first, the ghost writer's perspective on the house, and ours with his, will evolve out of his estrangement as a displaced, confined and, as the film progresses and both plot and space start to close in on him, increasingly endangered person. For him, the house amounts to little more than a flashy prison.

Once a cut has taken us across the thick concrete façade, and after the ghost writer has gone through yet another security check, his gaze guides ours towards the house's ample, hollow interior lobby as Amelia comes down the stairs to receive him [fig. 3.41]. An exquisite marrying of minimalism and opulence, abstraction and concretion, appears again as the dominant aesthetic. An impressive collection of abstract expressionist paintings—I have identified at least two 'Twomblys' among them—occupy the cold, flat and angular surfaces of the otherwise impeccably naked walls; the stylish staircase is made of a succession of separate, floating steps with no banister to dangle from; and the railing separating the upper floor from a free fall is formed by some thin and almost invisible glass panels. This "punitive luxury," as Denby (2010) has aptly described it, filled with Walter Knoll design furniture, "art as far as the eye can see," to borrow the title of one of Virilio's books on the postmodern (2007), and soon proven to be shielded by the kind of fierce, automated security system such an investment necessarily brings along, easily characterizes the building more as a private gallery or a vault than a house, let alone a home; more an emblem of finance, ownership and status than a human habitat.

219

Fig. 3.42. Between a rock and hard place.

The critique that underlies the building as a vessel for human life and sheer corporeality, and the kind of in- or anti-human world it represents, is made astutely apparent later on when, in clear metonymic fashion, the ghost writer is shown struggling to maneuver himself into the beautifully modern but visibly uncomfortable rectangular wooden bathtub of his room.

From that introductory moment onwards, the building will be presented in a piecemeal way, showing the rooms in separate scenes and shots, making it difficult to discern their location and the relation or distance to one another. Other filming strategies help transforming what is, on the outside, a uniform, rectangular structure into a fragmented, disorienting maze. Framings are low, close and tight, shots are static, mise-en-scenes restrictive and depth of focus craftily modulated so that what is an otherwise very solid material framework adjusts (extends, contracts, distorts) according to the mood and content of each scene. Throughout, consistently oppressing walls and ceilings ensure that claustrophobia remains pervasive, and although doors do remain visibly half open in the background of many scenes as a reminder of the lack of privacy or personal space in the house, it is impossible to tell where they lead because we almost never get to cross them. In fact, in one of the few instances in which the ghost writer does so, confused by

an unannounced security drill in which the whole building suddenly seals off around him, the combination of his lack of bearings and the punitive design of the house has an almost fatal outcome as he stumbles exiting his study and comes close to falling down the stairs.

Windows themselves, big but scarce, do not offer much solace, either. When they are not completely covered up and made into another index of constriction, the infinite deserted sceneries they reveal, in which land, sea and sky appear fused by the photography into a continuous enveloping backdrop, not only preclude our spatial orientation but also evoke a discouraging outer world with no place where to run or hide [fig. 3.42]. Nowhere is such an expressive role more overtly mobilized than in the somewhat contrived pan shot that laces the figure of the Vietnamese housekeeper Duc (Lee Hong Thay) working outside, seen through and enclosed within a narrow chink in the window drapes, with the ghost writer inside lying awake in bed after sleeping with Ruth [Fig. 3.43]. Suggestively, it is not only the two male characters that appear connected by the camera, despite the ghost writer's feelings of dislocation and entrapment being the clear driving motif, but, in a way, also the two spaces. Indeed, galvanized by this shot, the argument can be made that, for all the control, unease and danger that the Vineyard house radiates, the world outside its walls is not that different. From the ghost

writer being assaulted in the streets of London, through the mysterious agents that chase him after his visit to Emmett, to the very assassinations of McAra, Lang and, in the very last scene of the film, the ghost writer himself, the film constantly reminds viewers that moving in the open is a perilous venture in its own right. This is made all the more distressing by the fact that, as opposed to the house's hard physical certainty, and except for Lang's shooting, no clear explanations are given to these incidents. One is led by the end of the film to speculate, and only speculate, that they were all somehow part of some big, global conspiracy by the CIA, but for the most part events just play into a vague yet unshakable atmosphere of surveillance, menace and paranoia. The overall effect, inside and outside, is not far from a toned-down version of the "cabin fever" Virilio associates with living in a globalized and yet simultaneously foreclosed world, "carceral and panoptic," where visions of social life, progress and the future have been reduced to the boundless modulation in the "control of movement" (2010, 22-23).

That it is precisely the construction of such a world and atmosphere that is the point of the film, more so than whatever grand final explanation the novel supplied for the mysteries of the plot, becomes apparent if we pull back our focus from built to cinematic space and, more generally, to *The Ghost Writer*'s extraordinary visual style—which, symbolic interpretations aside, not only makes for the foremost triumph of the movie, but also, arguably, for one of Polanski's most stunning and consistent cinematographic achievements (for which DP Pawel Edelman and PD Albrecht Konrad should also be given due credit). Nothing seems more removed from the delirious camerawork and editing frenzy that has come to pervade so much cinematic and "post-cinematic" explorations of our contemporary experience (Shaviro 2010) than the utter formal pulchritude of *The Ghost Writer*. Pleasing as it is there is something distinctly oppressive, even deterministic, about the icy, elegant, meticulous, almost geometric way in in which

The Ghost Writer's cinematography, framing and mise-en-scene are arranged, how obstinately they inscribe and enclose the characters within every shot, close and long, wide and tight, inside and outside. If the audiovisual mayhem of the texts Shaviro (2010) analyzes enact the ontological chaos, accelerations and fluid assemblages of late or global capitalism, in *The Ghost Writer* it is its underside of spatial order and control that takes center stage. This is the case of the beach walk scene, where its dynamism and the vast openness of the space it captures makes the camera's tight compositional grip on the characters all the more distressing, but most of the frame-stills reproduced so far also work as a case in point. Even the first establishing shot of McAra's drowned body can now be read as setting up a world in which both the human drama and the primal randomness of nature, in the form of the flowing of the waves, are to be subsumed into a calculated exercise in photographic composition. The fact that, as the ghost writer discovers later on, the body's surfacing in that beach was neither 'naturally' random nor scientifically possible, that, as Wallach's character explains to him, the island's tides simply do not work that way, that the body was definitely planted there, only appears to reinforce the intimate, discursive correlation between the production of social and cinematic spaces in the film. Ultimately, what is to be discerned in the film's visuality, the content of its form, as it were, is an expanded projection of the same logics of utter spatial aestheticization, order, boundedness and control materially embodied and foregrounded in the villa, so that all that is found to be inhuman, claustrophobic and even potentially deadly about it expands to encompass the whole space of the film's spectacularly composed imagery and, by extension, the social and geopolitical world the building was meant to epitomize in the first place. At this point, our conceptual vocabulary would lead us to the somewhat oxymoronic conclusion that, in the world

mapped by *The Ghost Writer*, the border, ingrained as it is in the very style of the film, knows no bounds.

Such a notion can be further expounded on two fronts, both of which find correlation under Naficy's work on the aesthetics of transnational cinema (2001; 2003). Firstly, and more consistently in Naficy's account, is the psychological dimension, the stylistic projection of the subjective anxieties proper of the transnational experience. Particularly in those cases in which such experience is an enforced one, he argues, cinematic space tends to become a visual register of psychic distress: houses are scarcely homes, and landscapes are scarcely liberating; closure brings entrapment and openness brings threat; claustrophobia and agoraphobia reinforce one another (Naficy 2003). Absent the "accented" ethnic component that unites Naficy's corpus (if we leave aside Polanski's Jewishness, that is), *The Ghost Writer* seems but an ultra-stylized reworking of his main arguments. Even what little Naficy writes on temporality, its subjective perception and cinematic disruption (2001, 152-160), finds here some grounding, as the matching combination between the fluorescent lighting of the interiors and the ashen, invariably cloudy sky outside, in which the sun never appears, precludes a clear notion of the passing of hours or even days. The result is a consuming sense of stasis and stagnation, spatial and temporal, which the ghost writer openly makes his own when he declares: "I'm aging; this place is Shangri-La on reverse."

Naficy's second, if less prominent, axis of interpretation, the sociopolitical one, is perhaps even more relevant for us, as it involves what he sees as a historical transition in the production and regulation of social space. His central point revolves around the theories of Foucault and Deleuze and, more specifically, the gradual replacement of what the former called "disciplinary societies" (1977) by the "societies of control" theorized by the latter (1992). According to Deleuze, and Naficy, it has been a while since

Fig. 3.44. As constant control and surveillance haunt the ghost writer, even open landscapes becomes oppressive.

surveillance and domination were a matter of centralized institutions and specific buildings like schools and prisons. Much as what is said is happening with the border today (Casas-Cortés and Cobarrubias 2019), Deleuze describes those fixed spatial "enclosures" giving way to increasingly fluid, dispersed and continuous networks of control (1992, 3-6). In such societies, Naficy suggests, any and all spaces, open and closed, interior and exterior, analog and digital, are potentially controlling, repressive and dangerous, especially for dissidents and outsiders [fig. 3.44]. Crucially, what emerges from this new, wider and more elastic cartography of control are not masses of disciplined, "molded" individuals, as in Foucault, but "*dividuals*," partial, fragmentary subjects in perpetual state of "modulation" (Deleuze 1992, 4-6, his emphasis). Appadurai has recently related the present "logic of dividuation" with the "bizarre materiality" of financial capitalism; a world set up and organized so that, as the 2008 crisis dramatically exposed, something as spatially fixed, bounded and intimate as a house could, in the form of mortgage "derivatives," be endlessly divided, moved and sold all over the globe (2016, 21-25).

Little of this obtains direct, explicit figuration in the film—not even the internet would appear to be a factor were it not for the ghost writer's late, cursory Googling of

Emmett's name. What the film does makes explicit though, in the way of symptoms, are, as we have seen, both the spatial designs of such an order, in the form of an increasing compartmentalization, regimentation and control of space and the movement of people, with the border as its utmost material and conceptual referent, as well as what Bauman would call its "human consequences" (1998). Indeed, it is not difficult to see *The Ghost Writer*'s as a world traversed by precisely such 'dividuals' as described above: less fully formed subjects than 'human resources.' The ghost writer, "the new Mike McAra," as he is referred to as one point, is of course our prime example here, lacking a real identity in any classic, or rather modern, sense, philosophical or cinematic, being moved, controlled and then disposed of the moment he has done his job and his very existence has become just another risk to be 'managed.' But we also have Lang, who has had most of his (extremely privileged) adult life—not to mention the fate of the millions, close and far, affected by it—manufactured and conducted at the service of the geopolitical needs and whims of the US. Then there is Ruth, the direct agent behind such manufacturing, but whose whole personal, professional and emotional lives, including her quite evident affection, if not love, for her (arranged) husband, are themselves shown to be completely and, at certain moments, miserably subordinated to her lifelong undercover mission. And the list could go on, as the perceived failings and frustrations of contemporary existence trickle down to the lesser characters in the film (Barry, Amelia, McAra, Duc) to the point that almost every single person the ghost writer comes across seems to work as a refracting, magnifying mirror for the alienation, loneliness and dislocation of himself and the rest, so that all together they end up giving shape to a rotating, if fairly monochrome, kaleidoscope of a universally deracinated and 'derivative' condition; to the malaise of lives lived in the passive voice.

A visual and a literary metaphor seem an apposite springboard for some final reflections on the politics of this particularly self-reflexive piece of film. For the film's general approach on art as a whole is at first sight, as with everything else, far from edifying, as we are confronted with and by a world in which architecture is repressive, painting decorative and literature propaganda, all three pictured as monetary investments of some kind, and all made to work one way or another at the service of the establishment and the perpetuation of the powers that be. It is quite remarkable in this sense to note how little of the film's narrative development comes from the ghost writer's own 'artistic' endeavors—in the end, he delivers exactly the kind of mindless, impersonal and absolving eulogy he was hired to produce, whose writing process we are fortunately spared—and how much from his decidedly more gripping side-job investigating into McAra's documents, original manuscript and death, a schism which in itself seems to be pointing to something of an epochal incompatibility or at the very least estrangement between the commercial, creative and critical commitments of the artist in the postmodern. Indeed, many of the concerns presented across the film come together and even find something of a 'solution' through the ghost writer's dedication to his investigative quest. To begin with, it is through his inquisitiveness, apparently devoid of any concrete personal, ethical or political motivations, and completely at odds with both the strict stipulations of his job and his own personal safety, that a sense of agency, purpose and integrity is restored to the character. This gradually brings him closer to the status of an old-fashioned film protagonist, maybe even a hero, but also to an equally old-fashioned individual. Jameson would likely add at this point that what we may be enticed to interpret as instinctive, vocational or generic in this ghost writer, his driving desire to know, should also be seen in our present situation as 'social,' as a kind of cinematic shorthand for our general, collective and often unconscious efforts to make sense of and locate ourselves in an

Fig. 3.45. Border-crossing: The black figure of the ghost writer escaping the island ferry into the mainland.

overwhelmingly globalized, simultaneously interconnected and disjointed, world—that "desire" he has famously called "cognitive mapping" (1993, 5).

Secondly, and considering what has been said about the historical and geopolitical setting of the film, its content, as well as the marked spatiality of its form, it is more than fitting that the ghost writer's at once existential and epistemological journey should be predicated on him taking back control over his mobility, even at those moments when it means simply to retrace McAra's steps, leading him gradually, and precariously, to cross first the borders of the house, then the property, the island and, as we shall see, the film frame itself [fig. 3.45]. Mobility, as the willful crossing of boundaries and the capacity to "choose where to be" (Bauman 1998, 86), seems in this way to be reimagined not only as being co-constitutive of identitarian self-determination and personal freedom in a globalized world, but also as a vehicle of discovery and truth, both private and social, in a way that seems close to collapsing the two.

Last but not least, it means something that while the film, following the novel, does not resist the impulse to reward the ghost writer's journey with a grand final exposé worthy of his troubles, in the form of 'textual' proof of the workings of the global system, it relegates its disclosure to what is basically a coda in the story. For, in many ways, the

film is virtually over once Lang is shot and then buried with all the (hypocritical) honors bestowed on a national hero. As for the ghost writer, after being questioned by the police and retained for an undetermined number of days in Boston via the confiscation of his passport—"we need to keep you close," a police detective tells him—he is convinced again and without much persuasion by his agent to basically 'get it together' and finish the memoirs, this time from London. A sudden cut into a montage of printing machinery in full, frantic action indicates that he has complied and delivered, but also that all those disconnected pieces collected so far in his investigation—McAra's death being a murder, Emmett working for the CIA, Lang admitting, off the record, to sanctioning state torture—have probably been dropped as the initial, tantalizing brush-strokes of an intriguing but ultimately unfinishable painting. This would have been a bold move for the film, pointing perhaps, *à la* Jameson (1988; 1995), to some cognitive or epistemological inability to fully grasp the new world system, or maybe even doubting the very existence of a grand, totalizing narrative, picture or system to be discerned in the first place. On the one hand, there is no denying the bitter taste such a self-defeating non-resolution would have left in the spectator, not only leaving the 'true' forces and structures of Power and evil largely undisclosed and unaffected, but even questioning the value of an inquiry such as the ghost writer's with no definitive proofs or conclusions to show for it. On the other hand, perhaps lack of closure would not have been so bad after all, especially at a moment in which closure may be neither the best or most constructive measure by which our multifarious attempts at mapping the contemporary world should be estimated, nor, arguably, a concept that should come to define whatever social, spatial and aesthetic alternatives we may envision for the future. Or perhaps it is simply the case that something as trite as that old adageo about valuing the journey over the destination is in

itself, when it comes to knowledge, enough of a lesson to be drawn from a fiction film in such ultra-utilitarian times as ours.

At any rate, the truth is that this film, like *Death and the Maiden*, does indulge our desire for resolution, at once narrative and social—if only to frustrate it yet again in other terms and by other means, namely the death of the ghost writer and, with it, the apparently definitive burial of his discovery. All this suggests that *The Ghost Writer*'s tentativeness in deciding between an open and a closed ending up until the very last minute may be in itself symptomatic. More specifically, I would suggest that such vacillation is the film's formal coping with what remains a serious sociohistorical impasse, if not a deadlock, today, one where "overabundant information" on the system is already out there (Augé 1995, 28)—including virtually unlimited evidence of the ongoing, century-long meddling of the US in international politics, economy and wars; the cruelty and violence of the current border regimes; and the corrosive, alienating and self-destructive dynamics of capitalism as a whole—but, at the same time, one in which the triggering of a 'genuine,' i.e. global, organized and collective, change, seems more and more implausible, if not virtually unimaginable (Fisher 2009). Would whatever discovery the ghost writer made, however scandalous or totalizing, bridge that gap in a world where somebody like Naomi Klein is already a perennial best-seller? Probably not, but in sparing us that most discouraging of realizations, if at the expense of having the ghost writer killed and the system left untouched, the film has the paradoxical merit of preserving, in some latent, phantasmatic fashion, both the belief that there is inherent virtue in our continuous search for greater wisdom about the world and the (tacit) hope that, maybe, at one point or another, after this or that disclosure, enough knowing might finally move us into doing.

(Dis)Closure Effect

It is worth noting how stunningly this suggested contradiction—this kind of 'openness in closure,' and vice versa—is articulated by the film, and how both its marvelous stylistic flair and its connection to mobility, selfhood and the border find in the process a most apposite corollary. For, as it happens, *The Ghost Writer* evocatively, if probably unwittingly, mirrors *Death and the Maiden* in having a collective gathering as a closing set piece. The two are in fact quite similar highbrow cultural events—a Schubert recital; Lang's memoirs launch party—and it would not be difficult, were the two set in the same fictional, spatio-temporal 'universe,' to find them sharing some of their attendees, government officials and all. However, there is a significant difference in what each gathering is made to represent. The totalizing, comprehensive societal allegory of *Death and the Maiden*'s theater has now become a markedly elitist affair. Suffice it to note that the ghost writer himself is not invited—a rule of etiquette in such occasions, we are told— and that only Amelia's surprising 'plus one' invitation gets him through the ultra-securitized glass doors of the London Rhinehart Inc. building. The contrast encapsulates much of what kind of world each film has set up to evoke, the radical inclusivity of one and the equally radical exclusivity of the other, which, incidentally, correspond to the two complementary sides of how the border as a frame, process or logic is said to operate (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, 157-166). That each film should favor so clearly one of the two sides in its final images can easily be read in geohistorical terms and, more specifically, in relation to the very evolution, spatial and ideological, of globalization as a societal phenomenon and process, which is much of what this chapter has been all about.

Meanwhile, narrative-wise, again, the final gathering in *The Ghost Writer* also holds the key to the final revelation of the plot, if one that probably not many spectators may have been actively expecting anymore. It is in fact difficult to assess how much does

said revelation *really* matter. The uncovering of Ruth as a CIA spy, recruited by Emmett during their time in Harvard, discovered upon the scribe's final scrutiny of the manuscript in one of the bookstore's backrooms, may serve to tie some, if not all, of the various loose ends left by the film, to concretize, personally and politically, to what kind of relations and interests the characters have been subjected as well as, again, to properly reward the ghost writer's investigative activities. Similarly, its main implication—that the US had actively interfered in the UK's decision to get into the Iraq war—may offer some symbolic, expiatory relief to distressed British audiences, but it is hardly news in the grand scheme of things, at least not of the jaw-dropping kind it is made to be, and surely not for the dozens of other countries around the world which at one point or another in history have had their fates devised and controlled at a distance, by the US, the UK or any other foreign, imperial power or corporate board of directors. What we get at this point is instead, a rather simplified, 'individualized' and private, easily digestible resolution, perhaps the only kind a generic fiction narrative can truly provide and handle, not only for the intrigues of the story, but also for the picture of the state of the world affairs that it has in the process tried to paint. As with the whole aesthetic of the film, there is indeed something relatively outdated about it, more appropriate for the Cold War world of three or four decades prior, when international geopolitics and spy schemes were still the dominant game in town, than for the digitized, financialized, so-called 'rhizomatic' neo-liberal capitalist world of the twenty-first century. Rather than in Ruth's personal treacherousness, there is probably more truth to be found, if a scrappier one, in precisely those more tentative, lateral relations intimated more or less openly throughout the film. This includes the multinational corporate-military infrastructure ruling over the supposedly 'sovereign' decisions of the US itself, its ties within the upper echelons of the intellectual world and academia, the absent omnipotence of the media and

Fig. 3.36. Icons of homelessness—and death.

communicational and artistic apparatus, the ascendance of private land hoarding and speculation, the nebulous, all-encompassing reach of surveillance and control, and the perverse ethico-ideological scaffolding devised to sustain and justify all kinds of atrocities in the names of liberty, security and/or mobility, depending on the case.

Of all this, however, it is only Ruth's secret, it would seem, that is secured when, in the most memorable, breathtaking manner when the scattered pages of McAra's manuscript fly away in the almost empty and silent London street where, having just sneaked out of the Rinehart building, book in hand, the ghost writer is run over by a mysterious car off-screen [fig. 3.36]. It may be the case that, as McGregor and Williams relate in the DVD extras of the film, the idea for this shot—described by critics as "blindingly perfect" (Tim Brayton 2010) and "perhaps the best last shot of a movie since *Before Sunset*" (Dana Stevens 2010)—came to Polanski in the middle of the shoot as a proverbial stroke of genius. A look at the shooting script proves the original one to be not only significantly different, but also less inspired, as it simply describes the protagonist disappearing in a street crowd beyond the reach of Ruth's anxious gaze (Harris and Polanski 2008, 106). Apart from adding to Polanski's well-earned auteur mythology, the change is all the more remarkable for how cunningly it can be seen to re-connect formally

and symbolically with so many of the threads running through the film. For one, for the ghost writer to die off-screen only reinforces the unimportance of his life. Meanwhile, the very image of flying papers, a motif Naficy has found as a recurrent figure of exile and homelessness in transnational cinema (2001, 109), offers here an evocative visual metaphor for the alienation, displacement, malleability and fragmentation of the character himself and perhaps contemporary subjectivity as a whole. An icon of 'dividuality' if there ever was (a non-digital) one, the scattering book pages, with no extradiegetic score, with no *melos* to accompany the *drama*, transmits also a sense of emptiness and triviality, of business as usual. Whatever subterranean hope we may want to find latent here—i.e. that something could have truly changed had the ghost writer gotten to reveal his discovery to the public, that individual actions and our collective search for knowledge matter enough to get the system worried and acting—it must be confronted with all that is irredeemably pessimistic about it. More than anything, I would argue, this final sequence and shot imagines a world system with many borders but no genuine exits or outsides, internally fragmented, yes, but also globally foreclosed. A world and a system where no matter how many of its boundaries, borders, limits or divisions one gets to cross—a building, a country, the film frame itself— 'they,' or 'it,' will be waiting for you at the other side.

4. Europa, Europa

Among the necessary set of largely unquestioned assumptions, both ontological and epistemological, that have subtended this thesis, Polanski's European-ness, or at least that of his cinema, has occupied a particularly prominent place. Whatever the specific terms in which each film has articulated it—from funding and location through subject matter and address to style and sensibility, the notion that Polanski's films fundamentally 'speak' from Europe, even when their protagonists do not, has remained a stable, unifying factor. This is certainly not new or unique to this work. Most scholarly approaches to his career, even those which, as in the case of Mazierska, convincingly interpret Polanski's cinema as "the product of cultural travels" (2007, 187), describe a transnational but fundamentally Eurocentric constellation of referents, concerns and discourses at play. Polanski himself has encouraged the association: "I am European, I can feel it," he declared in a 1979 interview with *Cahiers du Cinéma* during the promotion of *Tess* (2005, 71). While more or less explicit statements of the kind can be found in more recent interviews, the point was particularly topical at the time. Polanski's celebrated directorial ventures as a foreigner in Hollywood, his notorious sexual scandal there and then unlawful and spiteful departure from the US and return to the continent only a year prior had turned his geographical origins, cultural foundations and sensibilities into a popular point of discussion both sides of the pond. His interlocutors from *Cahiers* on that occasion, Pascal Bonitzer and Nathalie Heinich, film critic and art sociologist respectively, would appear indeed bent on making the conversation as much about

geography, broadly understood, as about filmmaking, or, rather, about how much filmmaking may or may not be a matter of geography.

Thus, early comments about the universality of film as an art, its collective nature as compared to the privacy of television, which leads Bonitzer and Heinich to compare *Tess* with a Hollywood contemporary in *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979) as genuinely cinematic artworks (2005, 68-70), soon drift into an intriguing discussion of differences. After inquiries about the perceived "American" (read expensive) quality of *Tess*, its British literary and historical sources and French production, crew and scenery (2005, 71-77), it is Polanski's own ambiguous location that is taken up. In utter cosmopolitan fashion, he then declares himself a citizen of the "Earth," rejecting associations with any particular country on the basis of birth or education, and goes on to disingenuously suggest the attribution of geographical levels to films based simply on their setting: "If your story takes place in Poland, it must be Polish. If it takes place in Transylvania, it is Transylvanian" (2005, 78). Tellingly, none of this precludes his assertions of his self-professed Europeanness and of *Tess* as a "European work" (2005, 71), his defense of the existence of "something called European cinema," specifically as opposed to Hollywood, and his final plea for preserving "as many cultures […], languages and regional attitudes" as possible in face of increasing cultural homogenization (2005, 79). Meanwhile, breaking an all-too-polarized cinematic map between Western Europe and the US, a few mentions of Eastern, Soviet cinema, in which Polanski was educated, are peppered in. These are mostly dedicated to him dismissing it as an inefficient, unprofessional and ideologically bankrupt system whose only merit seems to be having copied the "American principles of production" in the industry's early days (2005, 74).

My point in bringing up this particular exchange is not to trace and uncover the personal biases in Polanski's remarks. What interest me is how neatly, if unwittingly, his

ruminations here illustrate what a unique yet capricious place Europe occupied as a spatial and cultural signifier for the greater part of the century—at least among Europeans. What I am saying, in other words, is that there is a certain 'cartography' mapped onto Polanski's 'feelings.' In it, and to keep things spatial, Europe and its cinema appear first located *vertically*. That is to say, from Polanski's comments, Europe comes out as a geographical entity or category suspended somewhere in between the rich but allegedly waning patchwork of regional and national cultures that constitute it from below, as it were, and a cosmopolitan, birds-eye-view of the planet and humanity as a whole. *Horizontally*, on the other hand, it is the US and the Soviet world, the corrosive exuberance of one and the regimented dreariness of the other, that outline Europe's location, geographical as well as well as cultural and ideological, from left and right, West and East. Meanwhile, the absence of the Southern, post-colonial world from Polanski's inadvertent mapping is just as symptomatic. We must not forget, for example, that Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) had only been published one year earlier, with the so-called "Third Cinema" still a few years away from enjoying sustained critical attention and recognition (Stam 2000, 281-291).

And yet, what strikes one as the key "structuring absence" in all this, in Richard Dyer's evocative phrase (2002, 83), is that of Europe itself. The name comes up time and time again, and the reader is repeatedly ensured that there is such a thing or place and that it has its own distinct cultural identity and brand of cinema. But at no point do these allusions crystallize into a meaningful description or reflection on it of any kind. Neither Polanski nor his interviewers appear to feel the need for clarifications. Europe is inferred to exist somewhere between national and global, on the one hand, and between West (US) and East (USSR), on the other, while, ultimately, being "*neither this nor that,*" as Balibar would put it (2003, 89, his emphasis). With such tenuous foundations, it is no wonder that

not every filmmaker would share Polanski's apparent certitudes. Chantal Akerman, for instance, would some years later become outspokenly critical on the whole European question, and profusely quoted for it (see Duncan Petrie 1992, 67; Rosalind Galt 2006, 104; Luisa Rivi 2007, 40; Halle 2008, 53-54). Speaking at a conference on the issue at the British Film Institute in 1991, she would openly doubt the existence of a "such a thing as European identity" and dread the instauration of a "monolithic European cinema." In her view, clearly sympathetic to the local and the contingent, the reason Europe had even entered the cinematic vocabulary had little to do with culture per se and much with purely institutional developments, namely the economic efforts of the European Community (EC) to offset, via the funding of co-productions, the global dominance of Hollywood.

Akerman was of course speaking from a somewhat different position to Polanski; personally, ideologically and artistically, no doubt, but also historically. By the early 1990s, to speak of 'Europe' meant referring less and less to some abstract cultural referent or identity as that proudly invoked by Polanski a decade earlier and whose meaning could be left unquestioned or taken for granted, and more to a very concrete geopolitical project commanding serious critical reflection. Ironically, such a reflection would be complicated by the fact that as the same time that Europe, or at least part of it, was redefining itself through increasing political and economic integration, as a 'Community' and then as a 'Union,' its boundaries were revealing themselves as more and more unstable. There was, for one, no Iron Wall anymore to physically and ideationally keep Europe neatly bounded from the now ex-Soviet East, often called the 'other Europe.' And neither was the Western, Atlantic border proving especially reliable in keeping "the American Enemy" (Roger 2005) at bay as it threatened both Europe's alleged cultural integrity and its (long-receding) place as the spiritual epicenter of not only the West but also, by extension, the whole world. Meanwhile, the post-colonial territories, ethnic minorities, migrants,

hybrids, marginals, and repressed peoples from not just the South but all over, internally as well, were emerging from underneath the long-cast shadows of a white, Christian and patriarchal Europe and into the disruptive lights of political and artistic self-representation. Last but not least, the main political legacy of modern Europe, the still axiomatic nation-state, whose miseries the break-up of Yugoslavia tragically displayed, was proving only ambivalently compatible with the (no less European) cosmopolitan, borderless aspirations ingrained in the project of a single, united future. "In the very moment of its coming together," Stuart Hall proclaimed at that same BFI conference Akerman attended, "Europe reappears as an enigma" (1992, 45).

Polanski's *The Ninth Gate* and *The Pianist*, released successively in 1999 and 2002, and surely the oddest cinematic coupling of my corpus, shall be approached in what follows not only as films conceived, written, produced, shot, distributed and consumed from within such an enigmatic coming together, but also as direct textual responses and reactions to it—each, of course, in its own particular, and not necessarily coherent and compatible, ways. Having said this, and as we have begun to intimate, debates around European cinema and Europe *in* the cinema, once seriously addressed, exceed purely cultural questions and the study of, say, auteurs, traditions, genres and motifs, and involve complex changing industry scenarios as well as society-wide processes. An introductory account of how those new scenarios and processes have been seen to reverberate on the images projected on the screen seems thus in order.

Towards a transnational aesthetic

Over the last few decades, debates over globalization, what it is and what it does, have grown to engage an increasingly wide variety of phenomena at all imaginable scales of human experience. Among the ever-increasing number of processes concerned, however,

few have concentrated as much sustained attention and debate throughout these years, few appear as genuinely involved in and exemplary of the notion and dynamics of contemporary globalization, as that of post-Cold War European integration. This may have something to do with the location, experience, profession, work prospects and, hence, conscious or unconscious interests of many of those leading such debates, from politicians and academics to filmmakers themselves. But it must also be seen as a result of the sheer, in many ways global, magnitude of the phenomenon and the breadth of the issues, concerns, discussions and positions the process itself has been able to both attract and engender, most notably regarding the future of the nation-state. There is indeed no shortage of analyses that have seen in the formation of the European Union the closest thing to a geopolitical blueprint for a postnational world space and order to come, as perhaps most notably argued by Habermas (2001, 58-112)

In such a world, so it goes, countries will gradually forfeit more and more portions of their sovereignty over to various transnational institutions, maybe even to some form of supranational state, through which they will engage in collective and, theoretically, democratic decision-making processes, open up their borders and societies to ever-larger numbers of foreign peoples, capital and goods and become increasingly integrated socially, legally, politically and economically. The image is sketchy but, I think, accurate enough. In keeping with such ambitious prospects, though, critiques have been plentiful. Habermas himself offers a cursory list of the arguments being waged against, or at the very least questioning, the means and ends of the EU model as it was unfolding at the turn of the century (2001, 89-103). These are mostly socioeconomic, or, more precisely, involve what he calls the "old battle" between the social and the economic sides of the Union, the tug-of-war between civil justice and market efficiency, cosmopolitanism and

neoliberalism. Craig Calhoun (2004), building on Habermas, adds to the list questions of legitimacy, transparency and territoriality, both inward and outward.

Doubts of these and other kinds were of course not unfounded. With the definitive dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the signing of the Maastricht treaty in 1992 and the formation of the EU, the unshakable trauma of the decade-long war in the Balkans, the GATT agreements, the creation of the Schengen Area of free movement, the instauration of the Euro currency in 2002, the projection and then implementation of an Eastward expansion for the Union (effective in 2004) and the writing and then voting of the (eventually failed) 2005 European Constitution, the turn of the century was a critical turning point in what concerns the geopolitical trajectory of Europe. Luisa Rivi offers a detailed account of the complex institutional arrangements carried out in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall, including all kinds of new legal, political and economic provisions and organs, all geared, at least in theory, towards "an agonistic co-existence of localisms, regionalisms, nation-states, and *supranationalism"* (2006, 29, her emphasis). All the while parallel developments were taking place in the realm of culture. Consensus was that if Europe wanted itself to relate, if not compete, in equal terms with localities, regions and nations, if it wanted to turn from a *space* into a *place*, a certain shared sense of identity, history, tradition, community, belonging and responsibility had to be nurtured, if not manufactured. What print and the rise in urban public life and face-to-face communication had done for the nation, Calhoun (2004) relates, other media had to do for the larger and more heterogeneous space of Europe; not just to legitimize it, but also to actively produce it. Calhoun then goes on to consider the role, actual and potential, of, among others, the Internet, television, museums and radio broadcasting in constituting a genuinely European "public sphere" and "social imaginary;" an arena where, avoiding the trap of expanding nationalism to a continental scale, differences could be explored

and mediated, "not one simply for the expression of similarities." All of those media, however, he finds for the moment lacking, whether in terms of form, content or both.

Strangely, at no point does Calhoun address the cinema. And I say strangely not to suggest that the film medium is necessarily better suited to support such a dialogical sphere and imaginary, although an argument could probably be made in that direction. Rather, Calhoun's neglect of film seems strange due to the sheer amount of personal, institutional and economic resources the EU and the EC before it had devoted to the development of a pan-European cinematic space, both in front and behind the cameras. While its success or lack thereof is a matter of debate, and though its motivations and imperatives may be as economic as they are cultural, there is no doubting Europe's investment in the integrative potential of film. Most scholarly works on European cinema, whether they accept or question the existence of a such a thing, tend indeed to begin with an account of the glut of institutional initiatives and programs carried out to bolster a transnational cinematographic sector in the continent. These initiatives and programs, Elsaesser has argued, might be the most reliable basis to build an understanding of contemporary cinema in Europe (2005, 17).

Some of them have already been enumerated in the build-up to the analyses of *Frantic* and *Bitter Moon* in the second chapter, as they evidenced growing concerns in the continent around the increasing hegemony of the US over the global cultural market and the representation of the world space—the same concerns those two films were then found to be thematizing. Thus, there were references to the Eurimages fund (1988) and the first MEDIA program (1990), both aimed at supporting trans-European audiovisual products, to the creation of the European Film Academy and the European Film Award (1988), and to the inclusion of the so-called '*Exception Culturelle'* in the 1994 GATT agreement as an attempt to keep the cultural industry in general and the cinema in

particular out of utter economic competition. To these, and still within our turn-of-the-century framework, can be added the second MEDIA program in 2000, the Culture 2000 plan, designed to "integrate the cultural dimension in the Community policies" (qtd. in Rivi 2007, 55) and the funding of the Europa Cinemas network of exhibition venues. As Rosalind Galt points out, it is not difficult to see the proactive, ideological logic behind such measures, especially as they precede or exceed genuinely political ones (2006, 103). She describes how, for example, Eurimages included eastern and southern European countries such as Poland and Turkey before the EU did (Turkey is still today not a member) and how the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) extended from Iceland all the way to Morocco.

Transnational co-productions, though active in the continent since at least the 1920s, flourished in this new environment to the point of becoming the norm rather than the exception in the continent (Eleftheriotis 2000, 93). As the contrast between Polanski's and Akerman's positions suggests, though, not everyone was equally on board with the changes. For some, Hollywood was no longer the only imposing force to fear; Europe itself was also suspect. Thus, many complained that this new paradigm, de facto ousting the post-war era of "national cinemas of *auteurs* and new waves" (Elsaesser 2005, 68), turned the viability and 'worthiness' of a film into a numbers game, a matter of being able to combine as many subsidies, tax breaks and incentives from as many governments and institutions as possible, with the hiring and mixing of personnel often predicated on the meeting of this or that national quota—hence the 'Euro-pudding' label. Randall Halle, with a more factual than critical tone, does register a noticeable move towards market reach and profitability and an increase in the significance and influence of the producer and distributor at the expense of the director (2008, 84-85). Rather than resulting in one single 'monolithic' industry or cinema, however, various, often overlapping, modes of

production emerged. Elsaesser, for instance, talks about "European post-Fordism" (2005, 69) to refer to the proliferation of small-scale production units and creative teams built around a producer and/or director—Polanski's RP Productions, operative since 1991, is an example. Halle, for his part, lists and analyzes three new production "ensembles," as he calls them: the "global free market," involving Euro-American co-productions with a Hollywood studio at the helm; the "closed trade zone," a trans-European protectionist mode conceived specifically to counteract the cultural and economic threat of the US; and the "inter-national federation," referring to distinctly national works but produced transnationally (2008, 30-59).

Shared by most observers, critical or not, is an awareness that changes to the production environment in Europe have had substantial effects on the aesthetic quality of the films themselves; not only on how they are made, but on what they tell and look like. When Halle writes that "something is happening to characters, actors and crew, language, setting, location, the film script, the camerawork and editing, in short to what we see and the way we see it," he is referring to the influence of funding changes on the films themselves, their representations and discourses (2008, 5). Naturally, results vary significantly between different ensembles and between different films—generalizations get tricky when a film like *Astérix et Obélix contre César* (Claude Zidi, 1998) benefits from the same funding from Eurimages, around 600.000 euros, as one like *Code inconnu* (Michael Haneke, 2000)[12]—but Halle is still able to discern a number of trends. The first and most obvious one, which he relates with the cross-border broadening of the market and the very requirements of the funding organs, involves the increasingly transnational orientation of the "film artifact," be it in terms of cast, crew, stories, language, location and/or style (2008, 83-84; 86-87). What he refers to as a "transnational aesthetic," does

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[12] Unless stated the opposite, all data regarding EU film financing has been retrieved from the Eurimages webpage https://www.coe.int/en/web/eurimages/programmes

however not imply an undoing of national and cultural differences, as many complained, but rather a more self-conscious and critical, if at times admittedly stereotypical, approach to them (2008, 86). Similarly, nor does he find said aesthetic, despite a perceived explosion of entertainment and genre films, leading to the waning of art and experimental cinema. Insofar as it has proven profitable, he argues, experimentation, in film but also other audiovisual media, has flourished in this new landscape (2008, 85, 87-88). According to Halle, the visual language of European films is being nothing but enriched under the aegis of the new co-production market and the transnational aesthetic. Finally, he notes, the content of the films and particularly the communities they imagine have tended to expand in accord with the new and larger social space opened by material connections (2008, 86-87).

Logically, Europe itself has in the process come to occupy a prominent place among such newly imagined communities and social spaces—not least because to reflect "a European identity" was and is among the chief qualifications making a project eligible for EU backing. [13] It is within such a context that one must make sense of, for example, a singular project like Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Trois couleurs* trilogy—*Bleu* (1993)*, Blanc* (1994) and *Rouge* (1994). Kieślowski was of course not new to the either multiple-film format after directing the ten-part *Dekalog* (1988) film series in his native Poland or transnational filmmaking after having already shot *La double vie de Véronique* (1991) between Krakow and Paris, a film easily readable as a bridge, geographically and thematically, between his two larger projects. Much like *Dekalog* and *Véronique*, *Trois couleurs*¸ a French-Polish-Swiss co-production but mostly backed by the French independent company MK2, wears its geographical credentials on its sleeve. The titles of the films make explicit reference to the three colors in the French flag and each part is

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[13] See "Appendix II "of the European Convention on Cinematographic co-production: https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/147

said to be loosely based on one of the three ideals of the French Revolution. However, each film takes place (mainly) in a different country of the three financing the trilogy, two are spoken in French and one in Polish, they are all interconnected narratively and, as Shohini Chaudhuri has noted, all three share the meditation on "the broad social theme of European unification" through intimate personal stories as their underlying motivation (2005, 27). In total, the trilogy received the equivalent to around 1.5 million euros in Eurimages funding.

Diverse as the new cinematic landscape in the continent may be, film's engagement and relationship with Europe and Europeanization, most writing on the issue coincides, has found two main cinematic avenues. First is that of the historical genre and, most paradigmatically, the WWII and Holocaust movie. If, as Halle writes, "*the future of a community lies in its ability to imagine a common past*," for post-Cold War European cinema it is the 1930s and 40s that have often tended to provide such a past (2008, 89, his emphasis). Reasonings for such a fixation abound: from the transnational, if not universal, dimension and popular appeal of the events; through their inherent cinematic potential for conflict, drama and spectacle; to, in more psychological terms, the collective, affiliative potential of narratives of war, tragedy, mourning, sorrow and guilt. That the chosen period should offer also clear-cut morality tales about the evils of national antagonism and xenophobia, as Halle points out (2008, 98), as well as glimpses of the last moments when Europe was still the undisputed center of the world is hardly coincidental. Political theorist Lothar Probst, though not talking about film at all, has written about the surging but questionable place of the Shoah as the intended "core of a unifying European memory" and its institutionalization into the "foundational myth" of a new Europe (2003, 53-58). More cynically, Akerman herself argued at the BFI that "the only thing countries in Europe have in common is their collective guilt in allowing the Nazis to slaughter

Europe's Jewish population during the Second World War" (qtd. in Petrie 1992, 67). For Galt, who builds her study of "the New European cinema" on historical films, though not necessarily Holocaust ones, the 1940s offered turn-of-the-century Europe an ambivalent vehicle through which to work through its own feelings of "loss," "disorientation" and "disenchantment," feelings she closely relates with the post-1989 crisis of the European Left, as well as a symbolic historical ground-zero from where to think and build itself anew (2006, 20-25). Whereas Halle sees in this the interests of transnational cultural producers and, like Probst, of the EU itself, and Akerman Europe's guilt-ridden unconscious, Galt discerns in the cinematic return to the WWII and its aftermaths an ideologically inflected attempt by the filmmakers to reflect simultaneously upon the imagined pasts, uncertain presents and potential futures of the continent.

If history is then the first *mode* through which Europe has imagined and reflected upon itself cinematically, geography is necessarily the second. Time and space, and not self-evident ideological statements, Galt argues, is what the politics of post-modern, post-classical European films look like (2007, 230). So, she starts by describing 1990s Europe as a "question of space," before elaborating a defense of the centrality of close textual film analysis in any attempt to discern the changing cartographies of "Post-Wall Europe" and the various ways in which "cinematic and geopolitical space" have co-articulated one another (2007, 5). She is not alone in this project. At least two edited volumes, by Myrto Konstantarakos (2000) and Everett and Goodbody (2005), preceded hers in dealing with the issue of space (and place) in European cinema. Directly addressing the central contention of the former, namely that European film imagination is articulated through series of "spatial oppositions" (Konstantarakos 2000, 4), the latter suggests a turn towards "more fractured and mobile readings" (Everett and Goodbody 2005, 12). Such a turn is presented by the editors in epistemological terms, a matter of a change in the analysts'

perspective, but it could have just as easily been traced back, as we have done, to actual changes in the considered objects themselves, namely Europe and European cinema. It is those changes that, for example, had prompted Elsaesser to displace his decades-long focus on the national and the historical onto the European and the spatial (2005, 78-79; 108-130), and the same that led Halle to have his chapter on WWII movies followed by one about migrants and borders (2008, 129-168). And, back to the beginning is those very changes that Galt (2006) sees as the main force animating 1990s European cinema's often meta-cinematic obsession with its war-ridden past and its twin, tentative explorations of time and space.

In terms of geography, however, there seems not to be such a pivotal, domineering motif as that of WWII—one towards which European cinematic spatiality may have tended to gravitate—but instead, and scanning through both films and critical literature, a number of sites or places operating in different kinds of indexical, metonymical or allegorical registers and relations. These include metropolitan cities, rural villages and natural landscapes, the sea, the home, the border and finally, if perhaps less explicitly than one might think, the nation. Similarly, a number of decidedly geographical and geopolitical issues can be found traversing the spatial imaginaries of turn-of-the-century European cinema: the uneasy encounter between East and West; the return of the post-colonial repressed; 'Fortress Europe'; the love-hate relationship with the US; globalization; the war in the Balkans; the uneven relationships, new and old, between North and South, center and margins; the crisis of the national; and, of course, the looming but disputed prospect of a transnational, pan-European social space and its very place in the new world. With so much on the table, it is no wonder that an outsider like Kojin Karatani would find European thought compulsively involved in the mapping of its own geographical future (Jameson 1995, 171). From this vantage, we could now look back at

the fragmented, multicultural and exorbitant Paris of *Frantic* and the sexually, spectacularly reified one of *Bitter Moon* as expressing not only local or national but continent-wide concerns. And was not the denationalization of *Death and the Maiden*'s narrative space readable also as a displaced projection of Europe's anxieties and hopes about its own processes of integration and deterritorialization?

If we accept such arguments, we should concede not only Polanski's own ambiguous stance towards those processes and the state, trajectory, location and status of Europe in general, if such were indeed our interest, but also towards the varied stylistic, generic and narrative practices and registers that can be found encoded and operating in his films. Despite sharing an intriguingly similar interest in images of ruins and destruction, no two films would seem to prove that variety as evidently as the ones analyzed in this chapter. In *The Pianist* it is of course WWII and the Holocaust that act as the central chronotope and codifying theme. As for *The Ninth Gate*, as we shall see, such a position is occupied by a meta-textual concern with the world of literature and cultural production, a generic involvement with the supernatural, and a meticulous mobilization of architecture, cinematic space and location shooting.

One Hell of a Business: *The Ninth Gate*

Opening credit sequences play a uniquely suggestive role in Polanski's films as we have seen before in this thesis. Beyond their purely informative purposes and their meeting of various contractual, marketing and institutional obligations, the functions of these sequences include: setting certain stylistic and generic parameters, training the audience's visual and auditory perceptual habits, intimating spatial and narrative structures, introducing complex symbolic relations of meaning and anticipating certain crucial events, themes, discursive messages and setting up the whole mood or ambiance of the

Fig. 4.1-4.4. Writing and filmmaking: deadly endeavors.

movie. Even in a film like *The Ghost Writer* that eschews them altogether, their sheer absence can be read as playing into the film's overall atmosphere of dislocation, disinformation and paranoia. If opening credit sequences are conceived as ambiguous zones of transition where the distracted spectator's passage from the real into the textual world is managed and mediated (Georg Stanitzek 2009), Polanski's appear to expect and demand an already attentive and engaged viewer from the very beginning.

The Ninth Gate is no exception in this regard. If anything, it may be seen an even greater investment than usual in its title sequence. Notably, said sequence is divided in two radically different sections which are made to bracket a concise but, as usual, brilliantly atmospheric opening scene, where an elderly man (Willy Holt/Andrew Telfer) proceeds to hang himself from a lamp in his sumptuous private library [figs. 4.1-4.4]. Just as they are made to frame this scene, the two segments of the credits also initiate two of the main conceptual concerns to run through, structure and indeed frame the whole of the film. The first segment consists of a series of four white-on-black intertitles detailing the film's production credits. They show, first, the film's worldwide (US) distributor (Artisan Entertainment), then its director and, lastly, the various production partners involved in what is explicitly designated as a "French-Spanish co-production" [fig. 1]. While such 'formal' singling out of the corporate sources of the movie, its material conditions of

possibility, as it were, is remarkable in itself, it is made all the more so for how this financial information is assimilated within the literary thematics of the scene and film in ways the later 'cast and crew' section of the credits will not. We can sense this association at work in the typographic choice for the production intertitles, which replicate old print lettering, but also aurally, in the diegetic sound of a pen scratching on paper—writing what will seconds later prove to be a suicide note. Themes of writing and filmmaking, books and films, become thus audio-visually interlaced, and quite somberly at that, in a kind of intermedial, meta-textual interplay. The casting not of a professional actor but of *Bitter Moon's* production designer Willy Holt to play the old, death-driven bibliophile only cements the connection and thus, arguably, the movie's inaugural thematization of an underlying concern with film and cultural production and its projection into the realm of the literary, to the point that the referencing of the latter may in what follows just as well be taken to involve the former. If, as Stanitzek argues, title sequences often condense the fundamental "dysfunctionality" between the economic and aesthetic dimensions of a film text (2009, 49), *The Ninth Gate* seems to be mobilizing said dysfunctionality in utterly self-reflexive terms—albeit in a more circuitous way than a film like, say, Godard's *Tout va bien* (1972), in which the opening credits are presented in the form of checks being signed.

As for the credits' second section, its inferences are more readily evident and in tune with our spatial preoccupations thus far. Once the old man has succeeded in his self-destructive efforts, which a fallen slipper both confirms and trivializes, the scene is taken over by a lugubrious extradiegetic score [fig. 3]. The camera then starts a single mobile shot where it navigates the space of the room, moving from the dead man's dangling feet over to the suicide note left on the table and then to the library shelves, filled with rows and rows of antique books, until it reaches a suggestively empty slot. The camera then

plunges into the hole's abyss and the second credit sequence begins. Typography and design have now gone fully digital as the camera pushes forward in a virtual black space gliding past the gigantic floating names of the film's personnel [fig. 4]. Evoking the title of the movie, the camera crosses in succession the nine gates of nine different castles and palaces, from medieval to neoclassical, but arranged in no apparent order. It is almost inevitable for us at this point to see in such a move some reference to border-crossing, especially considering the many nationalities conjured. French, Polish, British, Spanish, Swedish and German names the size of the buildings follow one another in what would read as a miniature atlas of a late-twentieth-century pan-European cinematic space were it not for the eye-catching intrusion of a number US American names, most notably that of Johnny Depp. Aside from launching a theme of mobility that will run throughout the whole film, as well as its concerns with European history, past and present, the sequence can also be seen to elevate the transnationality of its cast and crew into something of a motif or even a spectacle in itself and thus advance its role as an integral part of the whole symbolic and spatio-narrative systems of the film to follow.

Taken as whole, the opening sequence would often become an oasis of praise in the otherwise mostly tepid critical reactions to the film. At best, *The Ninth Gate* was regarded as an old master's exercise in light, generic entertainment, a film of a classical and ever more scarce visual elegance but little lasting effect, beautiful but "unnecessary" (Dargis, 2000), and, at worst, as dreary, trashy slight-fright, neither particularly scary nor funny; yet another step in Polanski's crepuscular journey into cinematographic irrelevance (Elvis Mitchell 2000). The inevitable comparisons with his previous incursions into the noir, suspense and horror genres, especially in his two Hollywood features, did not help, and rightly so. Still, I think it does more justice to *The Ninth Gate*, to what it is and how it works, to compare it with another, closer film, both in time and

spirit, namely *Bitter Moon,* and not just for the presence of Holt. The parallels between both films naturally begin with their shared meta-textual concerns with the world of books and literature—a concern revamped a third time in *The Ghost Writer* and then a fourth and a fifth in *Venus in Fur* and *Based on a True Story*—but *The Ninth Gate* follows *Bitter Moon* further, for better or for worse. It does so in its initial symbolic framework, that is, in its use of the literary as a means to elaborate on transnational European and Euro-American cultural and economic relations—in both cases involving in the process significant changes to the nationalities mapped in their source material, this time Arturo Perez-Reverte's *El club Dumas* (1993)—but also in aesthetic terms, which is to say in its immersion into the murky waters of postmodern self-referentiality and pastiche, where not only content but also form itself is self-consciously offered up as a medium of parody and critique. In other words, if the films look 'bad'—even if that surely means something different when it comes to Polanski—it is because, in a way, they are supposed to. The cynical, self-deprecating tone of both *Bitter Moon* and *The Ninth Gate* can be seen indeed to translate into a similar stylistic template: soft-focus photography, pastel colors, a slow and deliberate pace, a hazy, hallucinatory atmosphere and a shaky mixture between high and low, seriousness and camp. When Dargis talks about "Euro-Kitsch of the highest order" (2000) you would not know which of the two films she is writing about.

Yet, for all their similarities, they are not the same film, and not just because they tell different stories or mobilize different genres. In *Bitter Moon* the main concern was the US American gaze and its effects on the social and representational history of Paris. *The Ninth Gate*, on the other hand, would seem to avoid the type of victim/victimizer geopolitical structure that *Bitter Moon* first established and then half-heartedly worked to subvert and go for a more sweeping imaging of *fin-de-siècle* civilizational decay, with Europe at the center. The narrative engine is now not a failed émigré writer but a crooked

book dealer and detective, Dean Corso (Depp), hired by a wealthy New York collector by the name of Boris Balkan (Frank Langella) to travel to Europe in search for the only other two copies of a rare antique book and, in comparing them, prove the authenticity of his own. Literature (and culture) as a creative activity, however derivative and vain, as in Oscar's case, is thus here completely overtaken by its dimension as a material possession and as a business. Meanwhile, although explicit sex features again, with Seigner once more as protagonist, this time playing the part of a mysterious guardian angel, its twin roles as narrative motor and driving metaphor in *Bitter Moon* have been taken over by, respectively, money and cultural commodities—there is no human relation in the film not built around either of the two—and the supernatural, more specifically by the figure of the Devil itself. Understanding the allegorical intricacies of the latter in the film requires however some prior context not so much on the history of Christianity as on the widespread revival of the Devil in late-twentieth-century Western popular culture, most notably in the cinema, and its historical role as what Omar Lizardo calls a "symbolic mapping tool" (2009) under whose guidance religion, money, culture, history and geography prove, as we shall see, to be intimately intertwined in past and present formulations of a real-and-imagined European space.

Talk of the Devil

"Better than Harrison Ford, John Travolta or even Leonardo DiCaprio," began Kenneth Turan his review of *The Ninth Gate* for the Los Angeles Times, "getting the Devil involved in your picture is a sure way of getting it made" (2000). Although he does not dwell on it, Turan's opening pun has two obvious targets. One is Polanski's opportune, if not opportunistic, return to the subject that catapulted his career thirty years earlier, now in serious need of a lifeline after series of less-than-impressive showings, box-office-wise

at least. The other is the renewed currency of supernatural and demonic themes and the very figure of the Devil in the cinema. A fixture of independent, B-production horror movies for decades, with the sporadic and profitably controversial incursion into the Hollywood mainstream—from Polanski's own *Rosemary's Baby*, through *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973) to *The Omen* (Richard Donner, 1976)—Old Nick was *really* getting films made, and seen, by the 1990s. Early harbingers included *Possession* (Andrzej Żuławski, 1981), *The Name of the Rose* (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1986) *Angel Heart* (Alan Parker, 1987) and *Prince of Darkness* (John Carpenter, 1987), but the flooding of satanic, hellish and occult-themed films would reach almost biblical proportions as the millennial horizon approached. *Needful Things* (Fraser C. Cheston, 1993), *Dust Devil* (Richard Stanley, 1993), *The Prophecy* (Gregory Widen, 1995), *El día de la bestia* (Alex de la Iglesia, 1995), *Seven* (David Fincher, 1995), *The Crucible* (Nicholas Hytner, 1996), *The Devil's Advocate* (Taylor Hackford, 1997), *Event Horizon* (Paul W.S. Anderson, 1997), *The Book of Life* (Hal Hartly, 1998), *Fallen* (Gregory Hoblit, 1998), *Idle Hands* (Rodman Flender, 1999), *Dogma* (Kevin Smith, 1999), *End of Days* (Peter Hyams, 1999), *The Sixth Sense* (M. Night Shyamalan, 1999), *Stigmata* (Rupert Wainwright, 1999), *Eyes Wide Shut*, and *The Ninth Gate* scarcely exhaust the phenomenon. Then the year 2000 came and went, the apocalypse never materialized—or at least was delayed—and just like it was summoned, and after a few late, toothless side-jobs in the likes of *Bedazzled* (Harold Ramis, 2000) and *Little Nicky* (Steven Brill, 2000), the Devil was sent back to the underworlds of the midnight session and the second-to-farthest corner of the video store where he belonged.

Short-lived as it was, the craze for the Devil covered ample cinematic ground. A quick look at the above list suffices to note the stylistic, budgetary and generic latitude of the phenomenon (fantasy and horror films, thrillers, film noirs, comedies, westerns,

melodramas, science-fiction and action movies, often in crossover form) as well as the breadth of themes it was able to take up: from Namibia's troubled independence and the colonial, racist legacy in Africa in *Dust Devil*, to the moral corruption of US lawyers and the legal system and the multinational corporations they serve in *The Devil's Advocate*. 'Millennial anxieties,' replacing the more concrete nuclear fears of the Cold War (yet reclaiming their apocalyptic heritage), is the easy, catch-all explanation here, but more detailed accounts have been offered. In his *A History of the Devil*, first published in 2000, Robert Muchembled sets out to trace the changes to the figure and meanings of the Devil in Western civilization. He starts in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, when early-modern European kings reshaped him from a somewhat incoherent and locally contingent entity into the single major antagonist of the Christian cosmology and prime symbolic tool of societal control, and ends with its resurgence in the last decades of the millennium-(2003, 263-323). While generalizations are mostly avoided, the author turns time and time again to a major cultural divide in terms of how the phenomenon unfolded each side of the Atlantic. On one side, Muchembled locates the existential gravity with which the US and Hollywood in particular approached its millennial affair with, and fight against, the Devil, which he interprets as a retooling of the country's religious foundations, its identification of national expansion with sacred destiny, into a symbolic propellant for its self-appointed globalizing mission. If the Devil was being invoked, he argues, it was on the certitude, conscious or unconscious, of being able to defeat him (2003, 309). In Europe and France very specifically, Muchembled writes, the perspective was quite different. Here, not only was the renewed interest in the Devil much less prominent, but also a more distanced, humorous and ludic tone prevailed. This he relates with a more hedonistic ethos, where the Devil, often imported in the form of US American culture, was ironically embraced as a bringer of hitherto forbidden joys, but also with the

proud legacy of French enlightened laicism and a more liberal, rationalistic view of the nature and fate of humanity. Still, in both cases the Devil can be seen to play a somewhat similar cultural role; namely that of a symbolic catalyst for each national imaginary to reflect upon itself, its place in the world and its future at a moment of almost otherworldly connotations.

That *The Ninth Gate*, revolving as it does around the search for and authentication of a series of books reputedly co-written by the Devil, should trace such a clear textual and geohistorical path from the present-day US back to early-modern Europe insinuates a fully conscious use of both the transnational commercial appeal and the cultural and cinematic intricacies of the trope. This applies also to the film's often messy generic mixture of the serious and the parodic, film noir and horror comedy—not a novel blend by any means, but one which here, in light of Muchembled's arguments, easily lends itself to be read as a miniature map of late-century, trans-Atlantic cultural relations. Thus, within it, virtually every moment of potential moral strain, spiritual substance or life-or-death significance in the film is 'dislocated' from too close an association with Hollywood's millennial solemnity by means of a 'Europeanizing' note of satire; whether this comes from the eerily sardonic score by Wojciech Kilar, manifestly overdone instances of dialogue or mise-en-scène (ostentatious camera zooms; in-your-face special effects; cheap glistening satin robes; a mustachioed black goon with blonde hair) or the very concept of the scene (Corso caught in a fight with his pants down). Not that Europe itself comes out of this elevated or eulogized in any way. Indeed, quite the opposite appears to be the case, both in terms of its postmodern cinematic identity (seemingly reduced to the mildly rebellious caricaturing of Hollywood's genres and tropes) and of its whole historical heritage (portrayed as not only languishing but, as we shall see, rotten to the core).

In this sense, *The Ninth Gate* would seem to be playing into and with the geographical nuances and possibilities of the demonic trope more manifestly than even Lizardo appears to have in mind when, also reading Muchembled, he proposes the Devil as a "mapping tool" (2009, 611). Inspired by Jameson's notion of "cognitive mapping" and Michael Taussig's 1980 anthropological study on the functioning of the Devil in the collective imagination of South American peasants, Lizardo makes a case for interpreting the cultural evolution of the Devil vis-à-vis not just the progress and expansion of Western Euro-civilization, but also of that of capitalism as a world system. Such relation, he argues moving from Marlowe, Milton and Goethe, through Mandel and Wallerstein, to, again, late-twentieth-century Hollywood, has been nothing short of metonymic, from the obvious, namely the continuous references to contracts, deals, and the selling and buying of souls to the Devil's recurrent association with the 'economic' sins of usury, avarice and greed. In what Lizardo calls the "contemporary" stage of this "coevolution" (though in reality he never moves beyond 1997), two tendencies dominate: the disembodiment and interiorization of the Devil, socially and psychologically, and its relation with the process of commodification (2009, 608-612).

Quite in tune with Lizardo's thesis, the Devil remains something of an absent cause in *The Ninth Gate*—if we discount Seigner's numinous presence, that is—and, instead, finds its main embodiment in the most emblematic of postmodern, late-capitalist commodities: culture—here in the form of three antique books, or rather their engravings [fig. 4.5]. It is not difficult to find in this, including the specific focus on the books' images, a degree of self-reflexivity at a time when the financing of films and the integrity of filmmaking as a whole had become such a disputed topic in and for Europe, *Exception Culturelle* and all. If, as Turan (2000) suggested, dealing with the Devil was a "sure" way of getting one's film made, "not necessarily as a producer or financial backer (though that

Fig. 4.5. Ars Diavoli

probably wouldn't hurt)", there is a sense in which a film like this, and here we can for once dare to infer Polanski's own career anxieties, suggests it might have been the only one. "It sells," he bluntly replied when asked about the issue (2005 [1999], 176). Knowing Polanski's track record, the temptation is there to treat the Devil right away as a symbol of the US's inescapable and maleficent cultural hegemony—"the great Satan of American anti-culture," as David Morley and Kevin Robins once suitably put it (1995, 50)— especially considering that his currency, if not inescapability, as a cinematic trope was itself in great part a Hollywood thing, but the film seems to have its critical gaze set elsewhere: that is, both closer, towards Europe and, more universally, towards the *long durée* of capitalism's globalization as socioeconomic system. After all, if those books do indeed carry within them the seeds of the Devil, they had already been travelling the world for centuries before one of them found its way to the US.

Visions of America

This said, the film's cartographic quest, dramatized as something like the retracing of the Devil back to its source, does begin in US American soil and New York and Manhattan more precisely—or, rather, at a tightly shot, softly lit, studio-set and back-projected

Fig. 4.6-4.9. The Ninth Gate: Between Chrysler and Quijote.

recreation of it. As Baudrillard wrote, "Europe can no longer be understood any longer by starting out from Europe itself" (1988, 98). So, for a rough third of the film, its whole first act, this "New York-of-the-mind," as Morrison has appropriately called it (2007, 102), becomes the irredeemable epicenter of commercial machinations, moral laxity and the monetary debasing of (specifically) European culture. The scene right after the opening credits teases us indeed with the cognitively placid prospect of such a simple, one-sided relation. In its opening shot, which once again enacts that outer-to-inner move so dear to Polanski, the camera pans and then retreats from a panoramic view of a luminous Manhattan skyline, unmistakably branded by the Chrysler building, into an apartment's private library where the value of the antique books collection of a deadened, wheel-chair bound patriarch (Jacques Dacqmine) is being discussed [figs. 4.6-4.9]. Corso, in charge of the appraisal, promises son (Joe Sheridan) and daughter-in-law (Rebecca Pauly), barely able to hide their excitement, the sum of no less than half a million dollars if they wait one or two months for the right buyer. A master of his craft, Corso then casually flashes a wad of bills to the couple, offering to take off their hands a "quite nice but not particularly valuable" *Quijote* right away for a few grand. A shot of the old man's silent outrage tells us all we need to know about what is going on.

Corso's professional trickeries aside, the scene also sets up what at first appears to be a clear-cut historical opposition, where the gloriously glistening façades of Manhattan skyscrapers serve a neat visual contrast to the old, well-worn tomes of the library as cultural and historical motifs. The selection of which two particular symbols should represent them, Chrysler and *Don Quijote*, seems to play further into it. More than just some commercial brand with a uniquely emblematic building to its name, Chrysler is also a prime embodiment of twentieth-century industrialization and, in its uniquely US American embodiment, of the era-defining Fordist model of mass production. In other words, the Chrysler building can be read to symbolize the triumphant, trans-Atlantic evolution of those same proto-modernizing forces a daydreaming Alonso Quijano set out to confront in the, itself proto-modern, Cervantes novel—most famously captured in the episode of his ill-fated attack on those earlier architectural emblems of industrial machinery in the La Mancha windmills. Don Quijote's defeat is thus here updated and reframed in geopolitical terms: the downfall of a once-idealistic, Utopian Spanish but also, by extension, European culture at the corrupted hands of US American materialism, commodity fetishism and the monetization of everything—Cervantes' evil giants having now taken the shape of metropolitan high-rises. Nonetheless, if the novel's concerns with the nascent forces of modernity—from industrialization, through the bourgeois state, to money itself—already denote a continuum rather than a rupture, *Don Quijote's* very form *as* a novel, that is, it very existence as a byproduct of the invention of print and an embryonic stage of what Benjamin would call "the age of mechanical reproduction" (2007 [1935]), to which the film subtly alludes by identifying the book by its printer, Joaquín Ibarra, and not its author, complicates things further—even to the point of, yet again, suggesting a displaced, intermedial comment on the state of contemporary European filmmaking as a matter of producers and distributors rather than directors (Halle

2008, 84). Moreover, as is well known, the second part of *Don Quijote* was, in an almost proto-postmodernist move, largely devoted to the protagonists' dealing with their own existence as fictional characters and, through it, with the rise of the novel into a mass-produced and mass-consumed cultural artifact—precisely the kind from which Ibarra's luxurious 1780 four-volume, illustrated edition, commissioned by the *Real Academia Española* itself, was meant to stand apart.[14]

Meanwhile, looking deeper into the Chrysler side of things brings its own conflicting implications. For one, by the 1990s the building had long ago ceased to be related to the auto maker, company or family, except by name and only two years earlier it had been acquired from a group of Japanese lenders by a real estate developer (Charles V. Bagli 1997). By that time, a third of it was empty and its condition and value as an asset had gone downhill. Meanwhile, the Chrysler company had just merged in 1998 with Mercedes in what was the largest cross-border fusion in history, less a sign of the financial well-being of the companies at the time, particularly short-lived in the case of Chrysler, than of "transnationalization" as the necessary response to larger economic tendencies, which had brought about the ongoing decline of Fordism as a system and of car manufacturing as the spearhead of socioeconomic development, especially in the US (Robert J. Antonio and Alessandro Bonanno 2000).

With all this in mind, that initial camera move may start to look as establishing less a contrast than a crude analogy, namely the idea that the Chrysler skyscraper and perhaps the whole Midtown Manhattan skyline, as seen from somewhere around the intersection between 36th street and Madison Avenue—thus eschewing any reference to the more globalized Financial District down south—may in fact be meant to double the patriarch's library in their degradation into just another commodity increasingly more valued for its

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[14] https://www.rae.es/publicaciones/quijote-de-ibarra

Fig. 4.10. Art Deco turned grotesque.

exchange potential than its actual use—being inhabited—and as a towering, hollowed out memento of the splendors of a bygone era. Going one step further, the relation even lends itself to a full reversal, where it is the Chrysler building, as a symbol of both the US American automobile and construction industries as well as of a productive labor and "fixed" capital as a whole (see Harvey 2001), that works as emblem of a waning national past and economy, while the *Quijote,* in its new role as a travelling, dislocated cultural commodity and speculative investment, as well as a precursor of postmodernism's autoreferential sensibility, typifies a globalized, transnational present and future, its flexible, post-Fordist economy and the particularly self-conscious brand of cultural imagination in which the film itself participates. Looking at the overly contrived way in which the interiors of the apartment's building recreate the Art Deco aesthetics of the 1920s, those of the Chrysler building itself but also Hollywood's early golden studio era sets, testimonies of a culture tragically oblivious to the looming crash and depression, spells the idea that, whatever may be happening to Europe, what Henry Luce famously baptized as the "American century" (1941) was itself facing foreclosure [fig. 4.10]. (A perception turned prophetic in view of Lehman's Brother's collapse and ensuing global mortgage crisis only a few years later.)

Fig. 4.11. Balkan Tower.

It does however not take long for the film to imagine something of an effective but chilling synthesis of all of the above—the cultural and the economic, modern and postmodern, the national and the transnational, Europe and the US, buoyancy and squalor, even the rational and the fantastic—as Corso is summoned to the Balkan Press headquarters, barely at the legally advisable distance from a replica of the Trump Tower, golden lettering included. Of course, considering all the talk about books, the fact that Balkan—of unknown origin but most resonant Easter European name and played by an Italian American and a former *Dracula* (John Badham, 1979) in Langella—should have his emporium built around the business of print readily doubles down on the idea of culture and the media, if such a distinction makes sense anymore, as most profitable businesses (even though the only real evidence in the film of their current 'productive' activities is a later reference to a reprint of a self-help book from the 1930s.) More intriguing is at any rate the insertion of two bums hassling Corso at the building's door [fig. 4.11]. The episode is narratively inconsequential and unmatched in any way for the rest of Corso's stay in the city, but it can be read as a derisive puncture into the film's self-enclosed meta-cinematic bubble and thus to deliberately frame the content of the scene, for all its concern with the supernatural, in a relatively more sober, realistic tone—

not least by tapping into New York's 'real' issues with rising homelessness (see Nina Bernstein 2001). The same sobering impulse can be discerned in the design of the building itself. If its fully mirrored façade recalls Jameson's famous reading of the "glass skin" of LA's Bonaventure Hotel as repelling the city outside in a sort of "placeless dissociation," as well as his more philosophical reading of the reflection motif as enacting a postmodern "thematics of reproductive technology" (1991, 42), all the more appropriate for a publisher's HQ, its entrails bring up once again Castells and Augé: blank, empty hallways and naked walls, faded colors and interior vegetation of dubious authenticity accompany Corso first to an equally aseptic lecture hall, where Balkan is delivering a talk on demons in medieval literature, and then, already with Balkan, to the top of the building, where the mogul's private library, entirely dedicated to the Devil, overlooks the city.

The connection between corporate power and evil is almost too plain to miss, but more intricate connections are suggested. For as the encounter unfolds between the two characters, Balkan's fixation with the Devil slowly but surely reveals itself as more significant than just another rich man's eccentric diversion or appendage to his more prosaic relationship with money. Watching Balkan, in Languella's gigantic figure, gazing lifelessly from his library at the streets below bespeaks a mixture of melancholy and lack which only his feverish infatuation with the Devil seems to offset and in effect suppress for the rest of the film [fig. 4.12]. Put in vulgar psychoanalytic terms, the Devil would here seem to operate both as a symptom and an antidote for the essential failure of money and regular commodities to deliver on their innate promise of some ultimate, transcendental satisfaction-to-come (see Todd McGowan 2016, 11-50). After all, no one is better placed to grasp the fundamental dissatisfaction involved in capitalistic accumulation than an aging, jaded millionaire. Underneath the specifics of the job, coming to that same realization is much of what Corso's journey will prove to be about.

The terms of said journey are set up, and not just professionally, right at Balkan's library, as Corso is casually sounded out by his employer-to-be: "do you believe in the supernatural?," to which he replies in a most dry, cynical manner "I believe in my percentage." John Orr, also quoting the exchange, detects that the film is here tapping into something: that there is more to this than typical noir witticism or even a clash of worldviews, that "money and metaphysics" maintain a "vexed relationship" both in the film and in reality, but he stops short of fully decoding it (2006, 17-18). Going the full distance, I suggest, would first mean recognizing that, underneath the laconic play on words, the apparent contradiction is not such but, instead, again, a veiled dialectical equation. The effect is not only moralistic, as in the analogy between finance and evil, but also ontological; that is, the intimation that Corso's belief in money is in reality no more rational or 'natural' than Balkan's belief in Satan: that capitalism too has its own creed with its own doctrines, deities and myths (values, prices, wages, percentages, investments, profits, debts, margins, shares, surpluses, benefits) that require their own degree of faith to work. "One must see capitalism as a religion" Benjamin wrote a century ago (1996 [1921], 289). In the historical context of the film, however, the metaphysical correlation suggests also a more contemporary commentary on the neoliberal turn of the

world economy, which, since the 1970s financial crisis and the reactive termination of the Bretton Woods system, had itself grown increasingly detached from any tangible foundation, whether in terms of material production, infrastructure or its grounding on the Gold Standard (McGowan 2016, 83-84). It is not difficult to see Balkan's desires for transcendence encoding those of Capital itself—and the whole film as using the devil trope to the staging or mapping of that desire. The takeout, in other words, is that, now more than ever, and whether he knows it or not, Corso already too abides by a 'supernatural' entity—one whose supposed rationality may indeed be the grandest fantasy of them all. It is not by chance that by the end of the film he should be so 'cognitively' ready to follow Balkan and seamlessly transition from one belief system to the other.

Indeed, looking at his decidedly frugal lifestyle—his unkempt appearance, shabby clothes, microwave-heated diet and barely functionalist apartment—the questions arises of for what reason does Corso really want those percentages he so confidently stands by in the first place, besides affording his relentless consumption of alcohol and cigarettes and the expenses proper of his trade—in other words, the making of more money (Caputo 2012, 232-233). And it would seem to be the point of his incongruence that he does not really know it either; that he symptomatizes the ideologization of money into a self-propelling social and psychological engine; that Corso follows his percentage simply because he is supposed to or, rather, has been taught to. How surreptitiously this "false consciousness," in Engels famed term (1893), works in real life, how furtively it systemically trickles down from the upper to the lower classes, is brilliantly intimated in a later conversation with Liana Telfer (Lena Olin), the French aristocrat original owner of Balkan's demonic book, the hanged man's widow, and shaped in the generic form of a feline femme fatale, claws and all: "You work for money, I take it" she says. "What else?" he responds, in only an ostensibly rhetorical manner. Again, the sharp phrasing of

the exchange, remarkably devoid of any sexual innuendo in a conversation otherwise dripping in it, conceals a dialectical distortion. In reality, the question, inverted in order but not form, belongs to Corso (why work?), who does not know any better, while the answer has already been provided, in advance and from above, as it were, by Telfer (for money). It is a rigged game, and Corso's case may be even more indicative of its ideological and libidinal slippages than that of the collectors themselves—at least of those not invested in conjuring up the Devil, ironically the only ones concerned with the actual use and content of the book—and who, knowingly or not, accumulate and cherish those rare, old, virtually unreadable tomes out of the belief that there is, somewhere else, somebody else (a market) who values them even more. One has only to see the fetishistic pride with which they show Corso their book collections, bathed "in the kind of warm and flattering light usually reserved for actresses like Madonna" (Turan 2000), to realize that it is the desire of the Other, as Lacanians would put it, that truly drives them. In the end, at least they have books, and Balkan has the Devil. Corso only his percentage.

Before abandoning an invariably unfulfilling quest for money and becoming one more demonic acolyte, Corso, as a sleazy free-lance dealer, a trader, predictably plays the part of a classic capitalistic figure; one for whom antique books, on which he does prove to be a conscientious if deceitful expert, would seem to work exclusively as a means to get the next cheque cashed. To be sure, books and European culture as a whole do not play the part of any random commodity, but that is a question to be picked up later on. In the meantime, Caputo is not wrong in characterizing Corso as something of a cosmopolitan, if one less of the ethically than the professionally motivated kind, and in finding in him a significant departure from the classic US American subject abroad Ford's Walker embodied in *Frantic* (2012, 230-234). The ethnic origin of the Corso name, Italian, and its equally mobile but more accelerated meaning, "run," along with its

presumable etymological nod to legalized piracy (*corsario)*, moustache and goatee added for good measure, all but incite comparison. Thus, according to Caputo, and as opposed to Walker, the film portrays Corso as a dynamic, border-crossing, forward-looking being, culturally proficient, linguistically resourceful and somebody for whom place of residence may be a matter of occupational convenience but one that holds little to no personal attachment. In this, he proceeds, there is much of Corso that speaks of globalization but also of the spirit of (late) capitalism itself.

But if Corso's textual function is to a great extent allegorical, it is so also in terms of his nationality, insofar as the casting of Depp as the star of a European co-production makes it unescapable. Nothing in Depp's persona or cinematic trajectory up until this film had suggested anything other than a marginally offbeat variant of an unmistakably US American culture, on the one hand, and the embodiment of a postmodern Hollywood where the 'independent' cinematic explosion of the 1980s and 1990s had been slowly but surely domesticated back into the mainstream, on the other. If anything, *The Ninth Gate* marks in retrospect an initial, tentative step in Depp's career developing something of a transnational (but still English-speaking) streak, which only a year later would see him play two Romani characters in *Chocolat* (Lasse Hallström, 2000) and *The Man who Cried* (Sally Potter, 2000) and a Cuban in *Before the Night Falls* (Julian Schnabel, 2000), all before going full stateless in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series, beginning in 2003. At any rate, none of that was yet operative in our film, and we should perhaps recall that Corso's origin in the film is part of a larger reworking of the whole constellation of locales and nationalities mapped in Perez-Reverte's novel, where, among other things, Corso was Spanish and never moved out of Europe. Reasons of course abounded for casting Depp in any film with commercial aspirations and to have a whole character and story rewritten and relocated to make him fit, especially when he publicly agreed to forfeit his 10-million-

Fig. 4.13. Bernie's gruesome death barely affects Corso—or Depp.

dollar upfront fee for the chance to work with Polanski (Army Archerd 1998). The timing of the reports is unclear, but regardless of whether Depp's involvement was the reason for the changes to the script or an aftermath, the massive cartographic overhaul of which he is part, including having a third of the film relocated to a New York Polanski could never set foot in, brings up some key discursive implications.

For the truth is that Depp, with all his unshakable Hollywood flair, does little to convey 'Americanness' in any particular way, or much of any other identity, subject position, outlook or emotion for that matter. Not unlike McGregor in *The Ghost Writer*, where the character's existential alienation served to explain both casting and acting, he basically goes through the motions. Whether the deadpan dryness of Depp's demeanor and performance was here by design or not—and Polanski's own accounts offer most contradictory arguments in this regard (see Rüdiger Stum 2005, 173; Meikle 2006, 291; James Greenberg 2013, 205)—most critics found it (negatively) in accord with the apathetic, sluggish tone of the whole movie (see Dargis 2000; Turan 2000; Mitchell 2000; Michael Wilmington 2000). In terms of the geopolitical and meta-cinematic imaginary of the film, on the other hand, Depp's lackadaisical enactment of all the clichés of the noir-detective type, from chain-smoking to cynical incredulity, can be seen to reflect the same

270

kind of postmodern cinematic vacuity we have seen the whole of New York to emanate—dazzling on the surface, but pretty much empty inside. Not even the gruesome murder of Corso's colleague and only friend Bernie (James Russo) triggers much of a reaction in him [fig. 4.13]. If all this is to be read as a scathing comment on the state of both the US and Hollywood by a highly self-aware European film, it should however also translate into how we evaluate the film's look at Europe itself. Corso remains after all the main diegetic focalizer in the film, as were his compatriots in *Frantic* and *Bitter Moon*. Yet where Walker's pathos and Oscar's depravity allowed in their own way for a rather consistent geopolitical decoding and critique of the ins and outs of the films' Parisian imagery, here we are left with little more than Corso's empty pecuniary motivations and Depp's empty Hollywood gaze to make sense of (and blame for) what is said and shown about turn-of-the-century Europe, to the point that whatever is to come out of it, good or bad, sensible or hyperbolic, we may have no choice but to interpret as Europe's very own doing.

Haunting Specters and Old-World Woes

As the film's moves to the continent, and while its generic foundations on noir and the fantastic remain largely intact, *The Ninth Gates* radically transmutes from a self-contained urban thriller into a cinematic travelogue of sorts, as it follows Corso moving from one unique European locale to the next in search of those damned books—from Spain through Portugal to France. Stylistically, changes are subtle but noteworthy. Colors are now warmer and more intense, shots longer and deeper, framings wider and the spaces more open, often involving the countryside [fig. 4.14]. This is to be sure as much a product of location shooting as a self-conscious practice, but it also works in the way of figuring Europe as a genuine place, with history and 'depth,' as it were, as opposed to the imagined

Fig. 4.14. Europe's 'aura:' Landscape as a cinematic metaphor for place.

'flatness' of the US. Dargis (2000) has referred to the film's various European settings as a "pleasant visual distraction," and wondered if they were the reason why the film appealed to Polanski in the first place. Visually pleasing as it may be, most would agree that the film's overall picture on the state of the continent is far from flattering—and now it would be our turn to wonder if that is why it received no funding from the EU. Morrison, for example, has seen in its disenchanted, fatalistic view of contemporary Europe the true subject of the film (2007, 103), while Caputo, building upon Morrison's argument, has found in globalization and late capitalism the main culprits, centering his arguments on how Corso embodies the two and relegating Europe to a background against which their ruthless practices and eroding effects are projected and made apparent (2012, 230-234).

A closer look than that of Dargis or Caputo at both the actual trajectory being drawn by the film and specific locations and places being assembled in the process suggests, or at least allows for, a more nuanced understanding, one where Europe is more than a visual distraction or just another passive victim of a free-floating, "aspatial" process always supposedly generated somewhere else (see Massey 2005, 81-89)— especially after seeing the usual geopolitical suspect, the US, not faring particularly well itself. Indeed, tracing the geohistorical map drawn by *The Ninth Gate* not only reveals

transnationalism to be as old as the nation-state itself and to be at the core of modern European history, culture, development and progress—thus in a way legitimizing 'archeologically' the integrative efforts of turn-of-the-century Europe. It also, equipped with the 'symbolic mapping tool' of the Devil, opens up a periodization of the trajectory and relentless process of 'creative destruction,' development and crisis, of Capital itself across the continent, from its early days in the late middle ages, through modernity's colonialist glories, to its supposedly, and in any case unevenly, waning present. That it should be religion that accompanies the commodification of culture in animating the film's cartographic journey does fulfil a generic function as part of the supernatural framework of the story, but it also makes historical sense as a foundation for the film's meta-cinematic edifice. On the one hand, it taps into the unique involvement of Christianity and the church in early forms of cultural production and reproduction in the continent—from scribe monks to Gutenberg's Bible—and, on the other, on the interplay between religion and commerce in the original (con)figurations of not only Europe but also globalization and the world system as a whole (see Mignolo 2000).

The image or map drawn by the film is inevitably partial and selective. What it includes and what it leaves out has to be approached, before anything else, as conditioned by the 'spatial' commitments of a French-Spanish co-production vis-à-vis its source material. In fact, understood as a symptom of late-twentieth-century Europe's integrative energies, Perez-Reverte's *El Club Dumas* is a more completist, and in a purely quantitative sense successful, affair in its cartographic evocations. The sheer number of places involved (though not all are visited) is overwhelming—Madrid, Lisbon, Paris, Sintra, Toledo, Basel, Barcelona, Moscow, Istanbul, Venice, Brussels, Rome, Marseille—to the point that, along with its endless historical and intertextual references, to overwhelm seems precisely to be the point: to produce a disarming surplus of

Fig. 4.15. On the dusty, old streets of Toledo.

information. Out of this surplus, however, an image of a long-evolving European whole does emerge, one at once riven and bound together by cross-border political and religious intrigues, wars, trade, travels and, above all, the writing, printing, studying and circulation of books. With, I would argue, the same mapping impulse at heart, and having already moved the story's initial setting from Madrid to New York, *The Ninth Gate* retains from the novel only the three original European locations of the three copies of the demonic book. Despite preserving the literary theme, the film displaces its spatial endeavors, concerns and discourses towards more readily cinematic devices—namely location shooting, architecture and casting.

The first of Corso's destinations, and, as it appears, the one furthest removed from any past grandeur, is Toledo. It is also his briefest sojourn of the lot. Barely an empty, narrow, stone-paved street papered with bullfighting posters and an old bookshop are featured, and yet an almost spectral quality is deftly conferred to the place, thanks to the mixture of a hazy, dusty ambiance, an oversaturated, soft-focus photography and the battered state of the centuries-old stone buildings of central Toledo—not far from the kind of glowing exhibition of decay one would find in a TV adaption of one of Agatha Christie's Egyptian stories [fig. 4.15]. If the narrative pretext of the visit is the

authentication of Balkan's copy of the book by its original sellers (whom the novel located in Madrid), its place in the geohistorical continuum of the film hints at both the earliest stages in the evolution of Europe's transnational history and planetary dominance as well as its earliest signs of decline. After all, Toledo's many riches date for the most part from, first, the three centuries (8th to 11th) it spent after its Visigoth era as a *taifa* or 'kingdom' during the Muslim rule over the Iberian Peninsula, where it became a hub of commercial, religious and cultural exchange between Europe, Asia and Africa; and, then, after the city was taken over by the Christian Castilla, and Muslims and Jews were either converted or expelled from the territory, from its time as the capital of not only what is now considered, *grosso modo*, as the first iteration of Spain as a geopolitical and cultural entity (the product of the merger of the kingdoms of Castilla and Aragón) but also of its transatlantic Empire during the sixteenth century when Charles V designated it "Imperial City" (Michael Weisser 1973) and Spain's domain in the continent, extending from Flanders through Southern Germany to Sicily, "seemed to be absorbing the political space of Europe [and the] world-Economy" (Wallerstein 2011, 170). Again, little of Toledo's 'imperial' past or trajectory as a densified cultural palimpsest, what Massey would rather call "a meeting-up of histories" (2005, 4), could be discerned from what is explicitly shown in the film—except perhaps for the 'Arabesque' look of the photography—and where only the distant shout of a mother and the ensuing running child proves it to be a still a living, inhabited place.

The focus of the scene thus quickly turns onto the antique bookshop itself, where Corso meets the owners, twin brothers Pedro and Pablo Ceniza, both played, thanks to digital effects, by the same actor, José López Rodero [fig. 4.16]. As in the case of Holt (Andrew Telfer), underneath all the talk about ancient demonic literature, casting spells the name of the game. For Rodero is again no professional actor, but the *The Ninth Gate*'s

production manager in Spain. Story has it that Polanski saw him on set, liked his face and thought he fitted the part, but the parallels with Holt only reinforce the meta-cinematic undercurrents of the move (Rodero 2016). If Holt, a US American, had spent most of his career in France working with the likes of René Clement and Louis Malle, Rodero's career traces the Euro-American connection the other way around, having worked in various capacities in some of the biggest Hollywood productions of the 1960s and 1970s in Spain, from *Spartacus* (Stanely Kubrick, 1960) to *Papillon* (Franklin J. Schaffner, 1973). Add to this that one of the bookseller brothers is dubbed by Polanski himself and that they are the ones who tell Corso (and us) to focus on the engravings over the texts, and something of a motif may start to become apparent. The gesture could very well be read not only as an explicit signal to take the film's own narrative as a bit of a red herring and concentrate on its images, but also to keep an eye on the rest of the film's European cast for guidance. Indeed, the hastiest of analyses in this line reveals right away a consistently jumbled-up assemblage of characters, names and performers, which, as a whole, would seem to have in the cementing and amplification of the film's mapping of Europe's cinematic and historical transnationality its central, driving logic.

Surely, not all cases function in the same way, and it would be difficult to extract from the cast's miniature socio-spatial totality anything resembling the kind of unified collectivity or space Europe was at such pains to film itself into existence instead of that messy, incoherent hodgepodge or indeed 'pudding' of nationalities, histories, trajectories and relations it was much closer to being [figs. 4.16-4.19]. And, in any case, as Massey writes, maps, of whatever kind, do not have to pretend closure or coherence to work (2005, 109). Balkan's very name, for one, kept from the novel but attached to a different character, is as conspicuous as it is gratuitous, but its sheer mention (no less than eighteen times in the film, once even spelled) can be seen to work as an insistent if utterly

disconnected allusion to the floating shadow of Europe's war-torn Eastern periphery in a film which at no point moves beyond France—"where are you?" Corso repeatedly asks him on the phone. Then is the case of Liana Telfer, a descendant of the French nobility (Saint Martin being her maiden name) but who we are told had to marry a wealthy US American to save her family's castle [fig. 4.17]. Attentive spectators might have noticed that she is played not by a French actor but by a Swedish one in Olin, explicable as yet another overextended cartographic link, this time to the Scandinavian North, but not totally out of type or place, as she had spent the greater part of the previous decade playing the default displaced European: a Czech émigré in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (Philip Kaufman, 1988), a Polish Holocaust survivor in the US in *Enemies: A Love story* (Paul Mazursky, 1989), two Swedish expats in *Havana* (Sydney Pollack, 1990) and in *Night Falls on Mahattan* (Sidney Lumet, 1996), a Russian-American hitwoman in *Romeo is Bleeding* (Peter Medak, 1993), and a second generation Polish woman in the US in *Polish Wedding* (Theresa Connelly, 1998). Typecasting must be also part of the reason behind the choice of Jack Taylor as Victor Fargas, the fallen Portuguese aristocrat whose estate and book collection Corso goes on to visit in Sintra [fig. 4.18]. US American, Taylor, whom IMDb tells us must have coincided with Rodero on the Andalusian sets of

Cleopatra (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1963) and *Conan the Barbarian* (John Milius, 1982), had made his career working first in Mexican and then Spanish B-horror and exploitation cinema, the latter of which, at least prior to Franco's death, was indeed produced and shot all across Europe. Danny Shipka, with a few words on Taylor himself, has written explicitly about the "multinational spirit" of what he calls "Eurocult" and its role in forging an overarching European cinematic consciousness, imagery and industry decades before the EU set out to do it (2011, 310-313). Finally, genre considerations seem also to accompany the expanded geohistorical theme in the casting of British actor Barbara Jefford, a veteran from the Royal Shakespeare Company, television, voice acting and also Hammer Films, to play German Baroness Kessler of Paris [fig. 4.19], owner of one of the books and quite likely a Nazi sympathizer. Not only does she admits having met and fallen in love with the Devil when she was 15, and the dates match, but is also barely half an arm away from going full *Sieg Heil* when, angry, she raises her stump straight up to signal Corso out of her library after discovering he is working for Balkan.

If evoking (at least part of) the convoluted transnational history of the continent via film history underlies all these casting games, condensed in the sheer amount of fake accents involved, the fact that none of these characters make it to the end of the movie (only in the case of the Ceniza brothers is their death left to speculation, when in Corso's second visit to Toledo he finds their bookshop being totally dismantled) cannot but suggest at the very least a doubtful prospect for Europe and its cinemas—which then begs the question about how much of it, if anything, is indeed worth mourning (Morrison 2007, 103). For as much professional respect and admiration underlies the otherwise grotesque way in which Rodero, Taylor and Jefford are characterized in the film, they are hardly made to embody anybody's vision of what a future may or even should look like—they are just remnants from an irremediably fading world.

Behind Corso's unyielding, perhaps self-reflexively bespectacled, gaze, there is also little reflection or indeed lamentation in the film at the visions of architectural neglect and destruction that furnish it [fig. 4.20]. Just as he gets out of the Toledo bookshop Corso is almost crushed by a collapsing scaffolding—itself a common vision in a Spain deep into a so-called 'construction bubble' and whose bursting come, again, the 2008 global mortgage crisis would only deepen the country's recession further than most in the continent—and yet all we get from him to process the episode is a mildly agitated, incredulous look back and bit of panting. More time and attention are devoted to the decaying Fargas *Quinta* in Sintra (in reality the so-called Chalet Biester), where despite a gloomier take on both the character and his nearly vacated estate and library, an equally blasé, fact-of-life perspective on decay dominates. "Old families are like ancient civilizations, they wither and die," a fully accepting, almost self-complacent Fargas admits to Corso. Still, enough of the building and its natural surroundings is featured to suggest more than some arbitrary display of splendor in decline. The town of Sintra itself, like Toledo a UNESCO World Heritage site, would allow for its own geohistorical reasoning, but a more 'located' account suffices here to unearth the markedly 'European' significance of the place.

Fig. 4.21. The Chalet Biester: a transnational palimpsest of nature and culture.

Surely not as famous as the Palácio da Pena barely a kilometer away and in the same park, the Chalet Biester is nonetheless a unique, if, built in 1890, somewhat late testament to Portugal's colonial riches as well as the transnational circulation of both capital and artistry across nineteenth century Europe [fig. 4.21]. Ivan Moure Pazos relates the history of what he describes as an "intricate spatial tableau" (2014, 103, my translation). Thus, he details, the chalet was commissioned by a German entrepreneur (Frederico Biester), built by a Portuguese architect (Jose Luis Monteiro), in the British, Neo-Gothic and Neo-Romantic Queen Anne style but also with shades of Central-European, "alpine" typology, with interiors conceived by an Italian designer (Luigi Manini) alongside a Portuguese cabinetmaker (Leandro Braga) and gardens by a French landscaper (François Nogré) (Pazos 2014, 103-104). If, compared to Toledo, the encoded historical space is now one of an already-fully nationalized but culturally and economically porous Europe, where palaces as well as the very financing of art were less and less the realm of the aristocracy and more of a rising, often transnational bourgeoisie, the 'jungle' quality of the villa's daunting natural scenery is not just a sign of neglect or a Romanticized view of wild, sprouting vegetation. While the various palm trees of the garden stand out (of place) especially, the fact is that much of the flora in the area is, or

at least was, not indigenous. Not unlike the Japanese carps swimming in the garden's ornamental fishpond where Corso finds Fargas' corpse in his second visit to the villa, many of the plants are 'exotic' imports from around the world brought in a few decades earlier by prince Fernando II to the surrounding Parque da Pena; from Brazil, predictably, but also North America, Australia, China, Japan and South Africa, among others.[15] Seeing the globally mixed, post-colonial vegetation overtaking this proud Pan-European collage of the arts from within looks too much like geopolitical metaphor in a film with so little in the way of direct elucidations as well as a mildly relieving sign of life in a film so infatuated with images of death.

And so, although in purely visual and generic terms its decadent, Gothic atmosphere, not to mention its beauty, explains its memorable presence in the film, again it is its unique dimension as a microscomic chronotope of a certain worldview and system, its past and its present, that is of true interest for us. As for the story, by now Corso already knows that it is the books' drawings that really matter in all this, that each of the three books contains three unique ones allegedly drawn by Lucifer himself (LCF), that bringing the nine back together may or may not trigger some supernatural event and that somebody out there has no qualms to kill to get them—Balkan, surely, but not only him. Meanwhile, Seigner's mysteriously unnamed character ('The Girl,' according to the credits), first seen at Balkan's lecture in New York, has reappeared in Portugal as a willing and resourceful aid to Corso, but with no clear motives—except, apparently, assuring that he fulfills his task: she scares away Telfer's goon, leads Corso into the Fargas house a second time to find the owner's drowned body and his copy of the book burnt, missing the engravings, and then takes him to the plane to what is supposed to be the last stop of the trip, Paris. Then, just after they arrive, and during our first and only encounter with an actual

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[15] Floral information collected from the official catalogue of the Chalet, available online here: https://issuu.com/chaletbiester/docs/chalet_biester_the_book_eng_final_l

geopolitical border in the form of the airport customs which, as a non-EU citizen moving in the Schengen Area, Corso has to go through, the Girl—mysterious, but still French by any account—disappears once again for a while. With half of the movie—if admittedly not its best—still to go, the film's own geographical biases start to show to the point that, save for the little more than the 20 minutes spent between Portugal and Spain, the whole thing could easily be read as yet another Franco-American affair to add to Polanski's count, with a small detour around the middle.

Indeed, right from Seigner's very first appearance in NY, and as we hear Balkan going solemnly through the work of some pioneering French medieval author on the history of evil, a certain gravitational pull appears at work that assures that sooner or later the film is going to end up in France, that it is there that the solution to the whole mystery resides—of the books, but perhaps also of European culture if not Western civilization as a whole. If, narrative aside, Corso's trajectory follows as suggested a periodizing logic, tracing modern history on the back of the Devil, something of a parallel spatial route, internal to Europe, is meanwhile also drawn, and that is the old one from periphery to center—geographically, to begin with, but also spiritually. In tune with its initial figuration as the only 'bordered' space in the film, the portrayal of France unfolds in more 'exceptional' terms. Paris, for starters, has little to no shade of the elegiac atmosphere of Corso' previous visits nor does it fall into either the eroticized fetishization of *Bitter Moon* or the darkened urban confusion of *Frantic*. The film photography is still high-key and overexposed but comparatively natural, streets are bustling with people and traffic, a larger number of sites and spots are included, though all in the city center, a variety of local characters have lines and substance and, as Caputo has noted, Francs are recurrently featured as a "neat time-stamp marking the film's *fin-de-siècle* setting" ahead of the

Fig. 4.22. Back in transnational Paris.

introduction of the Euro only two years later (2012, 231) [fig. 4.22]. Corso is even forced to speak French once or twice. As for the object of the visit, Baroness Kessler's library and her copy of the book, the film locates them in yet another unique, but this time perfectly preserved, historical building: the Hôtel de Lauzun, a luxurious aristocratic apartment, or *hôtel particulier*, located on the Seine's Île St Louis, dating from the times of Louis XIV, expropriated after the French Revolution and, since 1928, owned by the city of Paris.[16] Apart from its lavishly decorated interiors, the building is mostly known for having housed during the 1840s the infamous '*club des Haschichins*,' where some of the most prominent French intellectuals of the time (Hugo, Flaubert, Dumas and Baudelaire among them) met to experiment with the drugs being brought by the Napoleonic troops coming back from their various campaigns in Northern Africa (Łukasz Kamieński 2016, 55-57).

As a hotbed of intoxicated artistic creativity and the place where Baudelaire is said to have written most of *Les fleurs du mal*, his magnum opus and an undisputed landmark of French literature, the site can be seen to suggest, once again, the dubious foundations of any rigid and self-enclosed understanding of national or indeed European cultural

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[16] https://www.paris-iea.fr/en/presentation-of-the-institute/the-hotel-de-lauzun

particularity. As the fictional property of a Nazi, on the other hand, its geographical and historical implications are more explicit; namely the haunting legacy of the German occupation in the city, in France and in Europe. When the Baroness proudly claims having earned "a million" writing about the Devil, which seems a direct reference to the millennial demonic craze alluded to above, it is not difficult to extrapolate and guess which single historical incarnation of 'evil' is indeed of sufficient cultural and commercial appeal to make a student of it a millionaire—before 9/11, at least.

After the somewhat expectable but sudden murder of Kessler, to which Corso wakes up after having been knocked unconscious in her library, now in flames, the film's French journey extends from Paris to two more locations, each one, yet again, with as overdetermined a cultural and geohistorical signification as any other in the film. The first is the Château de Ferrières, a few kilometers east of Paris, where the film's demonic invocation ritual is set to take place. In reality, though, it turns out to be only an excuse for decadent "orgies of aging flesh," as Balkan claims after he breaks into the ceremony and retrieves his copy of the book from Telfer, before he grotesquely strangles her in front of all attendees with her own pentacle pendant. In many ways, the Château is but an overblown reprise and reworking of the meanings of the Chalet Biester—only much bigger, furnished and with much better tamed gardens [fig. 4.23]. For starters, Ferrières was, like Biester, a foreign property, commissioned by no other than the German-Jewish Rothschild banking family in the mid-nineteenth century. By then not only was their fortune already the largest in the world, built on their pioneering activities as transnational bankers and financial lenders, working with private enterprises as well as states, but also their family had, in the old feudal way of arranged marriages, spread and thrived all across Europe, most notably in France and the UK (see Niall Ferguson 2000). It is not difficult

to find all kinds of new and old conspiracy theories—all too often with an anti-Semitic strain—linking the Rothschilds with some occultist form of the so-called Deep State—arguably incorporated into the film's own parodic take on satanism—but their more mundane role in the evolution of the capitalist World System is undoubted. According to Ferguson's extensive account of the family's history, the very design of Ferrières, one of the biggest and most luxurious châteaus in France, and custom-made in the aristocratic image of the Rothschilds' Mentmore Towers in Buckinghamshire, England, was itslef conceived as a symbol of the family's "global influence" in the form of "an eclectic mixture of French, Italian and English styles," complete, originally, with its own collection of exotic fauna (2000, 47-48). Throughout the years, the building would become a privileged witness of European history and the capricious interests of the capital stirring it, famously housing both sides of the Franco-Prussian conflict; first Napoleon III for a short visit in 1862, and then Bismarck and his troops between 1870 and 1871 during the war itself, whose peace agreement, i.e. France's rendition, was outlined at the estate itself (Ferguson 2000, 108, 200). Later highlights in the building's transnational trajectory include being occupied and looted by the Germans during WWII and the now-legendary

surrealist costume ball the Rothschilds hosted there in 1972, with guests ranging from Dalí to Audrey Hepburn.

In the film, the *château*, by then donated to the University of Paris, is said to belong to an impoverished French aristocratic family, the Saint Martins (sharing their name with its fictional location), which only Liana's marriage to a rich US American salvages from bankruptcy. This is of course not the first time we have seen France's dependency on the US thematized in a Polanski film, but the building's singular history opens up a more contradictory sociohistorical reading. For the Rothschilds, unlike their fictional counterpart in the Saint Martins, were no old European aristocrats, despite both what the building insinuates and their noble-like status in various countries, but corporate, bourgeois capitalists, and their fictional decay could not merely be explained as a delayed upshot of the gradual termination of feudalism in Europe—especially in France. Indeed, as Ferguson relates, it was the 1980s socialist rounds of nationalizations in the country that hit their business the hardest, but only to resurge again with Chirac's electoral victory in 1986 and the return to neoliberal privatization (2000, 495-497).

All this brings up once again the fundamental question of what exactly it is that Europe whose decline *The Ninth Gate* seems so fixated in staging. Spatially speaking, it is hardly one of discrete, self-enclosed national societies, economies and cultures. As the film has made a point of emphasizing, money, politics and art have been operating in various fluctuating transnational relations and "power-geometries" (Massey 2005) across the continent and beyond for centuries. Nor seems this supposedly fading Europe the opposite, namely some once-harmonious whole being now threatened by the evils of external interference and internal division. If Balkan's allegorical role is somehow a synthesis of both—in the form of US American imperialism and, if only nominally, balkanization—he is scarcely worse, and in the end fares no better, than the sad, old,

fractured collection of European characters he outdoes and dispatches on the way to those much-coveted engravings. More telling of the intriguing approach of *The Ninth Gate* to Europe's millennial woes is the fact that, for all the meaning it has invested in location shooting and architecture, virtually none of the buildings featured are less than a century old, as if (Western) Europe's image of itself had been suspended in some nineteenth century space-time between the rise of the bourgeois state and the end of colonialism, when the fate and specifically the decline of the aristocracy was still a genuine, working signifier for changing times in the continent and much of the world. Meta-cinematic references necessarily update the film's temporality, but only so much—mainly to 1940s Hollywood noir and 1970s 'Eurocult,' neither of which enters in significant conflict with the anachronistic framework of the film—as does some of the everyday life whimsically inserted on the margins of the narrative, mostly in Paris, with its glimpses of Japanese tourism and a Middle Eastern high roller. Outside of that, only the veiled reference to Nazism incarnated in the German Baroness (veiled to the point that no critic appears to have noticed it) and the Balkan name (equally overlooked) seems to suggest anything other than a hundred-year imaginary void in the continent. On the face of it, it is almost as if the twentieth century had never happened, which makes it all the more difficult to work out what is actually 'contemporary' about this Europe, its alleged falloff and millennial identity crisis. If there is something actually being now lost or threatened, what is it, exactly? The film gives few clues. When Morrison rightly senses the film's concern with "the end of a certain idea of Europe," it is symptomatic that he never goes further into it (2007, 103). Even the running concerns around cultural commodification, in all their cinematic currency and allegorical potential, lose their topicality when there is seemingly no instance of earlier art featured in the film which was not been made or used at the service of finance or power in one way or another.

The Ninth Gate's playful embrace of postmodern aesthetics makes historical slippages almost expectable, if not mandatory, but it also means that the line between reproduction and critique may be at times so thin and shaky as to be hardly traceable, which in this case makes it tough to argue whether the film is playing into Europe's arrested imagination or putting it on ironic, self-conscious display. Everything would seem to point to the latter, although some tension between both, at least in effect, is probably closer to the truth. For even self-consciousness (that impossible notion that a text or an author knows fully and 'exactly' what it is doing) cannot in itself justify and explain everything and opens up contradictorily as soon as we take it seriously. Simply put, either the film knows or thinks there is nothing to fear or lament regarding the fate of Europe as it makes its way into the new century, which then frames its decadent imagery as full-blown parody; or, on the contrary, it does share in a sense of loss and melancholy without a definite, discernable grounding, one which only a deliberate return to a past moment of glorious European splendor and the anachronistic restaging of its decay—in place of a genuine and more challenging engagement with the present—is able to codify and make apparent. But then a third, dialectical option emerges, whereby it is precisely that old, deeply-ingrained, anachronistic image of splendor that is the point, but in a way in which the film, in the paradoxically spectacular staging of its decay, at once derides and legitimizes. It may be telling of the film's dubious stance that what was in origin an ambivalent sign of progress—the withering of the landed gentry being coterminous with the emerging project of European Modernity—has turned into an unmitigated symbol of decline, with no apparent hints of anything new about to replace it. Not only that: the fact that both the Biester and Ferrières estates are not and never were aristocratic properties, as they are made to be in the film, but imitations of their opulence by a rising transnational bourgeoisie, pushes the diegetic/extradiegetic temporality of *The*

Ninth Gate's Europe into further slippages and contradictions. For if the nineteenth century bourgeois ideals of prosperity were caught up in those of the same class and system they were meant to supersede—which compels one to speculate on what other things also remained—the film seems itself, in its own regressive fixation with the fate of the aristocracy, unable or unwilling to face directly the now and, from it, try to look forward.

There are of course enough sociohistorical reasons to choose from to explain Europe's disoriented sense of loss at the time and the film's evasive take on it. If we were to follow Galt, and surely in spite of Polanski, the 'present,' real-world grounding of that sense of loss would be political, namely the precarious state of the Left in Post-Wall Europe, resulting in an ambiguous sense of cultural and ideological disenchantment (2006, 20-22). For the failure of the Socialist project was more generally the ultimate confirmation of the end of the grand, modern European Utopias and the curtailing of the continent's far-reaching political and ideological horizons, for itself and the world, to be replaced by the admittedly more modest projects of a common currency, internal mobility and the vague notion of solidarity across borders. Sharing the geopolitical blame for all this would be globalization's threat to the European and, through the European, to the national; the defiant rise of Third World, post-colonial economies and peoples; or, again, the looming menace of the US's "new imperialism" (Harvey 2003), traces of all of which can be found peppered here and there across the film, but never to the point of one of them becoming a consistent, reliable theme or motif, except perhaps in their combination. If anything, it is ("what else?") the creatively destructive, planet-spinning, all-consuming march of Capital, in which, the film suggests, there is essentially little novelty, that works to tie it all up together, even as it is reduced to a purely narrative device in the money-

form, transmuted into its metaphysical spin-off in the Devil, or projected culturally into fetishized literary objects and old architectural marvels.

The End

The combination of both the film's ambivalent, ironic distance towards its own material and Europe's end-of-century uncertainty and confusion makes it almost delusory to expect any kind of old-fashioned, productive resolution or final argument to be brought home by the film, but *The Ninth Gate* would seem to have incorporated its own ideological and Europe's millennial muddle into its very structure. Thus, the last quarter of the film is messy, full of broken episodes, dubious impetuses, hollow symbolisms, lousy coincidences, spatio-narrative shortcuts and dead ends. After the deranged scenes at Ferrières and Balkan's triumphant departure with the book, Corso swiftly ditches any monetary aspiration and notion of self-preservation and resolves to get the engravings for himself, even if he does not seem to be able to explain why. When, seeing him chase after Balkan, the Girl asks him "what more do you want?," Corso once again deflects the answer: "you know what." A car chase through the French countryside then ensues, but it leads nowhere except to a (undoubtedly paid-for) display of the nimble off-road aptitudes of Balkan's Land Rover. Then, during an episode at a small village *bistro*, brimming over with contrived local color, Corso finds among his papers Balkan's postcard of a mysterious medieval castle, which a foreboding soundtrack turns into the most reliable of leads, and Corso asks the owners for directions. The following sequence portrays his trip to the castle as a fanciful, back-road hitchhiking journey seemingly lasting a few hours. In reality, however, Corso has crossed virtually the whole of France, top to bottom. His destination, 900km away from Ferrières, and the last of the film's

Fig. 4.24. A glowing crimson sky hovers over the remote château.

grand, majestic European locations, is one of the many twelfth-century Cathar fortresses still standing near Carcassonne, in the South Eastern region of Languedoc [fig. 24].

The fortress, the Château de Puivert, is manifestly the oldest structure in the film, and so one is inevitably lured to take it a some kind of primordial kernel of meaning, the foundation or starting point of the film's spatio-temporal imaginary—the place where it all (France and by extension Europe) began. If that is indeed the case, the image is disquieting at best. Along with the many other similar castles of the region, Puivert was the theater to the early thirteenth-century battle between the Church of Rome and the rivaling 'heretic' Gnostic faction of the Cathars, at the time prevalent in the region. The latter doctrine, having arrived from the Balkans, through Italy to Southern France (unfit as the terminology is for the time), brought with it heterodox interpretation of the scriptures which, most notably, considered the physical world not God's but the Devil's creation and which, in turn, led to their treatment of all materiality as fundamentally evil (Michael Frassetto 2007, 79). So vital was apparently the threat of their ascetic, pacifist dogma to the Church that a Crusade was declared by the Vatican in 1209 against it, the first ever conducted within the West and against a non-Muslim enemy (Sean Martin 2005, 12). The ulterior motives of the ensuing two decades of carnage, though different from

the private land-hoarding interests that drove most Crusades to the Orient (see Benno Teschke 2003, 103), are today widely acknowledged. Languedoc's religious heterodoxy, "a voluble anomaly in the chorus of European Christianity" (Stephen O'Shea 2001, 9), was but the spiritual version of the region's ambiguous geopolitical placement in a volatile continental map with no fixed boundaries. Extensively open to the Mediterranean, neighboring both to the southern kingdom of Aragón and Barcelona, to which in many ways it belonged and with which it shared a culture and a language, and the Holy Roman Empire to the East, and thus completely closing the exit to the sea of the northern kingdom of France, Languedoc, and Occitanie more generally, was a somewhat independent entity occupying a pivotal geographical location (Laurence W. Marvin 2008, 9). In spite of its professed religious motivations, overdetermined as they themselves were, before the end of its first year the so-called Albigensian Crusade had already turned from a sacred to a territorial affair funded and geared by the French Crown towards its own expansion south of the Loire (Marvin 2008, 305-310). If the Crusade eventually failed in its pious goals, as the Cathar faith survived in the region well into the fourteenth century, its geopolitical consequences were enormous: Occitanie was eventually swallowed whole by the French Kingdom, not only setting the basis for the Mediterranean contours and eventual colonial outlet for the future state of France as well as the gradual transformation of the Pyrenees from a pesky natural accident into one of the foundational and most emblematic (if certainly not undisputed) borders in the continent for centuries to come, but also pushing Aragón's ambitions and energies from north to south towards a recedingly Muslim Iberian Peninsula and, well, the rest is history.

In many ways, then, Puivert (tellingly replacing the novel's original ending in Toledo) is a fitting last spatial vignette to close out the film's European retable, in a way that gets to remain true to both its mystical veneer and cartographic underpinnings. What

to make of it narratively and discursively the film does not seem so certain. At his arrival at the castle, Corso finds Balkan alone setting out to perform a ritual with the nine engravings and, after a pitiful attempt at stealing them from him and a bit of a scuffle, he gets his legs stuck in the decrepit wooden floors and cannot but witness Balkan do his thing, much to the latter's delight. The ritual turns out badly, however, with Balkan setting himself and the castle on fire and Corso fleeing the scene, but not before getting hold of the engravings. Back inside Balkan's car, the Girl magically reappears to seductively remove Corso's trembling cigarette from his mouth and lure him into copulation in front of the blazing fortress. The ensuing images are as powerful as they are contrived and what seems to be the scene's true reason of being beyond the sheer display of nudity, namely the confirmation of the Girl's supernatural perhaps even demonic identity, is at this point less significant than it may appear to be. The morning after, as they stop at a gas station (again an episode only justifiable by the ample display of the oil company) the Girl disappears yet again, leaving Corso with one last clue: Balkan's ritual failed because one of the engravings was a forgery and the real one is still in Toledo. The film then briefly cuts to Toledo, where Corso retrieves the last engraving from a now dismantled Ceniza bookshop, and then back to Puivert, seemingly unaffected by the fire, where we see him walking back into the castle where a blinding, almost celestial light welcomes him before bathing the whole screen in a final fade to white [fig. 25].

Setting aside its purely mystical foundation, if it indeed has any, the scene would appear to be yet another instance of Polanski's 'ambiguous endings' motif. Compared to those of, say, *Repulsion, Rosemary's Baby* or *Death and the Maiden*, however, this time around the feeling is that of an utter formal gimmick, almost a self-indulgent intertextual retreat into Polanski's own authorial mannerisms. Caputo, who delves into a possible religious reading (i.e. Corso being saved by the Devil), has noted the alienating quality of

the ending, but still granted it a concrete meaning in tune with the perceptual and psychological concerns of his analysis. According to it, Corso's adventures have functioned as a journey towards intellectual and perceptual clarity whose last reward is his ability to break from the hold of the camera as the "object" of the gaze and his transformation into a "pure subject," while we, poor unenlightened spectators, are frustratingly left behind (Caputo 2012, 244-245). Insofar as it does call for speculation, even if only to frustrate it, making any interpretation of it inevitably conditioned by one's analytical framework or perspective, I am inclined however to approach the ending's ambiguity in and of itself; not as the ostensibly intriguing wrapping of some other, ultimately quite categorical message but, on the contrary, and as could be argued of the whole spatio-narrative clutter that precedes it, an index of the resistance of the film to produce such a message and its subsequent and rather formulaic retreat into sheer cinematic grammar—an action scene, a sex scene and a fade to white.

In our case, the gesture must be framed, as suggested, within both the film's aesthetic framework, with its curious blend of authorial license and postmodern disengagement—"ambivalence without consequences, the delights of the dilemma," as John Coughie put it (1992, 39)—and the topic at hand, namely Europe's very own doubts

about its future, role and place in the world in the face of that imaginary deadline or vanishing point which was the advent of the new century and millennium. Neither of those appear to grant, in themselves or combined, the basis, whether historical or ideological, for an old-fashioned resolution of the kind that suggests both what might be coming after and how to critically look back at what came before, and the film seems unconcerned with getting its hands dirty by supplementing it. After more than two hours, the only thing the film seems certain of or care for is that it has to end—somehow. But even in this the film seems symptomatic of Europe's millennial predicament. As Baudrillard put it in a short 1998 piece: "no matter which event we are referring to—internet, globalization, Europe, the single currency, cloning, scandals—the only important outcome at the century's end is precisely that: the end of the century." "The anticipated Void of the Year 2000," he continued, "as if it were an approaching asteroid" made the future but a fiction, virtual reality, reflecting any forward thinking backwards instead, and leaving the mind no choice but a retrospective movement towards past history and "a return to origins" and the twentieth century in particular, if only to expiate its crimes and erase its marks. The singularity of *The Ninth Gate* is that, in performing that regression, the film should bypass precisely that one most pressing and traumatic epoch in the continent, but in a way that retains it as something of an absent cause; discernable in the haunting specters of uncertainty and disenchantment that permeate its images and the cartographic urges that drive its narrative, but still simply too vivid, too close and too personal to be figured and worked out into a lesson that could guide Europe's precarious path into the blinding world of the future.

Europe Year Zero: *The Pianist*

If *The Ninth Gate*'s 'dis-imagination' of the twentieth century was at odds, perhaps deliberately so, with the general cultural and cinematographic context it emerged from, Polanski's next film, 2002's Holocaust survival story *The Pianist*, confronts it head on. As Galt writes channeling Foucault, a "battle" had long been raging in Europe over "popular memory" and twentieth century history was the front line (2006, 11-14). At stake, scholars as well as politicians and artists recognized, was more than some documentarian reconsideration of the recent continental past or even the "therapeutic" settling of historical accounts Baudrillard (1998) was writing about. The very future of European integration, if there was to be one, was very much in question. It is no coincidence, writes Halle, that the 1990s and early 2000s in particular, the times of the foundation and consolidation of the EU, would witness the golden age of the "historical genre" across the continent, not just in terms of quantity but also popularity, which is all the more significant for this author considering the traditional bond between the genre and the national (2008, 89-128). If there were institutional interests involved in the production of historical tales of transnational conjunction and interdependence, ambivalent as these might turn out to be, these were met by a coalescing film industry in need of a galvanizing project and a receptive audience. No moment of transnational 'conjuncture' found itself returned to as often and as successfully in this period as that comprising the years before, during and immediately after the Second World War. This fascination is undoubtedly overdetermined and conflicted and has been mediated cinematically by a breadth of ideological, aesthetic and affective lenses. Horror, trauma, revulsion, confusion, anguish, loss, grief, guilt, anger, hatred, resentment, alienation, nostalgia, pride, compassion, forgiveness, hope and optimism among others crisscross Post-Wall cinematic imaginaries of WWII in Europe—an emotional latitude that may

stand also for a moral and political one and that it alone may serve to both justify and question the period's cultural preeminence, not only in the cinema.

Much scholarly interest on the issue, at least within cultural studies, has concentrated on the evolving, and highly malleable, connections established between then and now; on the period's ambivalent mobilization as the historical key for the present. Among the most somber, difficult and still today urgent lessons emerging from this exercise, argues John Mowitt, is the realization that the conditions that produced calamities like Fascism and the Holocaust "arose in a world that *remains* ours" (2007, 140, his emphasis). In the context of a Post-Wall Europe immersed in the process of unification, it is safe to say that the dominant discourse evolved in somewhat different terms. If the ideational goal has been the fashioning of a "We-identity" (Probst 2003, 46), in the sense of a collective European subject, this is a 'we' who remembers, as it were, but also one expected to do it from a double, ambivalent distance; as both increasingly *different*, in generational terms, from the one that actually lived through and remembers that era, and *differentiated*, hopefully critically, from the one that engendered it. A complex twofold move is thus necessarily involved, whereby contemporary European identity is meant to find itself at the same time grounded in a certain common past and defined in opposition to it—'Never again' became the slogan in institutional commemorations of the Holocaust. Resorting to WWII and the Holocaust in particular as a "negative founding act" of the EU, as Probst calls it (2003, 54), confronts the further problem of negotiating the many, often deeply conflicting perspectives and indeed memories different countries have of them. It could indeed be (well) argued that the identities, not to mention geography and political trajectory, of countries like Germany, Poland, Austria, France, Italy, Switzerland, Spain and the UK, to name a few, have all

evolved to a larger or lesser extent in relation to their incommensurable experiences of that period—and the same could be said for their respective cinemas.

WWII, fascism and the Holocaust were after all not new to the European screens. Aside from the ample cinematic record that the Nazis themselves produced, the slew of newsreel, documentary and archival material made public throughout the years on television, from Alain Resnais' *Nuit et brouillard* (1955) to Claude Landsman's *Shoah* (1985), the influx of Hollywood movies on the war, movements like the Italian Neorealism of the 1940s, the Polish School of the 1950s and 1960s and the New German Cinema of the 1970s, for instance, all had, and became largely defined by, their various takes on the period—from the episodic, cross-cultural war encounters of Roberto Rossellini's *Paisà* (1946); through the young, working-class, anti-fascist heroics of Andrzej Wajda's *A Generation* (1955); to the epic, trauma-infused, metahistorical theatrical surrealism of Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's *Our Hitler: A Film From Germany* (1977). What is new of the post-Wall, integration years, however, is precisely the gradual reworking of those events from a relatively disaggregated collection of national experiences, discourses and representations into a single, collective affair that could, in its present reappraisal, bring a certain notion of a European whole into view (Elsaesser 2005, 72-74). What that notion is, or whose, has been the subject of long public, academic and cinematic debates to which this introduction could never do full justice. For example, in a list that includes the more general category of 'War films' alongside those of WWII and the Holocaust, Halle counts in the hundreds the features produced and circulated between 1990 and 2001 in the Euro-American cinematic market (2008, 90). Just to mention a few notable examples on the European side of things, these include *Europa Europa* (Agnieszka Holland, 1990), *Korczak* (Wajda, 1990), *Europa* (Lars Von Trier, 1991), *Stalingrad* (Joseph Vilsmaier, 1993), *The Ogre* (Volker Schlöndorff, 1996), *Life*

is Beautiful (Roberto Benigni, 1997), *Bent* (Sean Mathias, 1997), *The Truce* (Francesco Rosi, 1997), *Train of Life* (Radu Mihailenau, 1998), *Moloch* (Alexander Sokurov, 1999), *Sunshine* (István Szabó, 1999) and *Tea with Mussolini* (Franco Zeffirelli, 1999). What Halle goes on to call "the possibility of a transnational perspective" was largely played out through their images and stories, legitimized by the names of seasoned, well-respected auteurs, the joint involvement of various national institutions and the Eurimages seal of approval. Halle is however quick to put a caveat to idealizations. While no strong ideological enforcement was in play, Eurimages' concern with profitability across borders, along with the demands of an emerging transnational market where cultural affiliations as well as strategic commercial and political alliances were very much on the line, effected their own restrictions, basically compelling filmmakers to adopt the "broadest possible unified imagination," something of a lowest common aesthetic and ideological denominator (Halle 2008, 93). While looking at some of the films in the above list—I am thinking about *Europa* and *Life is Beautiful*, for example—puts a big question mark on unduly overarching assessments, Halle's focus is on dominant patterns over unorthodoxies, and in this sense his arguments are appropriately justified.

Before turning to *The Pianist* as a text, the degree to which it conforms or not to the specifics of Halle's aesthetic/ideological formulation, and the implications it has for the image of Europe and its past it projects, it is worth considering for a moment the film's larger dimension as a complete cinematic artifact. By this I mean not only its production intricacies, remarkable in themselves, but also the broader constellation of 'paratextual' relations and meanings established around the film proper. Before the Palme D'Or and the Oscars, even before it hit the screens, *The Pianist* already had the makings of a cultural 'event' of the kind a Polanski film had not generated in decades, maybe ever. Moving across the sociopolitical conditions framing the film, its production history, the

promotional and critical account built around it and what its images actually ended up showing we may get a grasp of the unique placement and involvement of *The Pianist* in mediating the material and imaginary landscape of a unifying (and expanding) European space, as well as a uniquely emphatic testament to Lucia Nagib's succinct yet pregnant reminder that "making films is making history" (2011, 15).

(Transnational) Filmmaking as (Transnational) History-making

Public discussion on *The Pianist* can be traced as far back as the promotional tour of *The Ninth Gate*. By then the ground was already being laid in terms of not only what audiences and critics should expect from the film, but also how to interpret it. *The Pianist* occupies for example much of Polanski's 2000 interview with the Rome correspondent of the *New York Times*, while *The Ninth Gate*, still to be released in the US and, one assumes, the intended subject of their encounter, is quickly dispatched as silly, harmless fun—"I needed work" he practically apologizes at one point (Alessandra Stanley 2000). By contrast, *The Pianist*, the adaption of the memoirs of Władysław Szpilman, a Polish-Jewish pianist survivor of the Warsaw ghetto, was meant to be "an important, lasting film," the kind of story he "had been looking for for years." A similar message transpires from his TV interview with PBS's Charlie Rose in Paris, also in early 2000: "I think the story says things of extreme importance, particularly today […] where there is a recurrence of the ideology that led to this human tragedy […] of the whole war" (Rose 2005, 187). Similarly, screenwriter Ronald Hardwood, in a 2001 piece on *The Guardian* recounting his experience working on the film, echoed the sentiment of being part of something significant and at times emotionally overwhelming. Producer Gene Gutowski would describe Polanski crying watching Nazi propaganda during pre-production (qtd. in

Meikle 2006, 306) and similar testimonies of flowing emotions among the cast and crew would emerge from the shooting (Peter S. Green 2001).

Looming large over the project and immediately setting it apart from what some already decried as the 'Holocaust Industry,' was of course Polanski's personal experience of the ghetto—in his case Krakow. An aura of authority and legitimacy pervades the way in which the film was talked about by makers and critics alike, with echoing anecdotes about how Polanski would change this or that detail from the story or the mise-en-scene to better fit his own memories. As if wanting to indulge in the mythology, when promoting *The Pianist* in Spain, Polanski would reportedly only accept being interviewed by a colleague from his same generation and someone who knew what it was to live through the Shoah, so Jorge Semprún, a Spanish writer, screenwriter and survivor from Buchenwald camp, was assigned the task (Octavi Marti 2005). Part of the rhetoric of legitimacy surrounding the film was the familiar story that Spielberg had at one point offered Polanski to direct *Schindler's List* (Spielberg, 1993) which he turned down for reasons that vary depending on the source but tend to boil down to it simply not being the right project for him. By contrast, *The Pianist* was *it*, and Polanski was the only one capable of making the story justice; "no other director could make this film," an 88-year old Szpilman would be quoted saying after a meeting with him (qtd. in Meikle 2006, 304).

Moreover, this was not only Polanski's cinematic return to his past but also to Poland, the first time he would be working in his homeland since making *Knife in the Water* in 1962. As Green recounts, many saw in his return nothing less than "the vindication of Poland's place in the world" (2001) while reports from the Warsaw sets spoke candidly about a country receiving its prodigal son with arms wide open and a creative and technical team completely devoted to the cause (Marti 2005, 197; Feeney 2006, 166). So grateful must the Poles have been for Polanski's return, Mazierska

wonders, that no critic seemed to object to the story being shot in English, with only a little German "for sound effect," and with the main characters being played by heavily accented Brits and US Americans (2005, 159-160)—though, at least in the case of Adrien Brody, of Polish Jewish descent. Perhaps any Polanski film on the Polish Holocaust would have reached a similar momentum in the country, but the specific text chosen for the occasion brought its own set of historical implications.

Published in 1946, Szpilman's memoirs had been quickly withdrawn from circulation by the Soviet censors as ideologically problematic, not least because they portrayed a German Nazi in a positive light (Piotr Kuhiwczak 2011, 287). By then, a first attempt at a film adaptation, "one of the first projects in the history of Polish postwar cinema," had already been rejected (Marek Haltof 2012, 175). Although a film version entitled *The Warsaw Robinson* was eventually produced in 1949, the authorities found it lacking "revolutionary spirit," and the film had to undergo several modifications and reshoots before being released in its new form and with a new, more uplifting title as *The Unvanquished City* (Jerzy Zarzicki, 1950). Degraded into sheer Stalinist propaganda, Haltof laments, the film was nonetheless a big success in Poland, while Szpilman's 'real' memoirs faded into obscurity for almost fifty years (2012, 175-176). Then, in 1998, a German translation commissioned and introduced by his son was published, an English one following in 1999, and only then, already as an international bestseller and with Polanski's adaptation already reportedly in the works, a Polish reedition was issued in 2000 (Kuhiwczak 2011, 287-288). Though a significant geohistorical detour was needed—quite symbolic in itself—the text's reappraisal in Poland, and in the added form of a big prestigious film by a homecoming auteur no less, had all the ingredients to suggest a new era for the country and its cinema.

One of the inaugural scenes in the film, set in September 1939, just before the German invasion, can be seen to encapsulate a great deal of the anxieties, hopes and aspirations mobilized by the very making of this film. As German artillery falls over Warsaw, a panicking Szpilman family, in the midst of packing their belongings and ready to leave the city, gathers around the radio for foreign news. A flimsy signal from the BBC announces Britain's war declaration against Nazi Germany, with that of France expected to follow: "Poland is no longer alone!," the distant voice of the English newscast triumphantly concludes [fig. 26]. The family, jubilant, melts into one big embrace as the Polish national anthem plays on the radio. Though not without a bitter sense of tragedy floating in the air, as the news leads the family to irrevocably postpone their departure, this hopeful moment of transnational recognition and solidarity gives way to one of the merriest scenes in the whole film, when the Szpilmans use part of the little money they have left to throw a special family dinner to celebrate: "Here is to Great Britain and France!," the father (Frank Finlay) toasts.

The whole scene acquires a self-referential dimension if we consider the fact that *The Pianist* was not really, or only, a Polish artifact—that Poland was, at least this time,

not alone—but instead a large-scale transnational European co-production between four countries and sixteen companies, initially developed by the French StudioCanal. According to Halle's taxonomy of European film production, *The Pianist* would sit easily within the category of the "inter-national federation," a production "ensemble" focused on national stories, he writes, but under which specific local experiences and problematics tend to become backdrops for questions universal, and thus marketable, to the whole of Europe if not the world (2008, 51-59; 112-115). As in the somewhat similar case of Chile in *Death and the Maiden*, minus the trans-continental transfer, one is led to wonder about the actual place of Poland within the totality of the film's "ensemble" – that is, whether its much-vaunted involvement in the film had any substance to it. Polanski has for example often declared that Warsaw was an imperative as the location of the shoot, and the production did go out of its way to adapt and deploy a significant number of key locations in the city, including the settings of some of the most dramatically charged scenes, but the fact is that most of it was necessarily reproduced and filmed elsewhere— mainly at the Babelsberg studio lots in Potsdam, Germany, a bourgeoning epicenter of transnational filmmaking in Europe and not new to historical productions and recreations of WWII and the Holocaust in particular (see Halle 2008, 60-71).[17] More questionably, again, the use of Polish in the film is all but atmospheric, confined to historical posters and street signs, and the actual presence of Poles onscreen is accordingly relegated to the background as minor characters and extras. Though, as noted, the Polish press barely frowned, this concession to global distribution is all the more dubious according to Mazierska because it neglects an important dimension of the Nazi occupation, namely the linguistic policing of public space, where a wrong word or specific accent could be equal to a death sentence (2007, 159-160). Behind the cameras, on the other hand, and although

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[17] A detailed account of the Warsaw locations used in the film can be found here: https://war-documentary.info/where-was-the-pianist-filmed/

Poland's financial contribution to the film was minimal—barely 7% of an estimated $36 million budget (Haltof 2012, 185)—the Polish crew was substantial. Aside from Polanski himself, the list included composer Wojciech Kilar, director of photography Pawel Edelman, co-producer Gene Gutowski, production designer Allan Starski, set decorator Wieslawa Chojkowska, production manager Michal Szczerbic, as well as dozens of Polish professionals in less glamorous production roles. Considering the unique place music occupies in the film, a special mention should also be made of the almost 'ethical' resolve of having the piano solos performed onscreen by the protagonist (Brody) 'dubbed' by a Polish pianist in Janusz Olejniczak, as well as, if for other reasons, the short and silent but memorable cameo of Zbigniew Zamachowski, eminent graduate from the Łódź National film academy, protagonist of Kieślowski's *Trois couleurs: blanc* and very much an emblem of Post-Wall Polish cinema.

If production values, creative history and promotional rhetoric suggest a film committed to not only Polish history, but also culture, industry and sensibility, the aforementioned radio scene goes a long way into dramatizing, through the family allegory, a country less concerned with national particularity than transnational openness. One way of reading this is, of course, as a direct reference to Poland's uniquely dramatic experience of WWII, occupied and ravaged by the Germans and all but forsaken for years by both the Soviets and the Western allied powers. While movements of national resistance emerged throughout the country and Warsaw in particular, as the film respectfully acknowledges, it was on foreign help that the country's liberation ultimately hinged. On the other hand, if the themes of isolation, dislocation and helplessness introduced in that scene and meant to define Szpilman's predicament wandering alone across a crumbling Warsaw, only lightened by a few moments of interpersonal solidarity, characterize the sequestered state of Poland during WWII, they also evoke the country's

more immediate history. For such history includes not only the five decades Poland spent after WWII walled-off from Western Europe, but also the extra decade it had to wait after the fall of communism to be properly considered as a member of a unified European political community. *The Pianist*'s commitment to the affective, if not geopolitical, link between past and present, even at the momentary expense of historical accuracy, is indeed announced in that very scene: the "Poland is no longer alone" line received so joyously by the Szpilmans belongs in reality not to Chamberlain's original 1939 war declaration against Germany broadcasted on the BBC, but to the Polish foreign minister Bronislaw Geremek's address at the NATO in 1999, sixty years later, and three years before the release of the film, celebrating the country's admission into the trans-Atlantic military alliance (see Andreas Behnke 2007, 92; Geremek 1999).

With Poland's adhesion referendum set for June 2003, the Union's ratification of its Eastward expansion planned for 2004, and the European Constitution to be voted by all, new and old, members in 2005, the picture is complete for the country's celebrated integration into the transnational micro-community—along with that triumvirate of continental royalty formed by France, United Kingdom and Germany—, turning *The Pianist* into a cinematic expiation for past wrongs, but also paving the way, materially and ideationally, for the much larger geopolitical integration to follow. After decades of battering and neglect, of looking from the outside in, Poland could finally, for once, if only momentarily, find itself at the center of the political and cultural concerns of Europe. From the perspective of Europe, meanwhile, dispelling both Poland's and its very own lingering doubts on the process was not a banal endeavor. The EU's expansion to ex-Soviet territory, with eleven countries and more than 70 million people to be potentially assimilated, a special report from the European Commission recognized, was "perhaps the greatest challenge in its history," not just in terms of logistics, but also ideationally

(Kurt Biedenkopf et al. 2005, 5-12). "The further east Europe goes," Hall had worded the anxieties a few years earlier, "the more it threatens to mutate into something else […] nationalism, ethnic absolutism, religious bigotry and economic backwardness all threaten to descend" (1992, 46). Although neither Eurimages nor any other European funding organism appear to have participated directly in the financing of *The Pianist*, almost any other imaginable factor contributes in according the very making of the film a uniquely significant place among the myriad of practices, discourses and representations working at the time in the way of producing an increasingly bigger and more complex European social space.

This extra-cinematic contextualization brings a series of added representational expectations and demands to a film with an already demanding subject matter to deal with. As any film history book would tell us, WWII, Fascism and the Holocaust are (at least) doubled-edged cinematic signifiers: capable of providing a simplified Manichean moral universe for a film to thematize, make use of and even undermine in various ways, but also always on the verge of triggering an uncontainable excess of conflicting institutional accounts and personal memories, historical and geopolitical incongruities, as well as all kinds of ethical, aesthetic and representational dilemmas. This is even more the case at a time in which postmodernism and globalization have brought their own misgivings to any blind reliance on the image, not to mention the historical one, with Holocaust films as archetypal site of contention (Galt 2006, 15). One has only to consider the decades-long history of debates around the now infamous tracking shot taking place half-way through *Kapò* (1960), Gillo Pontecorvo's concentration camp melodrama, after one of the inmate protagonists, Teresa (Emmanuelle Riva), has committed suicide by desperately throwing herself into an electrified barbed-wire fence. Her body, hanging lifelessly from the fence, is dramatically reframed from a low angle by the approaching

camera into a geometrically balanced, almost pictorial composition, resulting in what many, galvanized by Jacques Rivette's 1962 foundational piece "De l'abjection," have come to take as the quintessence of all that is wrong in the aestheticization of historical horror (see Laurent Jullier and Jean-Marc Leveratto 2016). Turned into a byword for debates on the ethics of the mise-en-scène and the film form in general, the controversy around '*le travelling de Kapò*' not only overshadowed any further interest in the film as a whole, problematic in a host of other ways, but also marked the rest of Pontecorvo's career, very likely inciting the turn towards a quasi-documentary style in *The Battle of Algiers* (1966). If the patent linguistic liberties of *The Pianist* should already put us on alert about the various aesthetic and ideological frictions at work within the film— historical accuracy versus global marketability, in this case—, the question extends to the whole spatio-narrative and stylistic scaffolding of the film. In my reading, the film attempts to work around and resolve, or at least contain, various potentially disruptive tensions between history and representation, past and present, national and transnational, art and commerce, not just for itself, but also for a unifying Europe, through a committed yet ambiguous mobilization of the modes and discourses of aesthetic but also, inevitably, political realism.

Realism after Auschwitz

The film recreates and quite literally follows the precarious existence of Wladyslaw Szpilman, a successful and well-known Polish-Jewish pianist, during the Nazi occupation of Poland. Fifteen minutes into the film, not long after the news of the British war declaration breaks out, he and his family, along with the rest of the Jewish population of Warsaw, are resettled within the newly erected walls of the Ghetto, first in a modest apartment and later in a working barracks with various other families, as the world around

them becomes ever more desolate. Night raids, deportations, public humiliations and random executions become the backdrop of everyday life in the Ghetto. Eventually, the Szpilmans are themselves rounded up one night to be sent to the Treblinka camp. In the single, most crucial episode of the film, however, Szpilman is dragged away from his family and the crowds being herded into the trains by a Jewish policeman acquaintance of him (Roy Smiles), thus saving his life. Back in Nazi-occupied Warsaw, Szpilman becomes a slave construction worker, a time during which he helps smuggling weapons to the underground resistance, before escaping to survive in a series of empty apartments helped intermittently by non-Jewish Polish friends. From his various hideouts, he witnesses both the Warsaw Ghetto and Polish Uprisings as well as their demise, the gradual destruction of the city and the collapse of the Nazi army, all while his own physical and mental conditions deteriorate. Alone and famished, Szpilman is at last found hiding in a ruined villa by a German captain (Thomas Kretschmann) in charge of a retreating Nazi unit. Instead of turning him in, the captain helps him survive for the last few months before the Soviet troops finally push the Germans out of the city and the country. The final scenes of the film have Szpilman resuming his job as a pianist playing Chopin at a Warsaw radio station and then as the soloist of a classical orchestra in front of a crowded auditorium. Having shown Szpilman's unsuccessful attempts at identifying and locating the German captain after the war, the film's final intertitles inform us of the latter's death at a Soviet prisoner-of-war camp in 1952. Szpilman, we are also told, died of old age in 2000.

Spread across a six-year period (1939-1945), the film relies on a markedly episodic structure; a linear, almost metronomic succession of narrative 'moments,' where seasonal change and the parallel, increasingly deteriorating states of both Warsaw and Szpilman often work as our only sources of temporal orientation. Approached in such

terms, as a montage of various loosely interconnected episodes, with the protagonist either at the center or, quite often, on the outside of the action, *The Pianist*'s may seem a relatively unexceptional storyline considering the subject, and even as pure socio-historical recreation it can be seen to offer little in the way of novelty or insight, nothing not seen or told in the dozens if not hundreds of fictional and documentary films already devoted to the era—Haltof, for instance, describes many of the film's expository scenes and contextual imagery as common currency in the Polish cinematic imaginary of the period (2012, 178-180). In a cultural climate so infatuated with the "never-seen-before" of the period, as Halle writes (2008, 114), *The Pianist* is remarkably short on newness. If anything, it may be the plot's resolve *not* to engage with something, namely death camps, a decision conveniently sanctioned extra-diegetically by both Szpilman's memoirs and Polanski's own personal experience, that grants *The Pianist* a certain conceptual identity as a Holocaust narrative—while also, as we shall see, crucially alleviating the representational dilemmas of the whole text. While terrifying events are undoubtedly on display, at times to an almost unbearable degree, having them located within the still-somewhat-human and intelligible space of the city is not the same as suggesting the possibility of accounting for the unfathomable horror of the camps.

So perhaps more than to the *what* it is to the *how* that we should shift our attention. The formal question came of course with the territory, but Polanski's reputation as an impudent film aesthetician only made it all the more intriguing. After decades of public, journalistic and academic efforts to trace the dislocated marks of the Holocaust in his cinema—in the pervasiveness of violence, the psychological distress and moral disenchantment, the cynicism, the pessimism, the alienation, the misanthropy, the absurdity, the claustrophobia, the paranoia, the black humor, the voyeurism, the grotesquery, the ambiguous endings—the making of *The Pianist* seemed to hold a

twofold promise: on the one hand, a novel cinematic appraisal on the period by one of its most illustrious surviving witnesses and, on the other, a key to unlock not only Polanski's evasive and divisive artistic personality, but also his whole cinematic world and even, maybe, in the process, the four decades of the history of European cinema, culture, history and thought it carried on its shoulders.

And yet, it may be in this sense, in its potential to both capitalize on and give ultimate sense to Polanski's career and vision, that the film proved least effective. While some commentators were bent on seeing in *The Pianist* the "explicit culmination" of the "intersecting discourses" underlying his whole career, "an opportunity grasped to the full" (Michal Stevenson 2006, 150), and despite familiar themes such as those of sadism and victimization being abundantly on display, it is doubtful that any film course or study would choose this one movie as the epitome or even representative of 'Polanski's cinema'—as much as it has come to eclipse the rest of his career in popular consciousness. For even those resorting partly or completely to autobiographical readings of the film have coincided in seeing *The Pianist* as something of an anomaly or "departure" (Morrison 2007, 107), a "logic-defying exception" (Helena Goscilo 2006, 23): nothing "extraordinary or bizarre" here (Wojtek Kość 2002), no "sardonic ghoulishness" (Charles Taylor 2002), no "manipulation of generic rules" (Haltof 2012, 180), no "filmic innovation" (Orr 2006, 19). Instead, both positive and not-so-positive reviews (I have not come across any genuinely negative ones) talk about an uncharacteristically conventional film.

Indeed, with the *Kapò* controversy in the midst of a second heyday, at least in France, called up following the releases of *Schindler's List* and *Life is Beautiful* (see Jullier and Leveratto 2016), *The Pianist* appears determined to eschew any shade of aesthetic flourish or affected cinematographic gesture—shunning, for instance, almost

Fig. 4.27. A rare tracking shot captures Szpilman's miserable return to the Ghetto.

any camera movement not strictly motivated by pro-filmic action. Before the film indulges in a handful of more elaborate and evocative compositions in its later stages, the time when conclusions are drawn and morals spelled out, only the deep-focus tracking shot of Szpilman's miserable, lonesome walk back from the train station through the Ghetto streets across a sea of abandoned personal possessions [fig. 4.27], and some of the visual compositions that follow it [figs. 4.28-4.31], including a distressingly photogenic shot of the executed bodies of a Jewish socialist friend (Paul Bradley) and his family [fig. 4.28], would appear to betray the austere visual economy of the film. Of course, leaving the camera relatively still and arranging mise-en-scene and action so that can it remain that way and resorting to minor tilts and pans and continuity editing, for example, is, like any other aesthetic or narrative decision, also a form of intervention, and not a necessarily more neutral one. And neither are the toned-down, at times nearly monochromatic photography of the film, its blunt, unsentimental staging of violence, or its obsessive attention to material and anecdotal detail in the recreation of everyday life in the Ghetto. And yet, what would seem to have kept, almost subliminally, these stylistic decisions from ethical second-guessing, safe from the kind of heady philosophical deconstruction

exercised on the films of Spielberg, Benigni and Pontecorvo, is their adherence to the written and unwritten rules of 'realism.'

Debates on the notion and politics of cinematic realism invariably harken back to the classic writings of French critic André Bazin (see Bazin 2005a; 2005b). His theoretical legacy in this field is twofold: first is the foundational notion of the "ontological realism" of the cinema; that is, a belief in the medium's innate mechanical ability, by virtue of its photographic basis and recently developed sound technology, to materially record and re-present physical reality in a way superior to any other art (Bazin 2005a, 9-16; 23-40). Secondly, this realistic capacity or function of film, today commonly referred to as "indexicality" and thrown into material and theoretical flux by the advent of digital technology (see Brown 2013, 22-25 and passim), was according to Bazin best upheld through a number of formal devices, a certain style. Since Bazin's realism was largely located in temporal and spatial continuity, since they brought the medium/art closer to humans' experience of the world, maybe even to the nature of the world itself, said style was one that favored techniques like the long take, deep focus photography, medium to long shots and camera movement over editing as a means of composing a

scene. Without delving into the ideological criticism that the notion of cinematic 'continuity,' or indeed realism, would attract some years later, Noël Carroll (2016) locates Bazin's stylistic propositions as both a product of and a response to the evolving state of film art at the time, more valuable as a series of uniquely perceptive impressions on the changing currents in cinematic language in the 1930s and 40s—wherein Bazin located a heightened morality, mostly in allowing the spectator a cognitive and interpretive freedom compromised by the manipulations of editing or "montage"—than as a single, fully-fledged and coherent theoretical system.

Indeed, it takes some conceptual latitude to conceive today films like Renoir's *La règle du jeu* (1939) and Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941), two of Bazin's favorite examples, as belonging together under the same stylistic roof, not to mention that of realism. Indicatively, Leighton Grist (2009) writes how recent appraisals have found in Bazin's aesthetic postulations workable defenses of modernism and even surrealism. More consistent and enduring have proven however Bazin's arguments regarding the realism in Italian Neorealism, built as they are on both a formal opposition to cinematic "aestheticism" and a certain "faithfulness to everyday life" (2005b, 25) at the level of content—including not only socially-conscious narratives but also, famously, the use of non-professional actors, location shooting and natural lighting. The underlying notion of realism as an artistic, ethical and almost philosophical ethos based on the rejection of cinematic manipulation, however vaguely understood, remains largely, almost intuitively, effective, albeit with variations. Notably, whereas in Bazin it was Soviet montage, Hollywood's mawkishness, German expressionism and, perhaps most acutely, the "Nazi-fascist lies" (Nagib 2011, 11) that served as the 'manipulative' nemeses to the realist principle, the gradual simplification of cinematic geopolitics since then has seemingly turned realism into a one-directional aesthetic, conceptual and rhetorical

reaction to Hollywood. Not only European art cinema but world cinema as a whole, Elsaesser writes, has long come to define and defend itself against Hollywood on the basis of a "greater realism," however aesthetically heterogenous and even contradictory its output may actually be (2009, 3).

In the case of historical films, the question of realism is evidently a particularly knotty one, not least because of the significant degree of pretense the genre requires by default, from makers and audiences alike. Moreover, in the absence of an objective reality 'out there' to capture and against which to measure and evaluate the truth-ness of the representation, it is other texts that inevitably become the referents: history books, records and studies, personal accounts, when available, as well as, paradoxically enough, other artworks and films. In the case of *The Pianist* it is of course the faithfulness to Szpilman's memoirs (and Polanski's memories) that cements the film's 'realist effect,' and not just tacitly. If the promotion of the film had left any doubts, the 'Making Of' documentary included in the film's DVD boxset seems conceived to certify the legitimacy, objectivity and honesty of the representation. This implies more than reiterating the equivalences between book and film and Polanski's autobiographical input or attesting to the scrupulous material accuracy of the historical recreation, including the cross-cutting of the various scenes in the film with the period records and documentary images that inspired them, many of them made by the Nazis themselves [figs.4.32-4.37]. It very much involves a question of style, or rather non-style; the eschewing of any "unnecessary business," as Brody describes the process of conceiving his performance. DP Edelman talks similarly about developing an "invisible technique," PD Starski about looking for an "authentic style," and Polanski of having to "step outside with your bright ideas [sic] and just tell the things as they were […] no more, no less." The word "realistic" is expectedly dropped a few times as well. Yet what these statements suggest, and the film

Figs. 4.32-4.37. Images of Nazi propaganda alongside their recreation in The Pianist.

evidences, is a brand of realism not conceived as the result of some direct, natural and relatively bare cinematic practice, what Bazin's ideal figured as the straightforward appraisal of a pro-filmic, empirical reality, regardless of how fictive its content may be. Rather, realism comes out here, and is indeed celebrated, as just as grandiose, painstaking and meticulously arranged enterprise and creative an achievement as that of any Hollywood blockbuster. If *Schindler's List* was the implicit antagonist here, and there are enough reasons to believe it was, not just for this film (see Elsaesser 2005, 73-74), the path of realism does not even prove the cheaper one. *The Pianist*'s budget largely exceeded that of Spielberg's film, $36 million to $22, despite the latter being forty-five

minutes longer—though the nine-year difference between both films may add some inflation to the numbers.

The Pianist's publicized elevation of its discourse of realism to the level of spectacle serves however more functions than the setting of the film commercially and creatively apart from previous cinematic renditions of the period—in which, judging in terms of box-office and awards, it proved highly successful. Effectively resolved, *The Pianist*'s brand of realism-cum-historicity-cum-auteurism-cum-spectacle can be seen as, per Elsaesser, also mediating something of a geopolitical statement, namely the reclaiming of (the representation of) the Holocaust for Europe and in Europe's own terms, all while allowing the massive scale of the production, in its proud display of the continent's cinematic muscle and Polanski's capacity to choreograph it, to deflect the criticism of capitalist squandering and associated artistic impurity so often and readily addressed at (even more modest) Hollywood productions and its trans-continental impersonators in your Annauds and your Bessons. Furthermore, I shall go on to suggest, realism can be seen to offer Europe a solution for itself, at once aesthetic and ideological, in how to deal with such a disputed and controversial past in a way that, as was the institutional goal at the time, its re-presentation could be turned into the single, shared basis of a collective transnational future.

This said, where Adorno famously doubted the morality of "writing poetry after Auschwitz" (1983 [1967], 34), it is not as if realism, with its associated tenets of rationality, objectivity and truth, survived unscathed. Though not the first one to do so, Robert Eaglestone (2004) has framed the rise of the postmodern, with its ingrained skepticism and restless disquisitions about the limits of representation and the historically real, as a direct response to the epistemological shock of the Holocaust (see also Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg 1996). *The Pianist*'s solution is again not particularly

Fig. 4.38. Come and see.

original but still brilliantly pulled-off, and chimes in with a historical-literary tradition increasingly built on the genre of the "testimony" (Eaglestone 2004, 15-71), that of Szpilman's memoirs, as well as with a dominant trend in the historical film since at least the 1990s (Hilary Radner 2015): the zeroing in on the experience, perspective, knowledge and fate of the individual subject—a strategy of course not new to Polanski's filmography either. Consciously absent in that short list above, it must be pointed out, is the notion of the individual's 'actions,' as Szpilman, absolute embodiment of the Deleuzian "seer" (1989, 2), does not *do* much throughout the film, beyond looking, that is. Save for the regular provision of location shots and a few isolated episodes, especially in the first and more expository half of the movie, Szpilman remains virtually the single point of reference and focalizer, and the more the film progresses, the more his role as protagonist narrows down to act as such [fig. 4.38]. Compared to his antecedents in *Repulsion*'s Carole, *The Tenant*'s Treklovsky or *Bitter Moon*'s Oscar, however, at no point, despite the extraordinary and traumatic nature of the events, is Szpilman's perspective on what surrounds him challenged nor does his mental and physical condition appear to inflect the images on the screen. In fact, all those moments in which the camera does move away

318

Fig.4.39. The Pianist *as historiographical document.*

from his perceptual range into an external or 'objective' point of view—as in those establishing, quasi-documentary shots where an extra-diegetic caption locates us in a certain key, historical date [fig. 4.39]—only certify the aesthetic continuity and ontological coherence of the whole. No wonder one reviewer described Szpilman "as if he himself was watching a film" (Kość 2002).

A double, dialectical move can be found at work here. On the one hand, the film's formal reliance on subjective perspective and experience functions as what Jameson calls a "strategy of containment" (2002, 37-38), that is, a way of channeling and disguising the representational limits of the film through a device internal and organic to the text—most significantly, the leaving of the ineffable horror of the camps outside of the picture on the premise that Szpilman (and Polanski) never saw them. On the other hand, while Szpilman may not fully know or comprehend everything happening around him, the contingencies and limitations of subjective knowledge and experience never become much of a narrative or epistemological concern. The meaning of virtually every moment or incident and how to interpret them is relatively transparent for both him and us—when a scene is not diegetically self-explanatory (Nazis being cruel; Szpilman being hungry or cold), the

most cursory and at this point in time inescapable knowledge of the period on our part suffices to fill the gaps (getting into the trains is a death sentence; the Germans are eventually defeated). Meanwhile, the fact that Szpilman barely interferes in the unfolding of the events or how they are perceived only helps keep (a certain notion of) history structurally intact and beyond the reach of individual interference, questioning or reinterpretations (including, by extension, those of the artist).

What all of this does, in short, is not only to figure WWII, Fascism and the Holocaust as unitary, known, closed, fairly straightforward affairs, demanding nowadays little in the way of analysis, judgement or even questioning, but also, in the process, at that more abstract, allegorical level in which the Holocaust works as the ultimate touchstone for the limits of art and historical representation (at least in the West), to bypass, dissimulate and even deny any discrepancy or disjunction between subjective perception, historical narrative and empirical 'fact' in our collective understanding of the past and the world. In other words, what we know, what we are told and what it was (or is) at no point or level appear to clash within the realist visual ecosystem of *The Pianist*. The most disturbing result of this strategy is the notion that Szpilman's unique perspective on the events as a Polish-Jewish survivor ends up levelled and conflated with that of the Nazi propaganda documentaries that the film built much of its imagery upon.

A more forgiving interpretation would see in all of this a somewhat imprudent but well-intentioned view on the relationship between experience, memory, representation and history as such and a belief in the capacity of the cinema to incorporate, reconcile and account for all of them at once—nothing to do with those so-called "New History films" (Radner 2015), galvanized by Hayden White's "metahistorical" theories (1973), full of representational concerns, conflicting viewpoints and self-doubts. The brief, casual inclusion of a Nazi camera crew documenting the Jewish relocations on the Ghetto [fig.

Fig. 4.40. A Nazi camera crew in the Ghetto.

4.40], placed in virtually the same spot from where the film's following shot will be taken [fig. 4.33], could have in one of those films become a sign of self-questioning. Instead, here it is one of self-affirmation, made to play into the film's discourse of representational objectivity (the Nazis filming could not be more uninvolved) and a 'realism effect' based on the accumulation of anecdotal detail. No trace to be found either of that "historical thinking" Robert Burgoyne (2008) more recently associated with critical artistic examinations of the past as tools for the present. Polanski may declare *The Pianist* to "say things of extreme importance, particularly today […] where there is a recurrence of the ideology that led to this human tragedy" (Rose 2005, 187), but the truth is that the film does not give any clue whatsoever as to why the Nazis did what they did and what should be done to keep it from happening again. (Not even the readiest and widespread of explanations, namely some ahistorical and moralistic notion of ethno-nationalistic atavism and anti-Semitism suddenly turned extreme, is given much exposure, which incidentally allows it to linger unrefuted in our minds.) Had the film tried to do that, to attempt to explain how and why it happened, however laterally and tentatively, it might have turned out to give excessive, irrepressible substance to Polanski's vague but most

correct perception on ideological recurrence, namely that, in capitalist modernity, explosions of fascism, nationalistic bigotry and xenophobia are and will always be around the corner at every crisis. In the uniquely virulent case of 1930s Germany, humiliated and deprived of its colonies and much of its previous European territories after WWI and the Treaty of Versailles and with a ruling class wary of overexploiting its own workers into a revolution, recovery came in the form of political radicalization, extreme militarization, intra-European imperialism, war economy and, yes, the reactionary manipulation of local anti-Semitic traditions to their last, unprecedented consequences (see Chris Harman 2002, 519-532). These six lines do not of course account for one of the greatest and more mystifying catastrophes in modern history—Harman has noted the economic and even ideological incongruity of the ensuing pogrom, as evidenced by its logistical wastefulness and the fact that most of it was carried out in secret (2002, 530-531)—and my suggestion is not that any and all feature films on the subject are obliged to provide a complete historical elucidation. What I intend to do is nonetheless give some measure of what *The Pianist* is choosing to dispense with in its recreation of the period in and for the present. Having said this, at a certain point conclusions and evaluations are in order, and one must come to terms with the fact that, in the end, in its understated reconciliation of individual experience and historiographic document, *The Pianist* ends up avoiding and in effect suppressing any potential for critique and epistemological inquiry either of the two viewpoints could have produced in themselves or combined in other, more adventurous terms.

Though he does not engage specifically with *The Pianist* or other representations of the Holocaust, Halle's comprehensive aesthetic and ideological account of the role and trajectory of the historical genre within Europe's emerging transnational market and cultural imaginary seems tailormade for this film (2008, 89-128). Thus, Halle dissects the

genre's dominant register as made out of varying combinations of some recurrent devices: opulent realistic settings (2008, 126); reliance on classic film language and narrative forms (112; 126-127); individualized storylines concentrated in particular locations and social milieus (113-114); avoidance of excessive historical complexity and larger contextualizations (113, 126); interpersonal morality tales based on universal human concerns (113); and a marked turn to the affective over the critical and the pedagogical (126-128). As can be inferred, Halle's account is not positive. He goes on to relate the genre's dominant aesthetic with a "post-ideological vision" whereby continuities between past and present are only ostensibly dealt with, and where realistic recreations and affective individual identifications in terms of suffering or courage become substitutes for critical historical knowledge and inquiry. Simply by watching these films, Halle writes, we are given the impression of taking "political, social responsibility," but actually they relieve us of the necessary analysis; they may offer "cathartic discharge," he concludes, but make no real demands or incitement for further engagement in the audience (2008, 127-128). Talking specifically about films about WWII and the Third Reich, he frames his critique as a suggestion to "push contemporary production harder and further;" no film will ever fully account for what happened in those years, he admits, but that does not mean that the job is already done: "there will always be more that we can expect, more that we should demand" (2008, 128).

Halle's ultimate concerns with spectatorship can in fact be expanded beyond the (in his view undemanding) relationship these films establish between contemporary European audiences and the past, and indeed involve what kind of subject position a film like *The Pianist* constructs for the viewer vis-à-vis the present and the world she is to face once she leaves the theater. This is after all 2002, and while the processes of globalization, transnationalism and European integration may admittedly, or at least arguably, not be as

extraordinary and traumatic as WWII and the Holocaust, they still demand a significant degree of cultural and psychological readjustment, individually and collectively, to be figured and navigated. That is what Jameson's concept of "cognitive mapping" is all about: our tortuous and in many ways unconscious efforts to bridge the gap between our myriad of personal, local, daily, limited and often conflicting experiences and the global social totality we are all increasingly enmeshed in. That *The Pianist* should at that moment in time formally downplay the existence of such an epistemological gap in the case of the Holocaust, not only the intended foundational myth for the new Europe, but also the utmost paradigm of the shortcomings and incongruities of our cognitive tools and representational methods, may not be deliberately disingenuous, but neither is it innocent. Indeed, I would argue that it is precisely the film's more or less overt stakes in the process of European expansion and integration, rather than some conscious belief in the ontological unity and coherence of the Holocaust, that subtends and determines *The Pianist*'s formal solutions. These include not only the linguistic adjustment to more global and marketable English dialogue, but also, especially, the seamless, 'realistic' collapsing of Szpilman's subjective experience and the film's objective, quasi-documentary historical recreation into one single and continuous formal register, enunciative position and narrative space. The discursive effect on the (transnational) viewer, I suggest, is indeed, despite the grim imagery of the film, a certain reassuring and appeasing sense of unity, certainty and coherence. If Europe's deeply conflictual past is definite, representable and understandable, all the more so must be the already allegedly more harmonious and unifying present being built in opposition to that past. What I see as a latent Europeanist ideology and discourse ingrained in both the production values and textual strategies of *The Pianist* obtains, however, its most direct, explicit manifestation in the final and most hopeful moments of the film. Yet these must be understood as framed

and complicated by a specific spatio-narrative framework or chronotope, namely that of the ruined city.

In and Out of the Ruins

Before its complete decimation, Warsaw is split in two. The film goes out of its way to detail the planning, construction, bounding and policing of the Jewish Ghetto [figs. 4.41-4.48]. Again, personal experience and historical documentation are made to work hand in hand. Thus, we get to first see the planned layout for the area published in a newspaper Szpilman reads [fig. 4.41]. Then, both the apartment the family is assigned in their initial relocation as well as the one Szpilman occupies in his escape to the Aryan part of the city happen to be placed next and have a direct line of vision to the outer Ghetto Walls. This allows, for example, for the family to witness their construction first-hand [fig. 4.42] and, later, for Szpilman, having already escaped to the other side, to attend to the rise and fall of the Jewish Ghetto Uprising right across the street [fig. 4.47]. Some of the most dramatic episodes in the film also involve or are staged in front or around the walls: not just various shooting executions [fig. 4.37], but also the death in Szpilman's arms of a child smuggler trying to sneak through a hole in the wall [fig. 4.44]; the public humiliations of Jews at the inner-city checkpoint; and the scenes at the *Umschlagplatz*, the area where the Jews were gathered before being herded into the camp trains, where despite the change of location, the brick walls remain consistent as background for most of the shots [fig. 4.45]. At other times, it is simple establishing, atmospheric images of the state of the city that feature the motif of the wall as a key part of the composition, often in the foreground [figs. 4.43, 4.47].

The effect is a suffocating sense of omnipresence—the word "wall" appears no less than thirty times in Harwood's screenplay, virtually the same as "Warsaw" does

Figs. 4.41-4.48. "The Wall. The Wall. The Wall." (Harwood 2000, 18).

(2000). Given the way in which the division of the city is visually and narratively associated with agony, claustrophobia and death, it is not difficult to see here a rather explicit critique of not just racism or fascism but also of the very act of bordering. Talking about and figuring intra-urban walls in an ex-Soviet country, their construction and demolition, inevitably brings up reminiscences of the Iron Curtain and its most famous segment in the Berlin Wall. Doing so at a time of transnational European integration suggests a plea against nationalistic divisions and, if we think of the images of resettling

Jews as evocative of more contemporary displaced populations, also the infamy of Fortress Europe. The message transpiring for the modern European audience, Eastern and Western, is thus a notion of territorial partitions as not only xenophobic and totalitarian, but also as the prelude to social collapse, material destruction and universal human catastrophe.

Slowly but surely, then, as divisions lead to killings and deportations, as the city's population is decimated, its buildings destroyed by the bombings and then set on fire by the retreating Nazi troops, Warsaw becomes a desolate concrete landscape. Arguably some of the most evocative images of the film are indeed those with urban rubble at the center, and the more Szpilman himself is reduced to the shell of a human and a mere witness to his surroundings and both dialogue and narrative content are reduced to the bare minimum, the more the ruination of the city takes center stage. In her work on the "new European cinema," Galt (2006) writes profusely about the history and meanings of cinematic images of ruins. She begins by locating the ruined cityscape as the emblematic image of the post-WWII years, first made familiar by countless newsreels and then as a recurrent establishing shot for location-shot movies of the late 1940s, where it served as guarantee of "spatial and hence political authenticity" (2006, 160-161; 183-193); think here of *Germany, Year Zero* (Roberto Rosselini, 1948), *A Foreign Affair* (Billy Wilder, 1948), *Berlin Express* (Jacques Tourneur, 1948), and Wajda's 'War Trilogy,' formed by *A Generation*, *Kanal* (1956) and *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958), as well as that whole German genre of the "only half-ironically called" *Trümmerfilm* or ruin film (Galt 2006, 188). As the period is revisited in the present, however, and the original ruins are no longer there to be shot, their indexical, 'realistic' signification is complicated. In a film like *Underground* (Emir Kusturica, 1995), writes Galt, images of actual ruins of the Balkan wars in the 1990s are made to stand for those of WWII, if only for a moment, thus

suggesting an ambivalent sense of historical recurrence where the very idea of "postwar" becomes compromised (2006, 161-63). By contrast, she credits Lars Von Trier's film *Europa (Zentropa* in her analysis) with precisely avoiding such an image in its figuration of postwar Germany. In a film so involved in the intertextual quoting and reworking of previous "ruin films," especially *Berlin Express*, the absence of the ruined city itself is interpreted as deliberate and given a twofold interpretation (Galt 2006, 190-191). Firstly, in the absence of 'real' ruins to film, *Europa* discards in her view a now-impossible appeal to the emotional shock of indexicality they produced in the 1940s. Secondly, the film's refusal to recreate or even allude to the ruin image implies for Galt also a conscious rejection of its ideological implications as a "liberal" signifier of Germany's "political redemption" and its symbolic figuration as a spatio-temporal ground-zero from where human decency and morals could emerge once again from the rubble once the storm of the war had passed through (Galt 2006, 190). Galt relates *Europa*'s decision with Elsaesser's arguments around the falsity of the so-called "Year Zero" thesis that the ruin image epitomized, a thesis which in his view offered an idealistic and self-indulgent way of disavowing the actual causes, enduring legacy and indeed gradual rehabilitation of Nazism in the country (see Elsaesser 1989, 247-253).

The Pianist takes a different route to those two films and indeed those of the 1940s in its take on the 'ruin image,' but we may find that the ultimate ideological discourse is not too far from the one criticized by Elsaesser and rejected by *Europa*. Here there are actual, physical ruins no doubt, but they are neither preserved remains of the period, nor are they some contemporary battleground made to stand for the ruins of the past. They are not even part of the recreations in the Babelsberg studio sets or pure digital simulation, though some special effects were undoubtedly involved. Rather, they were built, or destroyed, 'by design' in the 'real' world. As the Making Of documentary relates, after

unsuccessfully scouting all over Europe for suitable, already-existing ruins, the production came across an abandoned compound of former Soviet army barracks in a former East German village next to Berlin called Jüterborg. Since the barracks were due for demolition, the filmmakers cut a deal with the authorities so that Starksi, the production designer, could demolish them by design into a photogenic film set recreating the ruins of 1945 Warsaw, most memorably displayed in that extreme long shot where, in one of the few cinematographic embellishments the films allows itself, a slowly soaring camera films Szpilman entering a wide, empty and bottomless avenue flanked by endless rows of decimated buildings [fig. 4.49].

Regardless of what takes place in those ruins, to which we will turn in a moment, their very creation and arresting visual power bring together a surplus of connections and denotations, especially regarding this thesis' concern with the involvement of the cinema in the production of social space. Thus, we may start by considering the way in which these ruins exhibit in an imposing, awe-inspiring manner such a productive (and destructive) capacity of the cinema, the material and not just symbolic effects filmmaking has in the real world. Indeed, it could be argued that the affective power of the ruins of *The Pianist* depends more on their artificiality than their 'realism,' even if both notions are as we have seen made to work in tandem throughout the film. What overwhelms us here is not, as was the case in the 1940s, the images' indexical relation to the actual ruins of the war, which we know are no longer there, but instead the film's power to recreate and manufacture them at will. As for their actual location, even if a matter of chance, a chance at any rate conditioned by the unique history of Central-Eastern Europe, the fact that it was the planned destruction of a Berlin Soviet compound that was made to stand for the destruction of Warsaw by the Nazis brings up a 'heterotopic' entanglement of geohistorical spaces, trajectories and meanings. On the one hand, it both mobilizes and

Fig. 4.49. Europe Year Zero.

harmonizes the close but problematic historical relationship between both countries and cities, already involved as they were in and by the co-production of the film, by having them coalesce and coexist within the same image and cinematic space. And on the other, it collapses the simultaneous processes of working out of the memories of both Nazism and Communism in the two cities and the two countries—if not Europe as a whole.

As to what is expected to come out of this mutual, simultaneous working out, what is to emerge from the ruins of the past, the narrative denouement of *The Pianist* is very explicit. In fact, the way in which the ruin image works in setting the 'formal' stage for the film's narrative, moral and ideological resolution is indeed similar to the way the extreme facial close-ups worked in *Death and The Maiden*, as both devices coincide under Deleuze's concept of the "any-space-whatever" as forms of spatial abstraction and dislocation (1986, 102-122; 1989, 1-24). In Deleuze, indeed, the ruined postwar cityscape of the 1940s, as seen in the Neorrealist films, was the tragic but exemplary expansion of the deterritorializing workings of the close-up as a (now-all-encompassing) space where the specifics of location dissolve and narrative causality and human agency are taken over by the sensorial and the affective in all their potentialities and ambiguities. As with *Death and the Maiden*'s close-ups, however, the any-space-whatever of the ruins in *The Pianist* is quickly allocated the very concrete and conventional function of accommodating a liberal discourse around shared humanity, compassion, and new beginnings.

Having escaped the destruction of the hospital where he was hiding, and after wandering around amongst ruins looking for food and shelter, a lonesome and decrepit Szpilman enters a relatively well-preserved villa where he finally finds a sealed can of cucumbers. Hearing the sound of spoken German, he takes the can with him and goes to hide in the attic. From there, he hears one of the Nazis play the piano. Later that night, looking around the house for something with which to open the can, Szpilman is found

by the Nazi. After discovering he is a Pianist, the officer makes Szpilman play something for him. The camera follows both characters into the piano room where Szpilman manages to play Chopin's "Ballade No. 1 in G minor." Moved but self-possessed, the Nazi officer resolves to help Szpilman hide and bring him food and clothes until the war is finally over. Then one cold winter morning, the Nazi leaves with the rest of his troops and Szpilman is eventually rescued by a group of Soviet soldiers, not without trying to kill him first after mistaking him for a Nazi.

Few reviewers failed to find in the film a message on the equalizing, redemptive nature of art, not just music but also the cinema, as some of the last images of *The Pianist* are then dedicated to honoring the real figure of the late Nazi officer (named Wilm Hosenfeld) as one of the 'good Germans.' The conciliatory spirit is undoubtedly there, and there is an argument to be made that it is the making of the film itself that is also under commemoration, and not just for its content. For if it is the abstracted space of the ruins that allows for Szpilman and Hosenfeld, Jew and Nazi, Pole and German, to meet each other and for that elating, epiphanic moment around the piano to happen outside of ethnic, nationalistic or ideological divisions, the truth is that that ruined space was not already out there for the film to find; it was precisely, literally, physically and symbolically, created by the movie. This is to say that, at some level, it is the film, and arguably, by extension, transnational cinema as a whole, that is credited with the power to create such spaces of encounter and reconciliation around which a new and unified Europe could eventually coalesce.

Unfortunately, much is being neglected in such a reading, which once again harkens back to all the things the film fails or chooses not to consider in its 'realistic' engagement with the Nazi period. For the encounter that the ruin image favors between Szpilman and Hosenfeld is at no moment one between equals. Szpilman is very much

obliged to play the piano the first time they meet, and the unspoken implication is that his life depends on it. As Mazierska notes, there is even a sense of class segregation at work, one in this case no less dramatic than the ethnic one, as it is doubtful that somebody else without Szpilman's artistic talent and education would have been allowed to live (2006, 109-110). Moreover (and talking here only about its fictional incarnation), we are being asked as spectators to forget that Hosenfeld is a German officer, that this is 1945, and that he has spent six years carrying out his presumably murderous duties as Nazi to the point of being made a captain with, as we see, a whole unit under his orders. Presuming that his saving (or is it sparing?) Szpilman's life should be accepted as some ultimate proof of innocence or at least redemption, and that it should a be a short piano recital (or perhaps, on another occasion, a film) that made the difference on the life or death of someone, may be poetic licenses proper of classical narrative cinema, but they ultimately work in the way of obscuring the profound complexity of what happened in Europe in those years and papering over still today crucial, unanswered questions in need of genuine critical reflection and analysis with self-congratulatory celebrations on the transformative potential of art. Content with such a conclusion, however, the final images of *The Pianist* reinstate the Utopian feel of those with which the film began. Right after the image of the sun dawning over the rural landscape where Szpilman tries to find the Soviet detention camp where Hosenfeld was last seen, we are taken, echoing *Death and The Maiden*, to a crowded auditorium in which Szpilman plays Chopin's "Grande Polonaise Brillante in E-Flat Major" accompanied by a whole orchestra. The impression is that of a totality restored, this time with no tracking shots.

Conclusion:
Cosmopolitanism or *Carnage*

What ultimately makes *The Pianist* such an oddity within the bulk of Polanski's filmography in general and what this thesis has labelled as his geopolitical cycle in particular, is not simply its enunciative visual style, overall formal sobriety and expository attitude, what one critic referred to as "artistic essentialism" (Taylor 2002). Films like *Death and the Maiden* or the more recent *J'accuse* can be located, *grosso modo*, within a similar register. Rather, what is unique to *The Pianist* is the way in which all those devices, along with the paratextual edifice built around the film proper (reports, interviews, documentaries), are univocally geared towards producing a discourse of epistemological certainty of the essential unity, knowability and representability of the world, even at its darkest and most ineffable. If, as argued in my analysis, the absence of the Nazi death camps from the film's imagery symptomatizes precisely the displacements and negations necessary for such a representational ethos to remain (or appear) effective in our times, just as telling is the fact that, throughout the rest of the film, nothing of what is actually shown appears to trigger any notion of inquiry, ambiguity or self-doubt in the spectator. Maybe for the first time in Polanski's cinema, at the most inauspicious of places, seeing and knowing are treated as virtually one and the same thing.

Indeed, the opposite has hopefully been proven to be the case with the rest of the films analyzed in this thesis, all of which are 'thrillers' in their own, more or less codified ways and have some fundamentally epistemological concern or representational problem—if not representation *as* problem—at their core, regardless of whether they

commit themselves to solving it or not. *Death and the Maiden*, arguably the closest film to *The Pianist* in terms of subject matter, tone and style, is of course fundamentally built around one such concern in the form of Miranda's true identity. While the film is structurally and ideologically geared towards the final anagnorisis, there is no shaking off the notion that in other circumstances, at another time or in another place, maybe in another film or indeed in the real world, the doctor's fascist past and crimes could have easily receded into obscurity with no means for his victims to ever know or prove them. Similarly, *Frantic*'s stab at a happy ending, in the form of the Walkers' final reunion, scarcely offsets the anxiety of those preceding two hours in which the intricacies of transnational geopolitics and the incommensurability of postmodern Paris have kept the couple apart—as the final shot of the darkened, sprawling cityscape of the French capital does so much to remind us. In our second Parisian film, *Bitter Moon*, the implications are more categorical and bleaker. Here, the workings of representation are not only conceived as limited and limiting, but, at least in the case of Euro-American relations and Hollywood's imaging of the world space as embodied in Oscar's fetishized visions of Mimi and the city, also associated with domination, reification and violence. Also concerned with US hegemony, though in more explicitly geopolitical terms, *The Ghost Writer* is however more tentatively and intriguingly ambivalent in its implications. In this film, representation can be seen to work both ways: on the one hand, as an instrument of control, materialized in the systemic bordering and policing of the global space under the twin rhetorics of terror and security; and, on the other, as a vehicle for agency, discovery and truth, where the protagonist's inquisitive urges lead to the (short-lived) disclosure of a transnational conspiratorial plot. Finally, in *The Ninth Gate*, the past and future of turn-of-the century Europe, with its present precariously suspended in the middle, turn into mysteries in themselves. If their sheer magnitude as subject matter was not troublesome

enough, the supernatural scaffolding and utterly cynical tone of the film assures that, whatever the conclusion provided by the narrative, their 'mystery' will at no point obtain a bona fide, productive resolution. All in all, then, this cycle of films, arguably including *The Pianist* in its naively transparent figuration of the Holocaust, can be seen to bespeak and often dramatize a crisis in representation.

In spite of their thematic, generic, stylistic and ideological particularities, this thesis has repeatedly located in the form and stories of these films, as well as the representational impasses and contradictions that pervade them, reactions to the same grand, overarching sociospatial phenomenon and epistemological 'problematic:' that of globalization. All of them, this thesis has attempted to show, are texts marked and shaped by the magnitude and complexity of this new social reality they inhabit and of which they participate—production-wise to begin with—as well as our individual and collective struggles to visualize, understand and navigate it. Jameson's notion of "cognitive mapping" (1988; 1995) has in this sense remained a constant point of reference and inspiration, highlighting as it does our continuous yet frustratingly ill-equipped efforts at making sense of our present situation and at locating ourselves and others within an increasingly global social space, not least by means of our cultural production and practices.

Appropriately, all these epistemological, representative and/or hermeneutic problems have found their main expression, but hardly a solution, in the spatial articulations of these films, whether in terms of the social realities of the concrete places they mobilize, or the spatial imaginaries they construct through and around them. Having said this, rather than restaging one by one the general arguments and concrete examples and interpretations developed in this line in the preceding chapters, I would like to

conclude this thesis by putting spatial theory and textual analysis to work one last time, and to do it on what can be seen as Polanski's transnational cinematic swansong.

For if *Frantic* marked the end of an era in Polanski's career, his last crack at major Hollywood studio filmmaking before his two-decade immersion in the Post-Wall European co-production market, *Carnage* strikes one today as the closing chapter of that period. To begin with, a French-Polish-German-Spanish co-production, *Carnage* is to this date Polanski's last feature in English. All three he has made since—*La Vénus à la fourrure, D'après une histoire vraie* and *J'accuse*—have been shot in French with French actors, take place in France and, despite all being co-productions and two of them adapting texts from another language, are as French as one can picture a Polanski film to be. That thirty-seven years had to pass between *Le Locataire* (1976) and *La Vénus à la fourrure* (2013) for Polanski to film again in French gives an idea of what a turning point *Carnage* represents in his career. Almost as if aware of its status as Polanski's last "markedly" transnational affair, as Hjort (2009) would put it, *Carnage* is packed with international stars—two US Americans (Jodie Foster and John C. Reilly), a German (Cristopher Waltz) and a British (Kate Winslet). Indeed, the fact that the film takes place mostly in one single interior location, a small suburban apartment in Brooklyn, NY (in reality a recreation in the Parisian Studios de Bry) not only confirms the destination of the film's generous $25 million budget. It also works to assure that the main investment and asset of the film is put to good use by allowing the four actors as much on-screen time as virtually possible. Coincidentally or not, depending on how direct of a relationship one establishes between the production and content of a film, *Carnage* is also the final installment of what we have so far called Polanski's geopolitical cycle in that it is the last of his films to concern itself more or less directly with the changing social, cultural,

geographical and political landscapes of our globalized societies—and the impossibility to fully account for them.

This is however not the first impression one would get seeing the film's initial premise. The story, which faithfully adapts Yasmine Reza's successful French play *Le Dieu du Carnage* (2008), itself one of those theatrical "texts-in-motion" (Appadurai 1996, 8) like *Death and the Maiden* seemingly able to be adapted to almost any place and context, is relatively straightforward: two pairs of middle-class parents, the Cowans, Alan (Waltz) and Nancy (Winslet), and the Longstreets, Penelope (Foster) and Michael (Reilly), meet in the latter's apartment in order to discuss and hopefully clear up the air around a playground fight between their children. Even before we know their names or relation to each other, the film presents the four adults writing together a statement on a computer describing and apparently giving closure to the incident. Despite certain discrepancies over the semantics of a few terms, the four of them politely discuss and agree on how to account for what happened. A UNESCO poster hanging on the room's wall adds, not without a hint of irony, to the diplomatic and conciliatory atmosphere that the encounter emanates. Once the statement is finished, honouring the "sense of community" they have displayed, and on the pretext of tasting the Longstreet's secret cobbler recipe, they decide to stay together in the apartment a little longer.

What follows should not surprise anyone familiar with the long tradition of films dealing with bourgeois encounters in private, confined spaces, from *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (Mike Nichols, 1966) to the more than fifteen versions in as many countries and languages already made of *Perfect Strangers* (Paolo Genovese, 2016). What is peculiar to *Carnage* however is how readily the inevitable confrontation turns to issues well beyond the immediate and the personal. Apart from the customary digressions into issues of class and gender, here it is not long before allusions to global politics,

international wars, slavery, human rights, human nature, universal morals, "Western values," financial capitalism, multinational corporations and the value (and price) of culture get in the way of and end up intertwined with the parental concerns that set off the plot. Beyond the habitual critique of Western bourgeois narcissism, liberal hypocrisy and self-repression, two readings come up right away. On the one hand, the film can be seen to make a clear point of how precarious the distinction between local and global issues has become, how deep and unruly is the entanglement between our daily lives, our thoughts and actions, and the totality of the world out there, to the point that we simply cannot keep them apart for long in even the most seemingly private of mattes. Remarkably, one reviewer criticized the film, and its apartment's design in particular, for betraying the suffocating enclosure of the staged play by making us "continually, literally aware of the world beyond the Longstreet's apartment" (A. O. Scott 2011)—to which I would reply that it is precisely such an awareness that is the point. On the other hand, and more disturbingly, the film suggests how disruptive and in its own way suffocating that very awareness can be and how often, instead of shedding light on one another, the local and the global can obscure each other beyond remedy. More than their clashing parenting styles, it is arguably the recurrence and constant interference of those larger issues—from Alan's repeated phone calls with the multinational pharmaceutical company whose misdemeanours he has been hired to cover up to Penelope's invocations of civilizational values and human rights violations—that slowly but surely veer the discussion into the all-out verbal war it ends up becoming, assuring in the process that, once again, no genuine closure will be achieved.

And yet, just as true as that they are troublesome and, in many ways, irresolvable, is the fact that there is no getting away from these problems. The Cowans attempt to leave the apartment at least four times throughout the film, but what appears as some

Fig.5.1. The kids are alright.

mysterious, magnetic force just keeps them from ever actually doing it—and the Longstreets from closing the door on them. "Why are we still in this house?" Nancy asks in one of the last lines of the film. The metaphor is ambivalent: it may suggest a willingness or at least compulsion to talk, but also to fight. More clearly perhaps, it evokes a certain sense of inescapabilty, maybe even of what Massey, when reflecting on the concept of place, refers to as our state of "throwntogetherness" (2005, 151 and *passim*), of our having to face the unavoidable challenge of negotiating our living together in and with the world, even if we do not really know how.

And so, rather than conceding an unearned denouement to the couples' quarrels, at a certain point the film, as frustrated as we are, simply moves on from them and, for its final shot, returns to that outside world where it began and to which it has been constantly alluding. The shot, echoing the opening sequence of the film, which saw the infamous fight between the two children take place, finds the boys again in the same spot in the Brooklyn Bridge Park waterfront, where they are now back together and playing as if nothing had happened [fig. 5.1]. The episode is, as in the earlier scene, 're-framed' diegetically by the trunks and branches of two trees, hence granting both moments a markedly symbolic, almost fable-like quality. As if in a fable, indeed, we seem to change

seasons, from winter to spring, if not temporally, at least figuratively: not only are the children now friends again, but the sun is shining, the colors are brighter, the music joyful, the park is brimming with social life and even the branches of the trees have been trimmed so that this time, as the camera gracefully ascends over the scene and the end credits start to roll, they almost appear to embrace one another. In terms of both form and content, the scene begs to be read in terms of what film scholar Celestino Deleyto, adapting Elijah Anderson's urbanistic concept, refers to as a "cosmopolitan canopy" (2017; see Anderson 2011). If, for Anderson, these canopies represent urban settings that favour the coming together of strangers, Deleyto turns the concept into a tool to decode formal devices that work to articulate comparable spaces in films. Both notions, urban and cinematic, prove appropriate for us, and the sequence goes a long way towards couching the comforting possibility of a more hopeful and harmonious future to come.

But the film knows very well this is no true resolution either, only a displacement of its impossibility into a purely Utopian register. Indeed, every device at work in articulating the 'cosmopolitan' promise of this last scene can be re-read as reflective of the film's own textual artifice as well as, by extension, that of any idealized, self-comforting solution to our problems. The trees, for one, inevitably remind us of the film frame itself, and their recurrence in both first and last scene, a fight and a reconciliation, not to mention the conspicuous difference in photography and music, seem to suggest the radical ambivalence and discursive malleability of cinematic spaces and what takes place within them. That the film places both itself and us at a significant distance from the action, not only through the use of an extreme long shot, but also by making the scene a silent affair, which means that no clues are given on the terms of the children's appeasement, highlights the illusory, wish-fulfilling character of the moment. After all, we already know what happens when words get in the way. Moreover, even at that purely

formal level in which this resolution is meant to work, there is in fact a more disquieting message looming literally in the horizon. For if it is indeed the future that is at stake in this scene, that of the children seems to be sealed, at least visually, by the towering Lower Manhattan skyline in the background. We can easily read the image as a deterministic counterpoint to the scene's idealization, as if sentencing the boys to an impending adulthood much like that of their parents. But we can also sense in the interplay between foreground and background a spatial reworking of the local/global conundrum. What we see behind the children is after all post-9/11 Manhattan, indelibly signalled by the absence of the World Trade Center. It also that of the financial district, Wall Street and, critically at the time of the film, the origin, epicentre and omnipresent visual signifier of the recently begun global economic recession. Yet even in this sense, the very 'manufacture' of the image brings up its own complications. For the Manhattan skyscrapers appear here bigger and closer than they are 'naturally' seen from the Brooklyn Bridge Park, but also 'flatter' than how they should look under the wide-angle lens with which the scene in the park is filmed. A bit of research then tells us that the scene was in reality shot in France, that there is no such a playground as the one seen on the scene on the Brooklyn Bridge waterfront and that the buildings in the background are in reality a back-projection made with a gigantic green screen. Suddenly the space of the scene becomes transnational, if not transatlantic, with background and foreground spaces simultaneously closer and further apart than they really are.

More than bringing up another take on Franco-American relations as a figurative shorthand for the workings of globalization, where the threat of the US is constantly looming even when it is not actually there, the scene suggests yet again the problem of interpretation. After all is said and done, what are we to make, *really*, of a scene like this? What can we do but articulate its ambiguities and contradictions, its paralyzing

undecidedness? As I write these last, closing lines, I am myself haunted by the fact that no definitive conclusion has been given in the preceding pages to any of the many issues I have taken up in my analyses, that open-endedness and ambiguity, the need to keep asking questions, remain. This thesis began talking about "ambivalences, contradictions, instabilities and blurred boundaries," about "a frustratingly messy and volatile landscape to navigate and evaluate in our analyses," and perhaps it is the case, as with the Cowans and the Longstreets, that things are now only more muddled than they were at the beginning, and that only the appeal to some final simulation of Utopianism could provide the necessary yet fleeting and ambiguous sense of closure and accomplishment. Or perhaps, thinking with *Carnage*, instead of a question of background and foreground, local and global, it is the final shot's middle-ground, occupied by a spatially 'compressed' East River, that evokes our current predicament; fluid, open, messy, undecided, anxious, dangerous—and so all the more in need of exploration.

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