



Working Paper Series No.17

Original Research Paper

December 2019

How do films make us think?

Alain Brossat

National Chiao Tung University

© 著作權聲明

本文著作權屬作者擁有。文章內容皆是作者個人觀點，並不代表本中心立場。除特別註明外，讀者可從本中心網頁下載工作論文，作個人使用，並引用其中的內容。

徵引文化研究國際中心工作論文系列文章，需遵照以下格式：作者，〈文章題目〉，文化研究國際中心工作論文，ISSN 2707-2193，文章編號，文章所在網址。

© Copyright Information

The authors hold the copyright of the working papers. The views expressed in the ICCS Working Paper Series are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the International Center for Cultural Studies. Users may download the papers from ICCS website for personal use and cite the content, unless otherwise specified.

Citation of the ICCS Working Paper Series should be made in the following manner: Author, "Title," International Center for Cultural Studies Working Paper, ISSN 2707-2193, No. #, URL of the publication.

國立交通大學文化研究國際中心

International Center for Cultural Studies

National Chiao Tung University

Rm.103 HA Building 2, 1001 University Road

Hsinchu, Taiwan

Tel: +886-3-5712121 Ext.58274, 58272

Fax: +886-3-5734450

Website: <http://iccs.nctu.edu.tw/en/wps.php>

Email: iccs.wps@gmail.com

How do films make us think?

Alain Brossat

National Chiao Tung University

Email: abrossat@club-internet.fr

This paper is inspired by Gilles Deleuze's definition and practice of philosophy. Philosophy should not and cannot be considered as a close sphere. Since philosophy is inseparable from the creation of concepts, it cannot be shut up in itself. It always has to "leak" and be on the lookout for flight (escape) lines. This is the absolute condition for philosophy to be creative, not just a repetition of legitimized statements or pieces of knowledge. To some extent, philosophy, as creation, is just the opposite of philosophy as tradition. It is close to art and opposed to "knowledge" in the ordinary sense.

By philosophy as tradition, I mean a corpus or "body" made of doctrines, theories, books, authors, etc., that has to be conveyed from generation to generation – mostly by teaching. By philosophy as creation, I mean an action or operation of the mind that consists in inventing or manufacturing concepts. The invention of concepts is a matter of power (*potentia*), as Spinoza means it – By creating concepts, the philosopher meets or carries out his / her and increases his/her power. This has nothing in common with abstraction or with the universals. It is an operation which always takes place within what Deleuze calls a "field of immanence". It is always related to special conditions, to experience or, as Deleuze says, to "encounters". The invention of a concept often derives from an "encounter". More precisely, Deleuze says: not so much encounters with people as with "things", something like, let's say a piece of art, a painting, a piece of music, a novel... *a film*.

The philosopher is on the watch, on the lookout: he / she listens to a piece of music, he / she reads a novel or a short story, he / she watches a painting or a film and, all of a sudden, an "encounter" takes place, that is: he/she bumps into "something", an image, a situation, a character, a statement that make a concept take shape or arise.

For the moment, what matters is that, in a paradoxical way, the philosopher has to *leave philosophy* (as a spacial location, a discipline) in order to make philosophy constantly alive, to relaunch it as an activity of creation and not only an inert set of doctrines, theories, works, etc.

Deleuze describes his perspective in a rather compact form: *Je veux sortir de la philosophie par la philosophie* (I want to go out of philosophy through philosophy) or *Je suis sorti de la philosophie par la philosophie* (I went out of philosophy through philosophy). “Encounters” that make it possible for a concept to be coined can only happen provided that the philosopher moves, displaces himself / herself, being constantly looking for new encounters.

At this place, one can see how Deleuze makes the difference between an idea and a concept. Ideas are everywhere and nobody needs philosophy or the philosophers to have ideas. As well, artists have a lot of ideas, but so do ordinary people. Nobody needs philosophy to think and reflect about what he / she is doing, this in one’s occupation, personal life, according to one’s tastes, orientations, etc. This is where the question of cinema, movie-making appears in Deleuze’s reasoning: films are full of ideas and some ideas can only take shape and appear, i.e. become tangible in films, by being staged through a filmic or cinematic device. Philosophy tells stories, cinema tells stories, mathematics also tell stories – it is a matter of narratives and regimes of narration – but a mathematic idea and a philosophical concept are two different things and so is a filmic or cinematic idea – it can only appear as a unit (Deleuze calls a “block”) where time, motion, sound and pictures are set together and “compressed”. Concepts, from this viewpoint, are the way ideas are conveyed within the realm of philosophy – within a philosophical *regime of ideas*.

What Deleuze emphasizes is how various forms or regimes of ideas interact with and contaminate each other. He *goes out* of philosophy and displaces himself in the direction of literature or cinema, bumps into an idea in a film or a novel and coins (“invents”) a concept; he makes a concept out of it. This operation cannot only consist in borrowing the idea he has met or spotted in the novel and the film and transposing it into a philosophical narrative. It is not that simple. In a film or in a novel, an idea can only exist in a practical state or condition (as Louis Althusser would say), that is as something that is inseparable from a plot (a story), from a situation, from characters, landscapes, situations, objects, milieus, everyday life. It is immersed in the tangible world the film recreates. It is material and practical as such, made of colors, sounds, movement – it is basically a “picture”. This is the “field of immanence” where the idea appears as a design, a motif, it travels, or “floats”, if you want.

The philosopher’s task is to spot it, to grasp it, to take a grip on it, to catch it – he/she is some sort of a hunter or a butterfly collector... But then, the work has to continue, he/she has to make

out of this “booty” a concept, a tool for “operations” within the realm or in the field of philosophy. A concept is an idea that is compatible with the regime of narration (the narrative “style”) of philosophy. One cannot just transpose an “image” borrowed from a film, a motif borrowed from a piece of music, a color borrowed from a painting into a philosophical discourse – it needs to be transformed, re-arranged, so that it can fit into a philosophical discourse. It is, to some extent, an operation that has affinities with *translation* – but Deleuze does not put it this way...

This operation cannot be described as passing from something concrete to something abstract – the concept as abstraction – it is not as simple as that. Deleuze constantly insists on the fact that, actually, concepts are “very concrete”, since philosophy always is something that develops itself through discourse, gestures, conducts, actions in relation to a field of immanence.

As a consequence, for example, it would not be true to Deleuze’s position (proposition) to say: Madame Bovary, in Flaubert’s novel, this is how an idea takes shape or appears in literature, incarnated by a female character; and, conversely, the concept philosophy derives from that would be *Bovarism* – an abstraction or a generality intended for designing a form of melancholy or depression related to particular time or class conditions. It is not that simple and Deleuze would rather say that *Bovarism* is the typical “portemanteau concept” everybody can make use of, because it is very vague, very weak and be able to, as such, travel from a discipline to another, from cultural studies to literary studies, from sociology to psychology, etc. The concept Deleuze would derive from Flaubert’s famous novel would rather be something like “the adulterous wife” or “the futile woman who dreams”, not as a social or psychological or psychopathological type, but rather as an “intensifier”, a tool intended for giving an impulse to the “power of thought” (Giorgio Agamben) – this in the horizon of an epoch, or what Foucault calls “*actualité*”. But I must confess that what I am saying here is a bit of an extrapolation from what I understand of Deleuze’s approach of the relations between philosophy and art – literature or cinema...

What makes cinema (and literature) so important in Deleuze’s perspective is that he constantly insists on the fact that philosophy has no exclusive rights on *human thought*, in general. Philosophy is a *bea* – it gathers pollen from many flowers and makes its honey out of it – the honey itself is made of concepts or, perhaps, the concepts themselves. Yet, for the rest, ideas are to be found everywhere in creative activities. What I would like to show is how different

types of ideas travel or circulate from the realm of cinema to the realm of philosophy and back. How do *percepts* nourish concepts but also how concepts can irrigate artistic works. Artists create percepts, i.e. sets or arrangements of perceptions that survive those who feel or experience them, because these are the material their works are made of. This is how do *affects* “run over” a piece of music, for example, and contaminate those who listen to it. Affects also can give rise, inspire, set into motion concepts – Deleuze mentions at this place how writers like Franz Kafka or Samuel Beckett or burlesque films make him *laugh* and, by doing so, make him *think* – from a grotesque situation in a novel or a play, from a gag, a pun, a trick to a philosophical idea – a concept... The appearance of an idea, in the field of art or in the realm of philosophy always has something in common with the rise of (a) power (*puissance*), the power of a human subject, inseparable from creation, bringing to light something new, original, something that disrupts and perturbs the usual ways of perceiving and thinking. It “splits open the (human) skulls”, Deleuze says, it settles down in a field of perceptions, in a philosophical topography and asserts itself as *an obsession* – something people come back to or on again and again ...

When we raise the question : *how do films make us think?*, we have to ask ourselves how do we pass from the stage of impressions, feelings, emotions, shocks, intuitions, maybe – affects and percepts – to another stage – something that can be put in the form of a question, a problem, a reasoning and that has to be phrased, put into sentences – in a language or another. Something is at stake in the film, or in such or such sequence of it or in a character, a situation or another – something we have to make a “freeze frame” on and “unfold” in order to state clearly and problematize it. This is where the concepts are similar to “summoned”, beyond feelings and impressions. It is not only about the relations between what the film is made of – pictures and sound “arranged” together, basically, and human language. It is about *community too* – as we talk about the film, passing from the stage where each viewer is facing the film alone, by himself to the other stage where the film is a stake in terms of *we* – an object we talk about, agree or disagree about – for doing it seriously, we have to go beyond statements such as “I loved it” or “It was a boring” or even “It’s a wonderful film !” but be able to argue and comment by using notions, general ideas, convictions – *concepts*. This is why film critique that is only based on impressions, feelings and that make of it only a “matter of taste” is a purely trivial and frivolous practice, sheer *subjectivism*. If we want to take seriously the term *think* in the sentence “how do films make us think?”, we have to lean towards philosophy – not in the sense that we should put a ready-made philosophical grid on films, a grid made of concepts borrowed

from the “great tradition” of (Western) philosophy, but that we are *inspired, inclined by films* to present new concepts.

What appears in a film is, let’s say, a figure, a motif, a problem – but always, I insist, in a practical condition, which is inseparable from a situation, a plot, a configuration where several characters are interacting, etc. It is always in a state of immersion in the tangible world the film sets up or reconstructs. The game of philosophy is to ask questions such as: What is this situation about? What is the problem the characters are entangled in? How to put into words the problem that haunts Antonioni’s or Minnelli’s films? Or: what problem do characters like Bartleby or Achab (in Herman Melville’s novels and their filmic versions) stand for?

The game of philosophy consists in making the question that stands in the film in a practical condition, that is interwoven in the texture of the story *travel* from a filmic narrative (from the filmic regime of narration) to another fold, that is a regime of discourse marked out by concepts or arranged around concepts rather than feelings or opinions. Making human thought and ideas *travel* means here passing from a way of showing or from a form of exposure to another: from the film as story to philosophy as discourse or arrangement of statements. But showing is here inseparable from inventing and creating. Instead of saying “showing”, I could use the verb “to produce”, as it means both production, manufacturing and staging, exhibiting. What philosophy does, in this context is exactly this – creating and showing as two dimensions, inseparable from each other, of from the problem a film or a set of films deal with. Naming and phrasing a problem in philosophical terms or, conversely, asking oneself of what problem such or such character is the name of.

Let us take a simple example : the general public usually likes Clint Eastwood’s films, all around the world, because they always keep it in suspense, because of the strong, energetic, often contrasted characters Clintwood stages, because of the great variety of his cinema in terms of situations, locations, epochs, etc; but not only for that – it is also because viewers from very different social conditions can feel that there always is in these films something more than pure and simple entertainment, than the usual cathartic use of violence (in Hollywood style films), some sort of a *moral supplement* that appears from film to film as a musical theme or leitmotiv, almost an obsession – something so insistent and recurrent that any attentive observer is inclined to ask himself/herself the question I already mentioned: what is Eastwood’s *problem*, the problem almost all his films seem to revolve around?

I would not say that the task of philosophy is to *answer* that question – just putting it, posing it in terms that make a profitable and exciting discussion would be enough... And this is where we have to take the risk of *problematizing* something, which is an activity of the mind that is very akin to the creation of concepts; it is a risk because we might be wrong and off-target when we put our proposition into words and sentences – it is a creation for it doesn't derive directly from the film itself. There is always a gap between a story and a problem, between cinema and philosophy – the way we name the problem always has something hypothetical. So, we take the risk and say: the way Minelli has a problem with dreams (if we follow Deleuze saying: Minelli's comes again and again on this question: what is at stake when one is involved ("taken" – "pris") in someone else's dream?), the same way, Eastwood has a problem with...

Eastwood has a problem with justice (or *Justice*, if you want). Many of his film's plots rely on this observation or statement: justice, in general, and in particular the Legal state as it is supposed to enforce justice and Law Order are constantly failing and prove to be powerless in the face of offenders and criminals of all kinds. The police are corrupted, incompetent, torn between political pressures and legal procedures, the apparatus of Justice is constrained by rules and conditions that only benefit criminals, as a consequence of all that, ordinary, defenseless, vulnerable people who are exposed to violent and abusive actions are at a loss, resortless. They only have to suffer the wrong done to them... This is where the *righter of wrongs*, a key figure or character in Eastwood's films appears. He is a man (Eastwood's movies are, from this angle *very gendered*, the rescuer has to be a male) who is familiar with violence, who knows how to fight, how to use firearms and other weapons, cool-blooded, energetic, brave, a veteran from the war in Korea, a pensioned cop, a rogue cop, a private eye (investigator), an outsider, a lonely man, hard-boiled, a guy who has gone through various ordeals and trials, failures, too...

The righter of wrongs has no legal status, he just cannot stand that criminals and bullies lay down the law, as a consequence, he *substitutes for* the failing Legal state and its powerless or corrupt agencies. Since he always is a *loner* (alone against organised crime, networks, gangs, etc.), he has to act and operate in a very expeditious way, using very brutal methods; he has to be very unscrupulous, and to rely on the deterrent effect of ultraviolence or terror...

This is what one could call the "Inspector Harry paradigm". In terms of cinematic dramatic effects, it is enthralling, very effective – rather classical recipes... The series of the Inspector

Harry films is the matrix of all this part of Eastwood's work, its dominant part. He always is re-enacting the same plot from film to film. What we have to try to decipher is what makes sense here, in altogether the theological, the philosophical and the political dimension. We can call it "the code", "the core", or perhaps "the fable" of this work. It is not something that would be hidden *behind* the various stories all these films are made of, or lie *under*, in their substructure, infrastructure. On the contrary, it is *fully open*, woven in the history itself, explicit, visible – but like a design or a motif that has to be identified as such – the motif in/on the carpet or the tapestry – this would be perhaps the "image" that fits best for this notion: it is here, it is available – but it has still to be acknowledged, put into words, shaped so that it can be appropriated as an "idea" or a problem. *The problem* is completely *immanent* to the story.

I mentioned the theological dimension of the problem – it is inseparable from the moral stake, here: since we live in society, a society which is imperfect, violent, dangerous, we are constantly fated to bump into various expressions or manifestations of the evil. We cannot escape it. It is not only about bad guys, lunatics, maniacs, vicious people, addicts who become predators, etc. It does not only on delinquency as a social problem, lack of safety in big cities, drugs, prostitution, street thieves, etc. It is about something that is more deeply rooted in our human condition, *the human stain*, criminal impulses, violent moves, our common condition as sinners, the evil as something immemorial and insuperable – in short the good old theological music of the *Original Sin* in Western Christian societies... See on this *Mystic River* that is especially insistent on that issue – evil.

Where the evil is omnipresent as a dimension of human condition, it appears that it constantly contaminates and corrupts institutions, powers and devices that are intended for fighting it – all that is supposed to embody the Law and secure the Rule of Law – police, justice, democratic institutions, etc. For this reason, *someone* has to appear in order to prevent human society from succumbing to chaos and prevent the law of the jungle from standing out – this *someone*, as a righter of wrongs is a variation on or a variant of a character whose religious connotations are blatant – *the savior* – the Christ being the original model of this figure. But Christ revisited *the American way* which is not exactly Gospel-like in these films...

The savior who restores law and order and secures the life of ordinary, good and decent people, as it has been put under threat by wrongdoers of all brands and kinds is inseparable from the

figure of *the exception*. He can succeed in doing what the apparatuses of democracy fail in doing not only because he never refrains from making use of means of exception, but, basically, because of his relation to *miracles*. The savior always is somebody who has the capacity to make (to perform) miracles. In Eastwood's version, these miracles are a secular version of the Christian miracle, they consist in rescuing, saving people the legal order has failed to protect or in punishing criminals or unmasking, exposing and making harmless human monsters (the Devil with a human face) that remained out of the reach of the legitimate powers who should have taken care of it. What the savior has as his own right is this: nobody is entitled to ask him questions on the ways and means (the hows) he performs his miracles. In other terms, his relation to exception is that of a sovereign – nobody is in a position to ask a sovereign to account for what he does and how he does it – if he has to, he's not a real, genuine sovereign, just a fake...

In other terms, we see how the design, the image, the motif of a political figure appears in Eastwood's films, that of the place of exception within the realm of democracy – *democratic order cannot do without this providential, heaven-sent character* – the righter of wrongs, as a savior and a miracle(s)-maker – which is, as you can imagine a very strong proposition from which many consequences derive, this in political and philosophical terms. It is maybe not just by chance that Eastwood was, on the occasion of the last presidential elections in the US an enthusiastic supporter of Donald Trump, a man whose political credo always was that might is right if it's related to a sacred cause (like "Make America great again!") and that, as a consequence, exception has to prevail over the rule if the end justifies it...

The figure of the righter of wrongs rebounds from Eastwood's movies to Trump's politics and policy, and this is how and why we can say that Eastwood's films convey not only a moral (in the sense of the moral of a fable or a tale) or morals derived from some sort of a Christian theology, but also a philosophy and in particular a philosophy of politics based on a strong notion of "sovereign exception" (Carl Schmitt, Giorgio Agamben). This philosophy is not written down in the form of a political manifesto. It is not proclaimed and put forward as such. It is our job, I mean the job of philosophy, to detect and discern it in the texture of the film(s), to name it and *phrase* it. Or, if you prefer, to make a "stop frame" on such or such movie belonging to Eastwood's work and say: Be attentive. This is not only a thriller, a dark suspense film, for here appears something we have to call "an idea". That is something like a proposition or a proposal we have to take into consideration and examine carefully – just because it's very

contentious and maybe dangerous... Don't let yourself be misled by the fact that this film belongs to a genre that is not "intellectual" at all, that it is intended for the general public, as an action movie, that the performance of the actors is very conventional, etc. This is not the problem. The so-called "entertainment films" can make us think no less than "intellectual films".

As Deleuze suggests, "ideas" can emerge everywhere, even in a film by Clint Eastwood, the "tough guy", the typical US conservative, anti-intellectual and anti-liberal in many respects, a stubborn supporter of the free trade of firearms in the US, etc. This is the way things are, and this is one of the beauties of cinema – it constantly reminds us that ideas are to be found everywhere, including where we would prefer not to have to spot them and deal with them... This is maybe the "democratic" or "common" dimension of cinema, in contrast with other arts that might be intrinsically "aristocratic", such as classical (Western) music or opera...

Some people have argued that Clint Eastwood's cinema is *intrinsically fascist* because it constantly flirts with exception, under the guise of the righter of wrongs, a Man of Providence whose action always is narrowly associated with extreme violence... But at the same time, of course, things are not so simple, since his films also convey all sorts of messages that go another direction – the passion for justice, dedication to the weak and the oppressed, the hate for malicious and abusive people – in brief some sort a general humanistic message these films insistently convey... This is also a dimension of the job: we have to learn how to problematize the complexities and tensions that go through a cinematographic work, we have to locate and mark out the spots where conflicting motifs collide – *how can the "soft music" of fascism permeate through a humanistic message?*

We see how the original figure of this work, *Inspector Harry*, is altogether an *affect* (anger, furor, vindictiveness in the face of social chaos and moral collapse), a *percept* (Harry as a character, his way of acting, behaving...) and an *image-concept* (an "idea", a *topos* that is both political and philosophical) about the complex, complicated relations between justice, violence, exception, and "rescue"; a *topos* whose individual incarnation is this very special "character" – the *righter of wrongs*.

Then, once we have laid our hand on this concept, we can test it, see if it increases our capacity to think about other situations, other films – and progressively, just by focusing on it, we discover that it leads us to the core of full sections of the American (Hollywood) cinema and

by the same token of the American (US) culture – this, let's say from the classical westerns or even *The Birth of a Nation* to Christopher Nolan's *Superman* and... Donald Trump.

The righter of wrongs as the indispensable compensation of or remedy to the weakness of Law, the evanescence of Legal order, the absence or the collapse of the Legal state or the Rule of Law. If you look carefully at it, you see that the righter of wrongs is a nomadic figure that endless "travels" through the history and the culture of the United States, that it is, in a very ambiguous and contentious way, an integral part of democratic culture and the culture of the State in this country, that is inseparable from hegemonism as a consequence of the very notion of "manifest destiny" – the so-called manifest destiny of the US to be a "great" nation and country, that is to rule and dominate. If you think for example of the killing of Bin Laden, a commando operation supervised by President Obama, in 2011, it is very typically placed under the regime of the righter of wrongs, in terms of representation and of narration – an operation of retaliation for the suicide attack against the Twin Towers depicted and praised as an operation of justice achieved not only in the name of the American nation or people but of mankind as a whole. To a great extent, it looked like the reenactment of a film bearing the signature of Clint Eastwood – the implacable and ultra-violent extermination of a "monster", an "enemy of the human kind" in a context where "common law" (international law, at this place) appears to be a too soft norm or authority. What matters is not the legal form of the action, its lawfulness – it's the result – the righter of wrongs isn't a jurist, a legal expert – he is a *man of action* – This at any scale – Kowalski, in *Gran Torino*, the ordinary man, the retired widowed blue-collar as well as Barack Obama, the ruling president of the US...

I will come again to this question and try to show how this problem of the Legal State or the Rule of Law that "leaks" from all its "ends", that is so imperfect, fragile and shaky that it constantly has to be reinforced, rescued and restored *in extremis* (at the last moment) by a providential savior, (a righter of wrongs as "hero"). This problem is so obsessive in Hollywood films that it endlessly displaces itself from a genre to another, from a popular "hero" to another, from John Wayne to Harrison Ford (*The Fugitive*) from *Gunfight at OK Corral* (John Sturges, 1957) to Christopher Nolan's *Superman*...

But for the moment, let me insist: cinema makes us think by encouraging us and giving us incentives to flush out and mark out *problems*. I use the term "problem" in the sense of Deleuze, when he says – Captain Achab, in Melville's *Moby Dick* or Vincente Minnelli in *Brigadoon*

(1954), what is their *problem*? That is, what is their life, their work so obsessively and obstinately revolving around – the bad infinite, being “captured” in someone’s dream or desire, etc.? When we watch films in a way that is active (*looking for something that makes us think*) and not passive (just make time pass or having good time for a moment – pure entertainment), we keep being on the alert, like a hunter, an angler, so that we don’t let “the problem” escape and vanish when it suddenly appears, sometimes in a fleeting and transient way, sometimes in a more insistent, almost obsessive way. It takes a lot of time and patience, for if you watch films in this state of mind, you have to watch a lot of films, all kinds of films, and sometimes to re-watch them, good films, bad films, etc.

Then, of course, you become some sort of a night bird or animal, an owl or a bat, living in the dark – but with wide open eyes...

Let me give you two examples I will have to come back again on, for both of them raise important issues, and each of them would be enough for a full course. First example, what I call *the car driver’s complex*. Let me explain briefly: you watch films (I mean *I* watch films...) from many countries, various times and located in very different contexts and, progressively, you see what I call a *topos* (a motif, a motto) emerge: a man or a woman drives a car and knocks over a person who is walking along the street or the road – knocks over or has the feeling that he/she has knocked this person over (down), for, most of time, the driver doesn’t stop, takes the flight – and this is where the story begins. Of course, there are many variations on this plot or *topos*, but this is the matrix, the starting point of films I see in a piecemeal fashion, in the course of my viewing of films – I spot the recurrence of this motif in a French film, an Argentinian film, a Turkish film, a Romanian film... and gradually, I tell myself : there must be *a problem* here – but what it is, I don’t know, at this stage – or, conversely : what is their (the filmmakers’) problem with this story or situation? How is it that all of them focus on such an incident and are so fascinated by it that they make a film on it?

This is the way it takes shape: you see a problem appear, even before you know what it is about – What or where the problem actually is. It is an intuition you have because you have noticed that there is a *topos* that so insistently goes through films from all around the world... You then have to try to work it out, to identify it, to name it – it’s a risk you have to take, for you always may miss the target... It is a track we have to follow after having singled out the problem, this

in order to give substance to the concept that emerges, to flesh it out: how can this both repetitive and scattered incident become not a symbol, not an emblem, but just the image or the sketch, the outline of a problem that obviously has much in common with the ordinary man's condition in our society, since this scene repeats itself in movies over and over, from one country to another, stepping across the ocean, passing from the past to the present?

Once we have marked out the space (the "territory") of the concept, we have to ask ourselves: what is at stake here? What makes that this "image" (a car running into a passer-by and not stopping) so insistent, so obsessive, so haunting? The first idea that strikes us is, of course, *guilt*: guilt feelings and what derives from them. But guilt inevitably associated with *shame*, too, intertwined with it. This is actually what the plot of the films related to this *topos* is made of: *what next?* How to deal with the result and the consequences of this very brief scene? How to escape, deny it or, on the opposite, make amends for it? After the "incident" has taken place, a configuration takes shape, where various characters are involved, the "perpetrator", his relatives or nearest, the witnesses if any, the victim and his family and nearest, the authority (police, justice, etc.)... And what is the "scene" (that often takes place by night, is associated with darkness – lack of visibility) actually about? What do we have to deal with, actually – an incident, an accident, a crime or maybe, in some of the films, just an imaginary non-event?

The more we watch these films, we dwell on them, the more what appears is *some sort of an allegory* that runs from film to film, like a dotted line, a design where various figures and mottos meet and overlap, like relationships between conflicting social "species", the moral discomfort of the middle class (the privileged), the car, or car driving, as the allegorical figure of the blind and constantly sped-up "move forward" of our societies, the moral weakness of the contemporary individual, guilt and shame part and parcel of his-her condition, etc. It is where we discover that films never "give answers" to present, more or less burning moral or philosophical questions, they just *mark out a space*, in a way that is full of imagery, vivid, a space where a problem is *designed*, staged, put forward under the guise of a "story". Then, the film leaves us alone in the face of the problem – we have to do the best of it, as we like, as we can... But when I say "alone", it is not quite so: we always can "pool" or "club together" to talk about it. This is how cinema can be associated with "community", the community of active viewers who sit together and palaver about the film...

We see here how films can be taken into consideration as virtual "thinking-machines" (on the

model of a washing-machine). They have the power, the capacity to make us think about the present. They can intensify, increase, our “power to act” (Spinoza) in terms of understanding, analysing, criticizing the present. It’s not an automatic process, far from that: most of people just see films for entertainment and recreation, that is some sort of a pleasant lethargy and state of absentmindedness. What I am talking about here is just the opposite of this majority use of and view on cinema – *films as intensifiers of our relation to the present*, this from the angle of an “ontology of the present” (Michel Foucault).

Let me now pass to a second example which is somehow different from the car driver’s allegory, but not completely alien to it. As you have noticed, what is at stake here is inseparable from the notion of *series* or *set*. I had to make a *set of films* appear for setting up this figure or allegory (it might be a paradigm too, we also can envision it from that angle) of the guilty car’s driver. It is a set or series because all what these films have in common, in spite of their differences and disparities, is this situation – a car runs over a person and kills him/her – or the driver *thinks* that he/she did run over somebody – but, we, viewers, cannot be sure – this is what happens in the Argentinian film *The Woman without a Head* by Lucrezia Martel. We cannot see the problem surge up in the absence of this series. We have to begin by making it. It is a precondition for the problem to take shape.

My second example is about addiction and the same precondition is here at stake. Before I can try to mention what the problem I’m trying to sketch out is, I had to watch a lot of films that deal with bad habits or vices, obsessions, compulsive behaviors – addictions: heavy drinking, addiction to drugs, to sex or pornography, to gambling, to video-games – all you want. The setting up of the series, on such an issue, is just a matter of time of patience – there are lots of films that deal with addictions, from *The Lost Weekend* (Billy Wilder, 1946) to *Shame* (Steve Mac Queen, 2011) or *Welcome in New York* (Abel Ferrara, 2014), passing through Otto Preminger’s *The Man With the Golden Arm* (1955) or Jacques Demy’s *Baie des Anges* (1963) – and many others...

This is to some extent the easiest part of the job. The most difficult thing is to pass from “addiction”, which is a very common notion everybody understands – but in the horizon of medicine, sociology, psychology, psychiatry, police, justice, etc. Addictions as a social phenomenon with a psychological and pathological dimension – the addict as a sick or unbalanced and suffering person. But this approach of addiction by common sense is not what

we are interested here in. It is not a concept. It is not an idea. It is purely descriptive, in the terms of various disciplines or institutions. *It is not philosophical*, for it deals with addictions in terms that make of them a problem that society, medicine, the police, justice have to face as a disorder, something that has to be diagnosed, cured, punished, described in articles or books, etc. Philosophy, in the sense of Deleuze, would take things from another angle and ask: the addict, as a character, *what is his/her problem?* Which is a very different question from asking oneself or asking experts, specialists: addiction to liquors, addiction to tobacco, addiction to heroin, addiction to roulette – what is it actually, as a social, pathological phenomenon?

For if we examine things from the philosophical angle, we discover that what is at issue in addiction is a “game” or a conflict between two poles: *repetition and difference*. Addiction is a curse in that very sense. It is based on a gesture (drinking, smoking, having a shoot, going to the casino for gambling, etc.), the will of the person has no grip on – an impulse that drives him/her and he/she cannot stop or refrain from doing. Repetition as a gesture that has to be achieved and whose achievement is out of the reach of free will of the individual. In this regard, addiction is a curse, a damnation, a constant suffering that tears the human subject into pieces. It’s an ordeal that is extreme in terms of loss of oneself and desubjectivation. It’s like being taken hostage by a satanic other and having lost any self-control. Repetition, from the angle of addiction, or addiction as a form or “version” of repetition is a curse – which is not the case for any form of repetition – habits, routines are based on repetition and we cannot live without habits and routines, that is things we make without thinking about them, automatically, they help us in everyday life... But addiction is the opposite. It is a burden on the human subject’s life, poisons to his/her life, what destroys it slowly or quickly... An addiction, it is not just a bad habit...

For this reason, all the films that deal with addiction are full with scenes where the existential, the vital, the agonizing matter of *the last drink*, *the last shot*, *the last poker game* (etc.) is at stake. It is distressing because we know that, most of time, it does not work: The last is not the last. There will be another drink, another shot, another game after the last, and the infernal cycle will start again, where the addict appears to be shut up like in a fortress, a prison.

On the other hand, experience shows that sometimes something like a miracle can happen, that a saving and blessed bifurcation takes place – that the addict succeeds in overcoming his-her addiction, giving up booze, heroin, compulsive sex, roulette, etc. Philosophically, this

“miracle”, we have to call it *difference* – that is the ability for a subject to differ from what he/she was, the instant before, as an addict, or, in other terms, to dismiss his/her previous condition as an addict, a human wreck: from that instant, I am clean, I am sober. It is a metamorphosis, a resurrection, I come alive again...

If you think a bit about it, you easily understand that this design, this figure – how repetition and difference are intertwined and interact in addiction. It is something that has to be inscribed in a wider, broader perspective... It is about the relation of the Self to the Self, about servitude (heteronomy) and freedom (autonomy). It is an allegory of the antinomies and tensions our condition is made of... This is of course the reason why “addiction films”, as a genre, have such a public success. This is the reason why addiction, as a narrative device of material and not only as a “subject”, is so popular.

Addiction is one of the marks or the stigmas of the human condition as imperfect, morally and emotionally weak, fallible, sinful “creatures”, beyond the social dimension of the problem – all that, in the modern forms of life, in big cities, drives us to be in search of outlets for our stress, our fears, our sufferings... But difference, the possibility to *branch out* of heavy drinking, taking drugs, gambling, that is *emancipating ourselves from it* – to relieve ourselves from this tyranny – this is an option that always remains open to us because we, in spite of all, have sealed some sort of a pact with freedom, that is free will. For this reason, all these films that sometimes deal with very sordid social conditions, with complete dejection and abjectness also have a metaphysical dimension for they revolve around something that is rooted at the core of human condition.

This is what I call a philosophical operation – making some sort of a figure or design appear, which is not properly speaking “abstract” for it is made of many films, many stories, plots, characters, it is very “concrete” in that sense and cannot be abstracted or separated from this “material”. It is rather a combination of, on the one hand, *notions* like repetition, difference, relapse, bifurcation, and, on the other, of *situations*. It is of this combination of the “ideal” (from: idea) dimension and the existential that the concept is made of, as it appears in the course of the reflection on these films, that is of what they have in common. This operation doesn’t only consist in spotting and listing situations that come again and again, from one film to another – for example the setback, the relapse: the addict having tried hard to get out of the grip of his addiction and seemed to have made decisive steps in this direction and who, all of

a sudden, for a reason or another, has a relapse and succumbs to his-her vice, a very classical scene in that kind of movie – it is beyond this dimension an *act of creation*, a successful creation, Deleuze says. A decision in the realm of thought, the activity of the mind, as well.

In effect, it consists in making visible something which is completely new. The concept is not just a “comment” or some sort of a synthesis (an intellectual digest) of what the films are made of. It is an act of re-creation. It makes a new reality appear. When the operation that consists in creating a concept is successful, it designs a new field, and makes a new reality appear. This, in general, goes beyond the filmic stake we are dealing with here. For example, the promotion of the notion of *genocide* after WWII completely reconditions and transforms our perception and understanding of the modern and contemporary exterminations, of mass crimes, state crimes, etc. It makes us think differently about history, the past and the present.

The suggestion I make is that literature and cinema back up these operations and acts of creation. Not every novel, not every film, of course, far from that, but, conversely, *any* novel or short story, *any* film has a chance to do it. I mean, in the realm of cinema, even very *commercial* films can give such a push to the act of creation, to the creation of a concept as design. Take for example a film like *The Four Feathers*, a lavish “colonial” film (there are different versions of it, the best being Alexander Korda’s). It is about a young man, from a good family of the British aristocracy in the second part of the 19th century. He belongs to a lineage of military men, so he is supposed to make a career in the British army, as his father and his grandfather did... He goes to a military academy, makes friends there, young men from the same milieu as his, he has a charming fiancée, but as time passes he becomes more and more reluctant to take up a military career – his vocation would rather be to study, to be involved in social or philanthropic work – things like that. He conflicts with his family and his friends on this issue and, at the end, as he is about to depart for a military (colonial) expedition in Egypt-Sudan, he resigns, he leaves the army. His friends, young officers like him who envision their baptism of fire with great enthusiasm, even his fiancée, do not understand anything of his reasons (they live in tradition) and just go to the conclusion that he is scared, that he is *just a coward*. His three best friends send him three white feathers and his fiancée adds to them the fourth, which is, according to the military code of honor, the way to express their contempt for his breach of honor and duty, a way of breaking off with him, a way before all of *shaming him*.

This young man is deeply distressed both by the insult and the rejection of his personal choice by his best friends, his fiancée, and his father. He feels it deeply unjust. He feels that nobody understands him. He is depressed. Time passes and he hears one day that the expedition (army corps) his friends, the young officers, belonged to has been inflicted a bloody and thrashing rout by local insurgents, on the borders of Egypt and Sudan and that two of them are held prisoners by these fierce native fighters, wild and cruel as anyone would expect....

At that moment, set in motion by an irresistible impulse, he decides to fly to their aid, to go for broke in order to rescue them. He sails to Egypt, walks through the mountains and the desert under the disguise of an Arab, takes all the risks, behaves heroically and finally succeeds not only in saving his friends by helping the British army to restore law and (colonial) order, crush and punish the fanatic insurgents, etc.

It's, of course, a very conventional colonial narrative, it's kitsch and ideologically indefensible and pointless – but this is not really what matters here.

What really matters is the figure of *shame and recognition*, the interaction between shame and recognition: as a modern Western subject, a rational subject, this young man is fully entitled to think that it is his good right to avert from a military career, to be allergic to all these silly dreams of conquest and glory, this in particular in the context of colonial expansionism, of modern imperialism. It's his good right to turn to something more rewarding and meaningful – education, philanthropy, what we would call today “social work”... But the problem is how this rational reasoning of a modern individual is like eaten up by shame and by the irresistible wish to show that he is not what his friends, relatives, his lover think – a coward. The loss of recognition of his human (moral) quality, dignity, is what he cannot face or stand – in the face of the others.

For this reason, he will be driven to set himself on the move and risk his life in order to show all of them that they were wrong, that he is not the chicken they imagine, that he will become, in opposition to his deepest convictions and commitments, an heroic actor of the British colonial undertaking, this in order to restore his “image” in the eyes of his peers and relatives.

It is very interesting, for it shows how, in given circumstances, our need (wish, thirst) for recognition drives us to act and take decisions that go the opposite direction of our most intimate convictions, of our innermost certitudes. This is what I call a beautiful figure, as a

philosophical, moral and aesthetic matter. It is beautiful because it makes us think about many things, because of all we can infer from it, in relation with our own life and experience. Something is at stake here which has much in common with our quest for truth or with “truth effects”. This is where it matters to make a clear difference between knowledge and truth, and, by the same token, between “real” and “true”.

In terms of knowledge as description of reality, such a film does not teach us much. It is an ornamental description of colonization, ideologically biased, not reliable. Despite that, it brings about *truth effects* for it succeeds in staging in a “romantic” and “commercial” way a *problem* we are liable to have, all of us, with recognition, that is in our relation with the community we are supposed to belong to, with our nearest, friends, relatives, all this in social and affective, emotional terms. It is, as I said, a lavish and kitsch story, but the problem appears in it, in a way that is distinct and insistent enough that we are encouraged to *problematize* it, think about it in maybe more speculative terms – as “an idea” that concerns our social and moral condition, our lives in the dimension of what Sartre would call the *existential*. All this is a matter of *intensity*, it is something we have to figure out as we watch the film, some sort of an *act of re-creation* that goes through a displacement – from the dramatic, romantic, commercial story in Technicolor the film deals with to a picture, a figure, a design that makes sense for a philosophy of life or, more precisely, an ontology of shame, a reflection on the interactions between shame, as an affect, and “the Self” (Foucault) as a field of experience and ordeals. It is not a matter of knowledge in the usual sense, at this place: what matters is not what such a film is supposed to teach us in terms of “human psychology”, as a general notion, which is very vague, weak and commonplace. What matters is the *power of shame* as it is pinpointed here – that is how such an affect can overwhelm a human subject with such an intensity and bring about so powerful and irresistible de-subjection effects that it drives him/her to completely reorient his/her existence, this as a result of a sudden and imperious impulse.

What makes us think here is the focus on that moment where a sudden turn, a completely unexpected bifurcation takes place in this young man’s existence. It is completely illogical, amazing – and this is what makes us think and ask ourselves: *what has happened?* It is the surprise effect, our amazement that make us think: how is it that, at this very moment, this character behaves in such an unexpected way, makes such an improbable choice? You see clearly here what I call “intensity”: this very moment (the crucial choice, the radical reorientation) is like a miniature, a close-up of what we have to problematize, it’s a matter of

focus or, if you want, extreme “concentration”, “condensation” – all the stake of the film is like condensed in this very instant – the moment when everything tips, turns into something unpredictable – the sudden appearance of a new horizon, a new escape line, Africa, the exotic country, the colony as a place for redemption...

But what redemption? This is where the plot of the film becomes not only thrilling (in terms of suspense) but intellectually fascinating, for our “hero” has done nothing shameful, according to our modern, rational, supposedly enlightened patterns, according to the norms of a society that highly values the free will of the individual. He does not share the pathetic dreams of military glory of his friends. There is nothing shameful in that. In spite of that, his thirst for redemption is intact : he has to show them and his fiancée and his family that he can also be a hero, fight gloriously for king (or queen?) and country, die gloriously on the battlefield or any other dubious combat, at the service of the British colonial empire. It is a complete denial of his previous existential choice which made of him a free, brave and very decent man, since he had to assert himself against the stream of tradition, conventionalism – the herd instinct. And all of a sudden, he takes a completely opposite direction by “replacing” this moral courage by some sort of a military bravery which is not something we can embrace without any reservation – for the least...

At the same time, the making of the film is clever and lively enough for making us, the viewers, feel with the “hero” the intolerable burn of shame and, as a consequence, perfectly understand his turn and feel the same way he does, we are in the same emotional tune or tone as he decides to leave everything in order to go for broke and try to rescue his friends... For shame, as an “ontological affect”, is something we can easily have the intuition of – it can easily communicate with our own field of experience.

Let me insist here on the divide between knowledge and truth. In terms of knowledge, such a film does not offer us anything: it is swathed in and soaked with a very conventional orientalist-exotic-colonial fantasy, the heroic deeds of the main character in East Africa are totally improbable, there is not much in all that story one can rely on, in historical terms. But, once again, this is not what counts. What counts is the quality of the plot as a *stimulus*, an incentive for our own reflection on our existential condition, on the power of shame, on the economy of recognition, on the difference between acknowledgement and recognition. Of course, what this film stages is a very sweet and, to some extent, insipid version of these problems, with the

inevitable happy ending, the sentimental or romantic tone, the suave sublime, etc. But, with all that, what remains, what is intact, is what I would call “the knot” – the more our hero takes a distance from his community’s *ethos*, the more he emancipates himself from this realm, the more the trauma (the moment he receives the letter with the four white feathers as the traumatic event) takes him back to the world he is coming from, to the condition that he has severed the links with. Shame is the transmitter that carries out this “operation” (the relapse into his former condition). This is a wonderful and brilliant conceptual figure or arrangement, something we can think and think about endless, both speculative, abstract if you want, and very matter of fact, practical, for it constantly echoes situations we are familiar with. And this is where I say, insistently: cinema is, and films can be, a fantastic *thinking machine* (“*machine-à-penser*”).

Cinema, as an art, is not an extension of literature, a sucker or a parasite on the tree of literature. It is, as an art, heterogamous to literature, placed under a new regime of the making of art. Walter Benjamin, among others, has insisted on. I do not want to dwell here at length on this difference. This is not our subject but we have to keep it in mind. Nevertheless, as far as we talk about movies as they make us think, we have to insist, conversely, on the fact that, at this place, on such issues, Literature and cinema are inseparable, there is a pact that unites them, a pact they have not signed but that is all the more indestructible since it derives from the way they achieve “operations of thought”. What I mean by that is simple: *The Four Feathers*, as well as Nathanael Hawthorne’s *The Scarlett Letter*, are not a film or a novel *about shame*; Beaumarchais’ *The Marriage of Figaro* is not a play *on* emancipation; *Benito Cereno*, Herman Melville’s famous short story is not a novella *on* the interpretation of signs or *on* the end of slavery, etc. This is not how it works in the realm of literature or cinema as fields or spaces of creation. What first comes to meet you in such or such a novel or film is not an “issue”, a motif, a subject, a matter, a theme, but *a story*, a narrative. And then, it’s all a matter of decantation, it’s like when somebody who has a gift to read (guess) the future from coffee grounds of tea leaves – you, the reader, the viewer, have to feel how an idea, a motif, a question appears, takes shape in the thickness, in the density of the story. In other terms, there is not distance between the piece of art and an alleged motto or subject, the “idea”, if any is buried in it, dissolved in it, in other terms, we have to do the job so that it becomes visible and can be put into words.

When people write novels, plays, make films they conceive as an *illustration* of a general issue,

a general moral or philosophical matter, a good cause, an abstraction – they fail. They become emphatic, demonstrative, pompous. What they write or make remains inconclusive. And it is even worse when they write a book or make a film from a true story they re-enact or worse than worse when they make a film on/from a famous person's life – *biopic* as a cinematographic genre. I do not remember having witnessed the appearance of what Deleuze calls “an idea” from a biopic. For what is very hostile and alien to the notion of idea in that sense is an approach of cinema (art) as representation rather than creation through imagination. A biopic's intention always is a trial to “represent” an individual's life course through cinematic devices and arrangements. It is a *copy*, laborious or spirited – this is not what makes the difference.

Another very exciting and efficient *regime* of the “let think” performed by movies, some of them – the exception rather than the rule – is that of the *fable*. What I call here fable is some sort of a discursive design, but framed or carved in the “material” cinema is made of – a combination of pictures, sounds, editing effects, as always. Or, if you prefer, a “figure” engraved in a “story”. This figure's property is to be an *incentive* – *it makes us think*, on our condition, our present, on ourselves, social order, time..., it inclines us to problematize something we often have bumped into but without never having made a stop at it and thought about it carefully. As the fable emerges, a “problem” that was indistinct, hazy even if recurrent, obsessive, is suddenly outlined and stands up.

Let me take a few examples to make my proposition clear. In a film that had some success among the young generation and was Oscarized (It was recommended to me by my son) called *Get out*, by Jordan Peele (2017), I saw (felt) a fable take shape – something that rang a bell, something I was somehow familiar with, but in a way that was only “floating”, hazy: It is about a young girl from a well-off intellectual white family who brings home her African-American boyfriend. Her parents live in a sumptuous house (with swimming pool, of course), surrounded with friends of all kinds, most of them bobos, artists, writers, etc. The Black man is of course welcomed and treated very kindly: These people are liberals, open minded, tolerant, sophisticated, but progressively, all sorts of indecipherable slight incidents occur that make this social landscape become very uncanny and even more – as shows the eery and gory end of the film... the fable that is designed progressively is relentless : as far as the relation to “the Other”, the Black as the eternal “Other” of this white caste is concerned, these “beautiful people”, these liberals, these progressive educated jolly people are worse, much worse than aggressive declared racists, they are much more dangerous than these, they are vampires and cannibals.

The fable that emerges here has of course a much more extensive value: it is about the illusions, delusions and impostures of “progressivism” in contemporary Western style societies. It is about the allegedly “respectable” Left which, as it is put to the test of power, facts, reality appears to be as cynical, devious, and indifferent to the condition of “the many” as the Right. And, if you scratch a bit the veneer away, *racist* too... It’s an inexhaustible fable on the “least evil” which, with use, often appears to be worse than a clear and overwhelming evil, for it is more deceptive and ingratiating... It’s an evil that always appears under the disguise of a good and this is why it is so difficult to detect and fight.

The more expressive, the stronger a fable is, the more it has the capacity to circulate and bounce from one film to another. In 1968, the British filmmaker Lindsay Anderson shot a film that was a manifesto in favor of an all-out revolt against “the disciplines”, this in the spirit of the time – 1968 as a global insurrection against “the disciplines – *If*”.

It is about three rebellious adolescents who are students in one of these old-fashioned British colleges where the children of the middle-class are trained and drilled, where patriotism and the sense of hierarchy are instilled. The three rebels are punished, but they cannot be subdued. They challenge the supervisors and the teachers in a more and more impertinent way, they get out of control and at the end they run amok, they seize arms they have found in the college’s attic and shoot at random at the students, their families, the teachers... this on the occasion of a ceremony. It’s a strident and merciless uprising, in the spirit of these years. The interesting thing is that one of the first victims of their shooting, the only one they carefully “elect” in fact is the principal, the headmaster of that boarding school. They kill him with a bullet between the eyes. Coldly, relentlessly. Why? Just because, as they vehemently conflicted with the institution’s discipline, he was the one who, by contrast with his subordinates, did not punish them but tried to take them in by telling them things such as: Look, you are smart guys, much smarter than your comrades. You rebel against the order and discipline of our school which I can pretty well understand, but why waste your precious energy by indulging in vain gestures and conducts. Why don’t you rather give a positive dimension to your anger by helping me to improve the system, taking responsibilities? And so and so forth...

The headmaster is at this place in the role of the tempter, whose game and function is to “recycle”, co-opt and hijack the rebellious energy, to avert it and put it at the service of the reform and updater of the school order... As such, he is much more dangerous and abject than

those who implement discipline, much cleverer and sophisticated – and this is why he has to be exterminated at the first place.

This is what the philosopher and sociologist Herbert Marcuse called in these years repressive liberation or de-sublimation. This is a figure that was subsumed in the French context of the 1968 revolt and its aftermath under the general motto of *récupération*, i.e. recovery, salvage... We see here very clearly how a fable can circulate from a film to another, in spite of the fact that their respective contexts, the timing and the circumstances of their shooting is very different. This is where we see that the fable has a reach, an energy that go much farther than the story the film deals with, the story as is always is, in some regard, just an “anecdote”.

Sometimes, a scene, a dialogue, a picture in a film have the effect of a *signal*, a warning signal or sign, but not related to danger, on the opposite, something that wakes you up, as you just watch the film relaxed and captured, that is in some sort of state of abstraction... It is perhaps comparable with the famous “madeleine” (biscuit) in Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu*, whose taste, after it has been dipped in the cup of tea, immediately awakes the memory of the “lost days”... But in the case I want to focus on, what is awoken is the memory of something we are more or less familiar with, we have a more or less distinct knowledge of – the scene, the dialogue, the picture functions as an intensifier and a reminder: with it, through it, under it’s impulse, we will go further in the direction the signal points at.

Let me take some examples. In a very both original and risky documentary film called *Small talk*, a young Taiwanese female filmmaker tries to engage in a discussion with her mother on what always was very thick family secret – her mother’s homosexuality. Her mother is her real mother, she gave birth to her – but in terms of gender, she is clearly a lesbian. The filmmaker tries to make her mother speak. She raises very painful issues, mentions scabrous episodes of their family life, but her mother hardly responds. She evades any “explanation”. She is not “interested” in “confessing” anything. She keeps silent, bends her head, runs away from the camera, etc.

As I watch this courageous film, It immediately rang a bell – Foucault’s book on sexuality, *The Will to Knowledge, History of Sexuality*, a book where he says that we, Westerners, are “relentless confessors” (“*des bêtes d’aveu*”), that from Catholic confession to the analytical couch of the analyst... By contrast, that lady, the mother appears to be a “relentless non-confessor” (“*une bête de silence*”). Starting from this observation, I am tempted to set up some

sort of an ambitious anthropological hypothesis: As in Ruth Benedict's standard book (*The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*), what we bump into here are two regimes of speech (or non-speech) in relation with sexuality as a contentious issue, as gender issues, or with the "order of family" (Foucault, Farge). One that would be Western (the passion for confession) and the other Eastern, Asian (the categorical refusal to raise such issues). Perhaps my hypothesis has as many flaws as Benedict's has – but it is not what matters here; what matters is that this film, in this context, has stimulated and kindled my reflection.

Since cinema is supposed to be *popular*, that is an art whose products can be accessible for ordinary people and not only cultural elites, it has to work hard for resolving "contradictions", conflicts – this in a way that might be fitted for reconciling the general audience with what its reality is made of. It is one of the challenges cinema and, I would say, on particular Hollywood films, have to take up: to stage a conflict, a scandal, a blatant injustice, a problem that is overwhelming, to unveil it, to denounce it and, at the same time, to solve it, to overcome it in a dialectic way that is itself completely illusory – some sort of a card trick. This is a figure we have to do our best to decode, that is to understand how it works in films, how it is built in filmic narratives and what its ideological and philosophical stakes are. It raises more general issues on culture – how do cultural industries resolve or solve or settle "contradictions" which are deeply rooted in our history, social life and economic conditions by resorting to "dialectics" that bring up imaginary solutions to the problems they deal with or echoes (see on that issue Adorno-Horkheimer, Marcuse....)

Let me take an example that is for me quite illuminating. A western called *The Indian Fighter* by André de Toth (1955), with, among others, Kirk Douglas and Elsa Martinelli. It is the story of an Indian "hunter", that is a man who has become very familiar with Indian culture, language and mores by fighting against Indian tribes (the Sioux) and who progressively has learnt to see things from the Indians' angle, as he witnessed the harm and the wrong done to them by the white settlers greedy for gold and land. He sides with the Indians as they conflict with predatory, rogue Whites, he has no doubt, at the end, that the Indians' civilization, their ideal to live in harmony with nature, their wisdom, all this makes them superior to the White brutal conquerors. As you see, this film is distinctly one of the first progressive Westerns, since it decidedly and resolutely changes the angle of view on the "Indian question" – the Indian is completely

transformed, metamorphosed: He is not the savage, cruel and barbarous, any more. He has become the victim of the violence of the White settlers, who are the savages, the thieves, the wrongdoers, etc. A complete reversal in terms of description of the landscape of the evil, of who is right and who is wrong.

But, if you now envision things from the viewpoint of the narration, you immediately see that things are not so simple: the narrator, not to say the hero, is the character thanks to whom or through whom the wrong done to the Indians is redressed is the Indian fighter who has become converted to the Indian cause. The white good guy who has changed and espoused the “Other’s cause”... He is constantly the “operator” of the narration, the mediator who makes that violence does not erupt. He is the one who knows how to argue with the Sioux chief and convince him not to go on the warpath in spite of the huge amount of grievances he has against the White settlers. He is the saviour, the demiurge, the real hero... It is anecdotal – or maybe not, for it shows how it works in the realm of filmic production – but you have to know that Kirk Douglas, the main actor, also was the producer of the film, that is the omnipotent master of its shooting and this is how and why he constantly appears in it in a rather majestic and magnificent way, extolling his courage and virtue and highlighting his wife, Diana Douglas...

In this film, the White characters, good or bad, heroes or bastards, are very distinctly *individualized*. The Indians, by contrast, always appear as *a tribe*, that is an aboriginal people, even the chief... They belong to the community, to the group. Only white people have as status as individuals.

As a consequence, you can see how, on the one hand, the film is very radical in his effort to deconstruct the racist vision of the conquest of the West – at the end, the happy ending consists in an inter-racial marriage: the former Indian hunter falls in love with the chief’s daughter and gets ready to marry her... Yes, but who is the actress who embodies the Indian girl? Elsa Martinelli, a French-Italian actress in a heavy brown make-up – not to say blackfaced...

And before all, in narrative terms, in this pro-Indian Western, the narrative supremacy of the White is never put into question, just the opposite – it soaks the story from the beginning to the end. In other terms, a vehemently anti-racist and pro-Indian Hollywood film and, as well, in an oblique but distinct way, *some sort of another white supremacist film*... The way the historical wrong done to the Indians by the European colonizers is righted in this film is purely illusory. It is a trick. It is a “white magic”. This is what I call an abuse or misuse of dialectics. The

reconciliation that takes place at the end (the perfect happy ending, an interracial marriage as amend and compensation for the harm done to the Indian tribes by the European conquerors) is just a way of dazzling the spectators. The euphoric climax of a big lie...

This way of resolving a conflict, of overcoming a contradiction, of giving an answer to a problem, I also call it an *operation*. I use the word here in a medical sense, more precisely in a surgical acceptance. This operation consists in *suturing* a wound or a cut, in *stitching* it, a wound that affects the integrity of a collective body made of narratives and, if you want, representations. The collective body can be, at this place, in this film, several things: the US as a people or nation, the Europeans as most of the settlers who conquered the “wild West” in North America were Europeans, or, even more generally, the Whites, the white race as opposed to the aboriginal peoples of the “New World”. The wound, the cut that never stops bleeding, is of course the criminal dimension of this conquest – the extermination of the native peoples, the Indians. The traditional narrative that is intended for justifying this collective crime, a genocide, narratives that deal with the inexorable expansion of civilization, material development, farming, cattle breeding, trains, mines, barbed wires, new cities, etc. – this narrative that legitimizes the conquest of the West in the name of civilization and progress is *leaking* endless. This is why I say that the wound never stops bleeding. Even in the more conventional Indian films of the first period of Hollywood, mute Westerns or first generation talking Westerns, there is something wrong somewhere, something that limps in the way the Indian is depicted as a savage, a barbarian, a killer thirsty for blood. The simple fact that Indians constantly have to be embodied by Caucasian actors heavily made-up is a symptom of all that – there is something “not right” somewhere in this narrative, in this story...

Films like *The Indian Fighter* appear at a time when this bleeding, leaking, tends to become hemorrhagic. Something has to be done. This something is what I call an operation and this operation consists in stitching the wound by inventing, promoting a character like this Indian fighter who has become not only the Indian’s friend but himself some sort of a spiritual Indian and whose role is to *save* the White man as the narrator of the whole story and, by the same token, to make that the White narrator saves his own position as the universal storyteller of modern history and, as well, of the present. This operation that is at work in many films intended for mending, repairing fixing the Western narratives of world history, past and present, this is what I call *suturing* or *stitching*. It is vital, indispensable for a storyteller whose position is threatened by the multiplication of lacerations on its narrative body. This is why this stake is

particularly sensitive, as far as European, Western narratives are concerned, when colonization, conquest, extermination, – that is the wrong done to other peoples and cultures by the West – are at issue. The example I took, which is one among so many others, rather banal, shows how the Western storyteller excels at performing that kind of operation. It is not a matter of “good right” (as we see clearly in this film), just the opposite – it is a matter of rhetoric capability. By contrast, we see that those who do not succeed in performing that operation, suturing, stitching, or who have to try to do it in much more precarious conditions, for reasons that have much in common with hegemony, their position in the battle for hegemony, often fail in stitching the cut and have to suffer a lot from it – the Muslims, for example, in our present, as they try in vain to get rid of their association with terrorism, fanaticism, prejudice against women, etc. If you fail in “suturing” the narratives that concern you, you are doomed to be downgraded a stigmatized by the others and to become the object of their narratives intended to put you at your place where you belong to....

PS: When I use the word “suture”, “suturing” here, what I mean has nothing in common with the sense these words have in the vocabulary of psychoanalysis (Jacques Lacan).