



Working Paper Series No.23

Position Paper

June 2020

Racial Supremacism and the Grammar of Species in Films

Alain Brossat
National Chiao Tung University
Email: alainbrossat46@gmail.com

© 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: https://iccs.nctu.edu.tw/en/wps_list.php

Email: iccs.wps@gmail.com

Racial Supremacism and the Grammar of Species in Films

Alain Brossat
National Chiao Tung University

This course was offered at the International Master's Program in Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, University System of Taiwan, Spring 2020.

Abstract

Phenotypes are a crucial issue in the realm of cinema and filmmaking. Characters, individuals are more than often surreptitiously assigned to a *species* (more than a people, a nation, a social group or a community) by their appearance, color of skin, morphology, way of speaking. Phenotypes function as signs which have a global dimension – cultural, moral, political. This « grammar of species», as it is used by filmmakers is all the more performative since its effects on the viewers are direct, immediate and remain unnoticed.

This is the object of this course: see how it works, scan this « grammar » and appraise it philosophically and politically.

The “grammar of species” as it is implemented in films has much in common with racial supremacism, the history of slavery, coloniality. This is why this course will focus on the representation of African Americans, “black bodies”, in Hollywood movies, “Indians”, colonial bodies and the stake of “darkness”, the chains of equivalence in terms of racial stereotypes that make it possible for an actor from Egypt to pass for a Mexican outlaw according to Hollywood's patterns, a Chinese-American actor to play the Japanese villain in a film on the Pacific war, etc. It's a course on “body politics” in the realm of moviemaking as an industry and soft power too. It intends to show how subliminal messages are conveyed through the symbols of color(s), as far as human diversity is at issue.

Let me first try to explain briefly what I mean by grammar of species (plural), this in relation to cinema, to films – racial supremacism, I imagine that you have a clear notion of what it is.

When you watch films, you see characters, that is people who are involved in a plot, immersed in a story. Or, conversely, the plot, the story is « peopled » by these people's thoughts, actions, conducts, relations to each other. What cinema has in common with painting, theater, opera, photography (as « arts » and apparatuses) is that sort of deal or pact with *visibility*: as a rule, the characters *appear* (on the screen and not in the flesh, in person – what makes the difference between cinema and photography on the one hand and theater or opera on the other hand), *they have to become visible*, it's a precondition for the narration to take shape. This is maybe the main difference between cinema as an *art of the visible* and literature where characters are presented, stages, sometimes depicted in a way that leaves room enough for the reader's imagination.

In other terms, when you watch a film, you have to deal with *bodies*, all sorts of bodies, but mostly human bodies. These bodies can belong to different categories. Some of them are actor's bodies, professional or not, stars or extras – but extras are actors too, even if evanescent – some others, in documentary films notably, are, by contrast with actors, « real people », they don't play, they sometimes are filmed without knowing it, sometimes without having been asked for it, and sometimes they can be in the film as characters, witnesses, storytellers – but not actors properly speaking like in a fiction film. We, viewers, are supposed to know how to make the difference between an actor, a witness, a passer-by, a real soldier being filmed for newsreels during a battle and an actor playing the soldier, etc. But in all of these cases, what we have to deal with are bodies, human bodies that « people » a story.

The problem that appears at this place is simple: these bodies have to *signify*. They have to condense and crystalize signification(s), they have to be as expressive as possible, they have to be as dense, intense and rich as possible, as *signifiers*. It's well-known: cinema is the realm, the kingdom of *body language*. Theater can be talkative, very wordy, as is, among many other examples, the classic French tragedy of the XVIIth century – Corneille, Racine. Cinema, as an art that is intended for the general public, « popular », cannot afford to be garrulous. This is why *bodies as signifiers* matter so much in its realm.

To put it simply, what usually makes things a bit complicated when you watch a fiction film, is that you basically have to deal with three « things » which are the same « thing »: a human body with distinctive features – woman or man, young or old, white or black or Asian (etc.),

beautiful or ugly, fat or thin... – an actor or an actress you often already know from other films or from his-her fame, and finally a character – the role performed by this actor-actress in this film... *Three entities in one*. We, as well, can put it this way: the actor *embodies*, or incarnates the character. The verb embody derives from body and in « incarnate » you can take notice of a Latin root that means *flesh*...

From that viewpoint, one can say that the entity « body » is what puts together or makes the actor and the character merge and amalgamate.

Another term I could use here is *presence*, in the sense of presence on stage, when critics speak of the presence on stage (or the lack of it) of an actor. Presence is before all the presence of a body and it's something that is not easy to define or describe – what is the presence of an actor in a film or a theater play made of? It's a matter of *density and intensity*, it's related to the way an actor, a character *occupies* a given space or, more generally, *the tangible world* a scene the film or the play stages. It's about the relation between this body, as a definite entity and the « territory » it is intended for occupying and giving life to. This is something you can easily become aware of when this capacity or ability is *lacking*, is deficient. The lack of presence of an actor is something you immediately feel, for example in a western, the actor is riding his-her horse in a wild landscape, he-she is involved in a confrontation with Indians or whatever action scene you may imagine and you feel that, for a mysterious reason, he-she *floats* in the rôle, in the landscape and the action, that is it's all too big for her-him, it all hangs loosely around him-her, he-she doesn't occupy the territory of the film... It's a matter of arrangement – something doesn't work well in the involvement of the actor in the film, the viewer's attention cannot focus on him-her, he-she fails in capturing, attracting our attention by being « in the middle » or at the center of the plot of the scenes where he-she is involved.

This motto – presence – shows how, in films, bodies are altogether signifiers, condensers and intensifiers. Whence the crucial importance of the operation that consists in making *a casting*, when you prepare a film – that is choose the actors who will play in the film. Making a casting is a complicated thing. You have to take into account a lot of different factors and variables – how much money you have for the actors, the availability of the actors you have in sight, schedule issues for the shooting of the film, etc.

But let's focus on one question, that will lead us to our subject: when you choose an actor for embodying such or such character in a film, he or she has to *tone with* or *match with* the character, that is supposed to fit into the rôle or with it. But what does that mean? It's very difficult to say. It depends very much on the sort of character we are talking about. It's very different if we are talking about, let's say Hamlet or about an Indian chief in a western or a slave in a lavish melo that is located in a plantation of the deep South of the US at the beginning of the XIXth century – Hamlet can be tall or short, blond or maybe not, have blue or dark eyes, these are not the features that really make the difference – he has before all to be a good Shakespearian actor...

As for the Indian chief or the black slave, it's different – he has before all to *look like* an Indian or a Black slave. He has to be recognizable and identifiable *in racial terms*, that is through alleged phenotypical traits – the black slave has to be black, the Indian « red » or look like what an Indian is supposed to look like. And this is where our story (reflection) begins: what makes that, in a film, the actor-actress *looks the part*?

As you know, in most classic westerns, that is until the late 1970s, the Indians were not real Indians, and in particular those who had to play important parts, they were Caucasian actors under the disguise of a heavily dark or reddish make-up. The same way, in *The Birth of a Nation*, the famous white supremacist film by D. W. Griffith (1915), most of the actors who play parts of Afro-Americans are *black-faced* white actors... This is of course where the problem I would like to raise in this course appears to be, from the onset on, a bit complicated... An Indian character, a rebellious slave, a Mexican cattle thief, a Nazi general, an Arab villager, an Italian housewife, etc. have to look like what they are supposed to be, that is the appearance (« the corporeal or « bodily » incarnation) of the character has to fit into *a certain system of representation* of what is supposed to look like – but, actually, not only to look like, for it's not only a matter of appearance, but, as well, a matter of how to behave, to speak, gesture, to feel, think, in brief, *to be*...

What I intend to question is this system of representation itself, a system that is implicit, that is based on a certain codification we, the viewers, are supposed to share with those who make the films and have in common – and that, most of time, we *do share* without having time to or being trained in putting into question – we watch the film and have no time to ask ourselves

why the Mexican bandit (villain) or revolutionary *has to* be unshaved, brutal, to laugh loudly, to like booze, gold and women, in short have this *dago* look that is unmistakable...

We have to reflect on this system of representation or on how this codification works and makes that we are captured by it and accept all the conventions that go with it. We need to work out a *genealogical approach* of this codification, that is to ask ourselves where it comes from and how it works so efficiently that we completely forget that it is made of tricks, that is, artificial, manufactured. We have to think about Hollywood and cinema in general as *a manufacture of stereotypes* that are so deeply rooted in collective imagination that we are inclined to immediately make the difference between the bad guy or woman and the good guy or woman, in a western – this just from their appearance, that is, very often, by relying on phenotypical features – White characters are not all (of them) good, far from that, but non-White characters are, as a rule, « the rest » of the American dream and civilization as it is expanding on the new frontier – the Indian drunk or the Mexican whore in the saloon, the childish and grotesque Black servant, the Chinese greedy shopkeeper, etc.

This is where we come closer to the notion this course will revolve around – « grammar of species ». When you speak a language which is your mother tongue or an idiom you have a very good practice of, you are immersed in a set of grammatical rules you implement without having to think about it, that is be attentive not to make a mistake. Same thing when you listen to somebody who speaks in one of these languages: you understand what he or she says without having to ask yourself – what is this? A singular or a plural, a present or a perfect? In the realm of films, in particular « commercial » films, films intended for the general public, what I call « grammar of species » works exactly the same way. I would even say that it's a rule, a law: the more commercial or industrial a film is, the more rigorously these rules apply, that is the rules of this grammar prevail, the more we, as viewers, are « wrapped » in them.

The consequence of that is that we see the world, the human world in its diversity through these rules, we are conditioned to feel and think about this diversity in terms of categories, hierarchies, that is taxonomies which have a very distinct moral background, all this without noticing it or being aware of it. It is an « economy » of human types and species that possesses us, has a hold over us without us knowing it. Each time a character appears on the screen, a character that is directly or indirectly related to this stake – the relation between an individual and his or her

« specification » – you are overwhelmed by, let's say, a profusion of signs, much more than what you can imagine or be aware of. You immediately « know » a lot of things about this character you have no idea that you know. This is how it works, through immediate associations, correspondences, automatic connections, etc. Or, if you prefer, we can put it in terms of recognition, acknowledgement – like recognizing a person you see from very far away or in the dark, just because you are very familiar with him or her, this only from very fleeting signs (the way the person walks, moves, gestures...

But the condition for this operation to work is that films (cinema as an apparatus) teach you, train you to feel and think about human diversity in terms of categories, rather than of individuals – not any film, of course, but, let's say, films made according more or less « industrial » patterns and intended for entertainment. Genre films like westerns, detective or black films, spy films, sword and sandals films, colonial films, etc. This is where the novel (literature) and the film (cinema) very often follow opposite paths. In the realm of the classic novel, the realist novel of the XIXth and the first part of the XXth century, the individual human subject is at the center of everything and what matters first is interiority (inwardness) or, in commonplace terms « psychology ». Take for example Thomas Mann's famous novel *The Magic Mountain* (published in 1924). The main characters are made of many traits, their complexity and singularity is made of an assemblage of various features. You have Lodovico Settembrini who is a rationalist intellectual, a humanist and encyclopedist, a tireless promoter of the ideals of Enlightenment, from Italian origin – but everybody speaks German in Mann's novel that is located in a sanatorium, in Davos, Switzerland. Leo Naphta is a Jesuit from Jewish origin, a fanatic obsessed with authoritarian fantasies, Jewish, Catholic, with a German cultural background. Mynheer Peeperkorn, another protagonist is a Nietzschean Dutch Epicurian, etc. You can see here how, in the novel, the more complex the individualities are, the more difficult it is to reduce them to types or categories and, above all, to physical, racial modes of categorization or typification. The main characters of *The Magic Mountain*, you have to imagine them by yourself, to visualize them as you read Mann's thick novel.

Things are completely different in films, for the good reason that the first operation a film performs, when a character makes his-her first appearance on the screen, is to *exhibit a body*. And since cinema is an industry that constantly inclines to make of films commodities in the horizon of financial profit, it insistently leans towards designing or shaping the character in

terms of categories and types. The most common outcome of this inclination appears in the moral dimension – the villain or the bad guy as type, or, by contrast, the good guy, the nice fellow, the moral hero, the brave, etc. But, as well, *ethnicity or ethnic appearance*, or look related to or associated with nationality also is, in this regard, a must. This is what I will show by presenting a US war film, *Sahara* (1943) by Zoltan Korda (the director who made of *The Four Feathers* I have shown last semester). I have chosen this film which, for the rest, has nothing special, which isn't a masterpiece, far from that, because it make an exemplary (if I may say so) use of the categorization of characters in terms of nationality or ethnic-cultural identity, this by making an extensive use of physical (body) stereotypes – the perfect « look the part » paradigm.

What we have to remember here is that time is money and that this always has to be taken into consideration when we talk on movies, moviemaking. It took Thomas Mann exactly twelve years to write his novel – from the moment he began to write it to the moment *The Magic Mountain* was published, it took from 1012 to 1924. When you make a film, everyday counts, every day is money, in particular in terms of duration of the shooting. I imagine that the shooting of *Sahara* lasted a few weeks, the average duration for that kind of film. This is something we always have to take into consideration – since the people who work in cinema (all of them, not only the directors) always are in a hurry and have to manage time which is money, it's easier for them to sketch out characters in terms of categories or *along types* than to dwell on the complexities of individual singularities. And this is where the «grammar of species» issue appears to be crucial.

Sahara is a war film that takes place in Libya during the Western Desert Campaign of WWII. It depicts an imaginary episode of the desert war between the German Army led by General Rommel and the British forces, a very bitter and for a long time indecisive confrontation that finally ended up with the British victory on the occasion of the battle of El Alamein – a turning point in the war in the West, since it made it possible for the Americans and their allies to attack Italy and land in Sicily. It stages the crew of an American tank nicknames *Lulu Belle*, attached to the British Eighth Army. These American soldiers commanded by a sergeant called Joe Gunn (Humphrey Bogart, the star of the film) have become separated from their unit during a retreat and are lost in the desert. As they wander about in the wilderness, they come upon other stray Allied soldiers, a French corporal, a British officer, and later a Sudanese sergeant with an Italian

prisoner. Later, they make a German prisoner, then they are attacked by a German unit, have to fight to the bitter end against it, etc. – in brief, a very dramatic plot, a classical war film – *desert war film* more precisely, it's a sub-genre in the realm of war film.

Not that bad, as a war film, very intense and indecisive till the end. But this is not what I'm interested here. What is interesting for our subject is how the plot of the film makes of it some sort of a *portrait gallery of various human « species »* - the American, the British, the African (the Sudanese), the German (Nazi), the Italian, the French... Each of these species is typified in a very simplistic way, that is designed by and associated with « signs », « marks »: Germans (or Nazis, all the same in the spirit of the film) are fanatics; the French are silly cheese eaters, but rather brave and faithful; the British and the Americans sometimes quarrel but like members of the same family do – they basically belong to the same species – the best, the salt of the earth; the Sudanese is the perfect colonial subaltern – brave, loyal, the desert is his natural element, but, of course, he is distinctly deficient in terms of civilization – as a Muslim, he appears to be a happy polygamist; the Italian is a born coward, not made for war, his faith in Mussolini is childish, but, at the very end, with a burst of energy, he moves over to the camp of the supporters of civilization, the civilized species.

The interesting thing is that in this film, the narrative setting of a categorization of humans into species *doesn't coincide with racial divides*: the divide between civilization and barbarism goes through the White race – Anglo-Saxons and French (with their colonial extension) against Germans – it has to coincide with the general configuration of the conflict – the so-called Axis against the Allies. But this complication of the « game » of categorization of the film's characters in terms of *species* is not an insuperable obstacle to the manufacturing of a narrative that espouses this inspiration and conforms to the rules of the grammar of species: the bodies, the look, the acting, the way the characters move, gesture, speak have to fit into this general framework, to make visible and tangible what each of them is supposed to be according to the implicit code or rule in terms of species.

And this is of course where our « problem » with such a film begins... For it's not only that in Korda's film individuals appear as « categorized » according to their belonging to this or that species – national but to some extent ethnic-cultural too: the Sudanese is a synecdoche for « the Black African » or « The exotic Muslim », the Italian a synecdoche for the Latin type, that is,

basically a degraded or debased byproduct of the White race – something halfway between the superior race (the White Anglo-Saxon) and inferior races like Blacks, Indians, etc. The German Nazi is the corrupt or depraved and faulty incarnation of the White race...

It is, as well, that these species are *hierarchized* – it's like a pyramid with, at the top, the American embodied by the hero of the film, Humphrey Bogart, a Hollywood star and, in this story, a perfect soldier and leader, very professional, brave, morally irreproachable... As such, as he occupies the place of honor right on top of the hierarchy of species... As such, he is entitled to teach lessons, lessons of moral(e) to all those who are below him – and, of course, in particular to the Nazi fanatic full of racial prejudices (against the Black soldier, in that case). He teaches him a good and implacable lesson of democracy, racial equality, respect for the different others, etc. And, of course, this is very funny, or if you prefer, *bitterly ironical*, if you remember that, at that time, segregation was still in vigor in many states in the US, the lynching of Blacks not rare in the rural states of the South, interracial marriage banned in many states, as it was from films made in the US...

This is of course where the film, as a vibrant manifesto in favor of democracy, democratic culture, a democratic approach of racial and cultural diversity shoots a bullet in its own foot: it brands Nazi fanaticism and barbarism, but the grammar of species it implements *isn't that far from the Nazi ideology*: individuals are before all what their racial-cultural or « specic » identity (belonging) makes of them and this is how they are « put at their place » in the hierarchy of species. The funny thing again is that he who is at the center of the « fable », at the place of the superhuman, the American superman is incarnated by such a slender, small-sized and not very body-built fellow as Bogart... But he has the manners, the bearing of a White American and this is what matters...

You can see here (and this film is only one example among dozens of others I could, as well, have chosen - I took it almost at random) – you see how cinema works or, more precisely, can be destined for teaching us or *conditioning us to see the human world in terms of species* before all, that is to reduce the diversity and the richness of the human world, of human society, to categories based on ethnic-cultural criteria. We can call it, if you want, *politics of bodies* or governing (the public, the audience) by or through *appearance*, that is by setting up a codification of tangible signs, a system of associations, chains of equivalence, as well, when

human bodies appear on the screen, whose result is that you, as viewer, immediately and automatically are driven to such or such « idea » - idea as image, what leads you from the « percept » to the « idea », if not the « concept », properly speaking (Deleuze).

What I want to suggest is this, which is some sort of a variation on what makes the core of Carl Schmitt's political theology. Before I go further, I have to remind you of Schmitt's political theology's main concept: « All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts ». State-sovereignty is a transposition, in a secularized world of God, etc. By transposing Schmitt's proposition, or by following his inspiration, by displacing his statement, what I would like to suggest is this: what films show, because they constantly have to deal with bodies, have to « inscribe » them (make them appear) in a visual space or territory, is that in Western societies, « all significant concepts » related to democracy, citizenship, the Legal state, are *notions borrowed from the grammar of species* and wearing the new clothes of political (cultural) civilized order.

Cinema « betrays » (that is reveals, gives away) the best kept secret of Western political modernity against its own will, despite its wishes, because it is an apparatus that has to deal first of all with the visibility of human bodies in the tangible world, it has to make them appear in the sphere of visibility. It does it against its most intimate wishes because, of cause, moviemaking, as an institution, sees itself in the West as a manufacture of democratic values, conducts, ideals, etc.

But the fact is that when classic(al) Hollywood movies, until recently, make « the citizen » appear, in a story, in a plot that is not necessarily related to political issues, but just the ordinary American as citizen, this citizen is, as a rule, a *White man* (and, should I add, who belongs to the middle class, be educated). If Blacks appeared on the screen, it was not in the skin of the citizen but of the subaltern who, from that viewpoint is the exact opposite of the citizen. I will show various short clips that illustrate this motive. When things begin to change, from the 1960s on, it's always in a very ambiguous way. A few films are « scouting » for a new approach of this question and try to stage Blacks as citizens but they only can do it by picking up characters who are distinctly *exceptional*: the perfect son in law in *Guess who comes to dinner?* (Stanley Kramer, 1967) or the brilliant cop in *In the Heat of the Night* (Norman Jewison, 1967) – in both cases characters embodied by the sparkling Sidney Poitier.

Then, when Black characters invade the screens of Hollywood, they are not drawn or shaped as citizens (equals) but always from the angle of law and order – good cops or bad villains, offenders, outlaws. More recently, a new turn has been taken: Blacks have to be shown not as subalterns but as « people in charge », people having important responsibilities – if you have a crew of four astronauts, one of them has to be Black; if you have a team of high ranking epidemiologists as a pandemic is raging, one of them has to be a woman and the other a Black... But nobody is fooled by this device related to political correctness, everybody can understand that this new norm or rule has nothing of common with the promotion of Black citizenship – it's just an alibi, based on a simplistic politics of *quotas*. The same rule applies to Asians, today – any kind of Asian, what matters is the look, the type, slant eyes, black sleek hair... As everybody knows, it doesn't improve in the least the situation in real life – Blacks continue to be killed by rogue and trigger-happy White cops... Whence the importance of a movement like *Black lives matter*...

In other terms, what so many films involuntarily show is that in the West, citizenship is a notion that constantly has trouble in *crossing the border of race* or, let's say, « species ». When « others » seem to have succeeded in crossing that border, it raises the impression that they are *guests*, guest of honor or just tolerated guests, in a world, a sphere they basically don't belong to. This is what a film like *Get Out* (Jordan Peele, 2017) exemplarily shows.

It's like an updated version of *Guess who Comes to Dinner this Night* – a white young woman takes her African-American boyfriend to her parents' place for a few days. These people are upper-middle class WASPS, the father being a neurosurgeon, the mother a psychotherapist, progressive, open-minded, they have voted for Obama, of course, and they welcome the young man, apparently indifferent to his skin's color... But a few odd remarks addressed to him by the parents guests on the occasion of a party, in their wonderful garden with swimming pool, of course, or as well the fact that all their servants are black and look at him as if he were an intruder, not at all at his place, all these « signs » makes our fellow feel increasingly awkward and uncomfortable. Tolerance and benevolence progressively appear to be just for the show, a pretense, a lie, superficial and false, uncannier or threatening for him than open contempt. What the film shows is that is how vain it is to try to erase the divide of species, and how risky it is to pass from a traditional regime of a « grammar of species » where white bodies are at their place (on the top) and black bodies at theirs (below) to a *different regime* where the

identification of characters in terms of race and color are supposed to have vanished and evaporated. For this erasure, as tested in reality, appears to be a *pure illusion*: the cool well-off Whites who welcome so kindly the black boyfriend just do *as if* there would be nothing particular, noticeable about his « small difference », they are self-controlled enough to be able to feign indifference to his color, as they behave that way, they *act*, they *play* the role of the white progressive liberals.

But in practice, it's just a way of depriving him of his own « profile », not to speak of « identity » - a too « thick » and rigid notion, maybe at this place. By erasing his difference and making as if he were just a boyfriend like any other, that is as if the racial divide had never existed in this society, as if there would not exist any bone of contention about race and color and interracial relations in the US, they actually make him become evanescent, they *negate* him as what he is – not an abstraction of a human, but a young African American in the US, with all the problems and difficulties related to that condition.

In sum, this film's proposition would be: there is nothing more racist than liberal and progressive antiracism when it consists in denying the other's otherness or difference. We don't need to agree without any reservation on the terms of this paradoxical proposition, but it's worth being thought about and discussed.

It's a somehow shocking proposition, because it consists in saying that, all things considered, these « beautiful people », these educated jolly people are worse, much worse than aggressive declared racists, they are more dangerous because they don't just reject or stigmatize the other, they try to « cannibalize » him, to « vampirize » him. It's a very sharp fable about the illusions and tricks of a certain Left or progressivism or humanism, or universalism as far as racial and color issues are concerned.

The interesting thing is that here, cinema, that is a film, takes a distance from itself as the manufacture of racial/color stereotypes, covers the tracks in order to make us think on the complexities of these questions. It is interesting for example that in the film, the black servants appear as those who are shocked and scandalized by the trouble in racial order the presence of the African American boyfriend in this company brings about – they immediately make him feel that he is a troublemaker and he, conversely immediately feels ashamed and guilty,

embarrassed, as he has to interact with them, as subalterns. He suddenly feels that, having crossed the immemorial color border, the divide that separates the servants from the masters, he has caused a trouble that cannot be healed – and that, as a consequence, he will have to pay for it – both sides have good reasons to make him expiate this « crime » loaded with heavy symbolic stakes.

What *Get Out* draws our attention to are the continuities in apparent discontinuities that become manifest when, for example, the chain of equivalence between black bodies and subalterns (the Black as a servant) appears to be broken, that is when black bodies are dignified, promoted and that African American actors are assigned to parts and roles where they embody « people in charge », educated, smart, patriotic, good husbands and fathers, statesmen even, etc. This is what I called earlier « quota politics ». But if you take a closer look at it, you will notice that this « promotion » or apparent disruption of the grammar of species has its flaws or, maybe, is a decoy. Let me take an example – a « space film » called *Capricorne One*, by Peter Hyams (1978) – not a masterpiece, just a good suspense film. It's about a government hoax created to make the public believe that a crew made of three American astronauts has landed on Mars while they, actually, have never left the NASA base. The three astronauts are Brubaker, a colonel, the chief of the mission, a white man, Willis, Lieutenant-Colonel, also white and Walker played by the notorious O.J. Simpson, a Commander, Afro American, with the lower rank. They have been removed from the space capsule *Capricorne One* at the last moment for the specialists in charge of the flight have discovered *in extremis* that something was wrong in the life-support system and they would have died during the flight. For this reason, the spacecraft has been launched empty, but for prestige reasons, the public has not been informed and the three astronauts have been flown to an abandoned base, in the desert where a fake landing on Mars has to be staged in order to deceive the public – this is the what the hoax consists in...

To make a long and rather complicated story short (you can watch the film and read the article on Wikipedia if you want to go into the details of the plot), at the end the three astronauts escape and run for their lives as they are pursued by helicopters – they have to die since the NASA people have forged a story – their capsule is supposed to have burnt up as it returned to Earth. The three of them are stranded of the desert and they try desperately to go back to civilization and save their skins. And this is exactly where the grammar of species is restored, at that

decisive moment where it's all a matter of life and death and where each of them has to show his capacity to survive in this « one against all » confrontation. This is where, at the last moment, *the superiority of the white man is reestablished*.

Walker is the first one to be caught and killed, an easy prey for the professionals who hunt him, unable to survive in this hostile environment. Then Willis, a bit tougher. The only one who succeeds in evading capture is Brubaker, the chief, the clever white man. It's not only that at the end the hierarchy (in terms of ranking) is respected – the only survivor is the leader, the boss, the guy with the highest rank. It is, more decisively, that the hierarchy of races or species has to be safe, intact.

As often in such a configuration, the death of the inferior, in terms of « specific quality » is, in narrative terms, some sort of a necessary sacrifice: the inferior's death is the counterpart or the condition for the survival or rescue of the superior. You can find this figure in many westerns where a good guy or a good woman but who happen to be a bit « dark », some sort of a *dago*, Indian or Mexican or a mixture of both, has to die at the end so that the hero, who belongs to the blessed race, can be saved (see on that: the end of *Duel in the Sun*, a famous Western by King Vidor).

I don't mean by that that this is the explicit message the filmmaker *intends* to address to the public and that would be a *racist message* – not at all – the only thing I'm saying is that it is the way *it works*. Never forget that films, cinema are narrative machines where what I call « grammar » is what constantly « operates » in the back of the people who « make » the films. I call it here « grammar » but we could, as well, call it a *police* of the cinematic discourse. An order, a set of rules.

It is important to remember that race, as a sign or a feature, frequently « works » or functions as a *stigma* and this, in particular in modern Western narratives, in the Western colonial *grand récit* that deals with the superiority of the West and its vocation to enlighten and civilize the planet. This is why, when you look at a certain brand of Western films, not only westerns, but adventure films like the James Bond series with a trained eye and notice that a character visibly bears what I call here a racial stigma (which doesn't mean that this character necessarily has to be evil, negative or whatever, but just some sort of a mark of racial inferiority or his or her race

as a « handicap », an mark of imperfection, a *stain*) - then you can be sure or almost sure that this character will die before the end of the film, that is be sacrificed on the altar of racial hierarchy.

Second thing we have to remember at this place is what Foucault says in one of his courses at the College de France (*Security, Territory, Population*, 1977-78) on the key function of racism in modern states. Racism isn't for the essential a bad feeling that would result from conflicts and competition between insiders and outsiders. Racism is basically a device or an arrangement intended for ruling populations in modern societies. The main operation that is enacted through racism consists in making *a divide* appear, in a given set of population, in a national space or whatever, a divide between those whose life has to be defended, protected and promoted by the state and those who have to be placed under a negative sign, set apart, marginalized, stigmatized, fought against, expelled, exterminated...

The production of this divide is an integral part of what Foucault calls governmentality – the way those who govern deal with those they govern and the way they think about the conditions that make it possible. For this reason, the way cinema, as a general apparatus that also takes its share in the government (not governance...) of populations, in modern societies, enforces what I call the grammar of species or races, this has to be connected to the way the modern state relentless re-designs the divide between those whose right to life has to be defended and those who appear to be a threat for this very right. In this regard, cinema, as it deals with races and species, close-up or from a distance, always has a political dimension or, more precisely, always is *more political* than it looks like when we watch films abstractedly.

Let me finally add a brief post-script on the problem of the endurance of the grammar of species in the realm of Hollywood, the grammar of species as a hard-wearing matrix for films that, in a way or another, deal with racial conflicts, interactions, racial hierarchies. I already mentioned that the politics of racial quotas in films is a false solution or a too easy way-out the good old time as Blacks were staged as subalterns and dummies. I also touched on the impasses of a certain progressive, cool, openly anti-racist approach of the problem – *Get out*.

Let me now go one step further by mentioning a film that deals with chattel slavery in the US, a film that was rather successful and that was shot by a (now) renowned African American

director – Steve MacQueen (*Hunger*) – *Twelve Years a Slave* (2013). It's from a « real story », the story of a Black musician Solomon Northup who was a free man, since he lived in New York, as a musician, a violin player, this around 1840, that is before the civil war. Two white criminals set a trap for him and sell him to slave traders who take him to Mississippi, a state where slavery plantations prosper (cotton, etc.) where they sell him again to a white planter and farmer and where, as a consequence of all that he spends twelve years as a slave. He has to go through all the ordeals of that condition, this before he succeeds in asserting his rights as born as a free man and is able to get back to New York and join his family...

It's not a good film, very sentimental and that often succumbs to what I would call pornography of horror, sadism, ultra-violence, etc. But this is maybe not the more contentious in it or its main blind spot. The most critical onlookers have noticed something they found even more open to criticism and suspicious: at the end of the film, on two occasions, *decisive occasions*, Northup is saved by « good Whites » - by contrast with the white insane sadistic slave-owners on the plantations: first time by a white carpenter, a role performed by a famous actor, Brad Pitt (and this detail really matters in that case), a fellow who has come from the North, brave enough to accept to convey a letter addressed by Northup to his friends in the North, a very risky decision by him, the carpenter, I mean. So, this is the first savior, a good and brave white chap. And, second savior, a certain Mr. Parker, Northup's sponsor, as he was a musician in New York city who is plucky and true to their friendship enough to travel to the Deep South, come and rescue him, challenge Northup's « owner » (« he is my slave ! ») and take him back safe to the North.

As a consequence, no happy ending, no liberation of Northup who had to face and accept all the humiliations in order to survive as a slave, no happy ending in the absence of these two white *saviors*... This is the reason why the most critical part of the African-American critique of the film made this statement: it's a film made by an African-American director, to be sure, but a film basically intended for White liberals, it's a film that doesn't teach us anything by exhibiting all these horrors but that promotes some sort of paradoxical rehabilitation of the Whites by exposing the horrors of chattel slavery in the South (as White shame) and, conversely, the honor of the good and honorable Whites who were brave and righteous enough to fight against the horrors of slavery...

For this reason, this film can be seen as a perfect example of what I called in my last semester's course, « suturing », the implementation of this narrative device that consists in suturing, stitching a narrative that is « bleeding » and leaking – in this context, the narrative that deals with the exceptionalism of white « American » history as a paradigm of democracy and liberty and an example for all the peoples of the planet. What makes here things a bit complicated is the fact that the storyteller is a Black himself, an African American... It just shows, first of all, a simple thing: *the apparatus is stronger or more decisive than the individual narrator*. There seems to be some sort of an invisible hand that makes that at the end of the film, at the very last moment, the pre-eminence, the moral dignity and, most important, the central position of the White man has to be restored. It's less a moral issue (moral and brave Whites against depraved and ugly Whites, Northerners against Southerners, in short) than a matter of position: 95% of the film is made of the crimes and infamous deeds perpetrated by white slaveholders in the Deep South, but this is exactly what makes the 5% left, at the end of the film, *decisive* – for it looks like a last minute salvation or rescue not so much of the honor of the Whites as species than of the prerogative of the White as the narrator or storyteller – the White as the collective subject who makes that things happen, that the story exists – from Northup's abduction to his rescue – bad things, good things...

This is a typical example of *narrative suture*, a very successful one – see the success of the film. *Twelve Years a Slave* makes a displacement happen, but a very ambiguous one: African-Americans are portrayed not as a dumb subalterns, like in classic Hollywood films, not as dangerous plebs like in many Hollywood films of the last decades of the XXth century, but as *victims of white history*, white violence and exploitation in the US – chattel slavery as a collective crime. In order to make this displacement happen, the film has to rewrite and put right the copy of classic Hollywood film, beginning with *The Birth of a Nation* – putting things right, that means, among other things depicting a rape scene where the victim is a Black young female slave and the rapist a White farmer and not, as in Griffith's film, just the opposite – a racist fantasmagory. But this displacement is ambiguous, for by being depicted as a victim before all, a victim of all the horrors of chattel slavery, the Black is pushed into the position of a bystander or subordinate (underling) in American history, the real agency belongs to the Whites, the bad as well as the good. The Blacks only exist according to this narrative as they are dependent on White history. They are and remain the fifth wheel of the cart of American history as intrinsically white...

The same sort of ambiguity can be located in another recent film by another star of « Black cinema » in the States, Spike Lee – it's called *BlackkKlansman*, 2018. It won the « Grand Prix » at the Cannes Festival, the same year. It's the story of a young Black police inspector who has just entered the police in Colorado Springs. He makes a plan to infiltrate the local section of the Ku Klux Klan led by local racist idiots he suspects to prepare terrorist attacks against the Black community. But since he cannot be himself the spy, for obvious reasons, he has to work in tandem with a White colleague from Jewish origin, who will act as a fanatic KKK neophyte under his guidance.

This is the plot, and, very important, it takes place at the end of the 1970s, that is a time of vibrant radicalization of the Black community, as revolutionary groups like the Black Panthers prospered - actually, Ron, our « hero », wears an « afro » (haircut Black Panther style) and falls in love with a BP female militant...). Very feverish and restless years, then, as far as the Black community in the US is concerned and this is what the film is about, not only its context, but the object of the film: the years as the Black radicalization reached a climax, beyond the non-violent mobilizations for civil rights and after the assassination of Martin Luther King and other leaders of the African-American community. New perspective appears for the Black minority, armed resistance to White violence (Black Panthers), the conversion to Islam (Muslim Brothers, Malcolm X), Pan-Africanism... That is new horizons for the struggle of the Black minority in the US, a turn in a new direction: not claiming for rights only, asking the American state and the White minority to grant rights to the Black minority, but thinking about one's historical fate in terms of autonomy, self-reliance, nation (the Black minority in the US as a *nation*) secession even for some activists of the Black cause.

Very distinctly, Spike Lee, who always was a very vocal and rather radical Black artist when he deals with racial issues, can only resuscitate these years, (tragic, epic, dark and glorious altogether in the perspective of Black history in the US), by complying with certain conditions or implicit « rules »: his hero, the clever and attractive Black young man, has to be... *a cop*, not a BP activist. He is smart, well-educated and one (the viewer) immediately wonders what can make him « dream to be a cop » in such a political context and atmosphere... This is the first narrative « compromise » the Black director has to make with « the system » so that his film becomes feasible, in terms of production, that is compatible with Hollywood standards – this is the first *suture* that has to be mentioned here.

The second suture is no less visible: Ron's partner, Zimmerman, has to be *Jewish*. That is to belong to another minority which, though being white, has a long past of oppression and discrimination. Throughout the film, Spike Lee puts the emphasis on the Klan's phobic hate of the Jews, not only of the Blacks, so that a solid basis exists for a solidarity between both characters, the Black inspector and his Jewish partner...

It's a very blatant opening made to the Jewish community in the US, to the Jews in film industry, at a time where the respective fates of the Jewish and the Black communities in the US have visibly diverged - for social, cultural and political reasons that are notorious. This is the second attempted suture in the film: the way Spike Lee tries to conjure up these electric years by placing them under the aegis of a figure that has vanished – the alliance between progressive and antiracist Jews and Black intellectual and artists advocating civil equality – that sort of merger that has made films like *Guess who comes to dinner* and *In the Heat of the Night* possible, in the 1960s... A way for him of trying to rekindle a convergence or alliance between two ethnic/cultural minorities that has fallen apart – Hollywood ideological, market « logics ». These two examples show, I think, how difficult it is to dismiss the grammar of species, this even when new storytellers appear who not only belong to minorities but to minorities who obviously continue to bear the burden of a past made of all kinds of ordeals and crimes – chattel slavery at this place, the Afro American community in the US. What we see in these two films is how the « narrative of the other », that is the hegemonic narrative of White history in the US, contaminates the minority narrators who try hard to put right the narration of the history of the American people and seek redress for the oppressed of that history.

The Black hero of the story where the incandescent 1970s (for the Black community in the US) has to be an exemplary cop and needs to have a White/Jewish double. The Black hostage of the White slave holders of the deep South can only be liberated through the intervention of other White men – the virtuous and civilized part, share, of the White species. This is how it works – when you reflect on cinema as an industry or a global device, you have to think in terms of hegemony too. In the two cases I have mentioned, it is obvious that Steve Mc Queen and Spike Lee are, to some extent, *hegemonized* by an apparatus that is globally White or, in more sophisticated terms, that is *overdetermined* by the hegemony of White civilization, in terms of grammar of species.

It doesn't mean at all that they are purely and simply the captives or nothing but the hostages of White history, in these two films, things are more complicated than that. They try hard to find escape lines out of the domination of this history, to stage the harm done to the Afro Americans in the course of this history, to go back again and again to the original scene of this harm – chattel slavery in the South. They do their best to rewrite this history from another angle, that is to promote a *minority narrative*, to testify for a minority people and history (Deleuze-Guattari). But, at a given moment, they reach some sort of a glass ceiling – the invisible rules, the implicit constraints that weigh upon the making of a film in this environment – Hollywood and its dependencies.

They might be more or less independent in terms of production, not in terms of distribution. Power belongs to the big distribution companies – « majors », as ever. So, they have to anticipate, that is basically to let the « text » (James C. Scott) of the other contaminate their own text – it's not a matter of censorship, it's a matter of adaptation and compliance. They have to be to some extent opportunists, if they want to « play in the big leagues », that star in Hollywood. They become opportunist for the good cause, of course, because they are very much dedicated to the cause of their community, they advocate respect and a fair rewriting of the history of the US. But for doing that, they have to compromise with the grammar of species set by the other. So, their films have to make a few good White fellows appear at the right place – a decisive stake.

Cinema is a business and an art where everything is interconnected. When you write a novel, things are relatively simple: once you have finished it, you send a copy to various publishers and wait for their answers. This is not the way you make a movie. As soon as you have an idea, a project, a script, you have to interact with a lot of people and you depend on them, to various degrees and in various forms. In this realm, complete independence, which is the dream of any filmmaker, is and remains, precisely, a dream. Clint Eastwood has his own production house, he is very independent, if you compare him to most of his colleagues, but there is a hidden condition behind his « independence » – that he only makes films that sell well. He doesn't take risks, he has his recipes, he knows how to make popular films, he thinks about the audience in terms of market the public as a market – he is maybe an artist, in some regard, but a good salesman before all. In that sense, his independence is a fake, an illusion.

Let me give you now a both very sad and beautiful example of what the limits of the artist's independence or autonomy are, as far as cinema is concerned. It's directly connected to our subject, I'm not losing sight of my subject. It's about one of the first African American filmmakers in the US, Oscar Micheaux. I'll mention him and his work only briefly because I think that I already mentioned him in another course. Micheaux was one of the first, if not the first, African American filmmaker in the US. He has set up at the beginning of the 1920s the Lincoln Motion Picture Company which was the first movie company owned and controlled by black filmmakers. So, as you see, very early, independence is a crucial issue for Blacks involved in filmmaking, in the US. His father was born a slave in Kentucky. Micheaux has shot in 1920 one of the first African American feature film, a film called *Within our Gates* which is often pinpointed as an answer to *The Birth of a Nation*, for it is mirroring Griffith's film – from the descendants of the slaves' angle of view.

Before he went to movie making as a director and craftsman rather than an industrialist, for he never could afford to do it « big », Micheaux had many occupations and a life full of hardships, he was a poor farmer, a blue collar, a salesman, etc. The opposite exactly of a Hollywood patrician like Griffith.

His film is, politically very ambiguous, if we look at it with today's eyes: it's about very light skinned Blacks from the North (of the US), enlightened African Americans from the middle class who, willing to educate and civilize the poor Blacks from the South, illiterate farmers and direct descendants of slaves, try hard to raise money in order to open schools for Black children in the South. It's a very paternalistic view of the promotion of the direct heirs of slavery, and the color divide is visible – the post-slaves in the South are very dark, the free and educated Black from the North are fair-skinned. Besides, this Black aristocracy from the North is very patriotic, they support enthusiastically the war against Spain in Cuba and then the participation of the US in WWI in Europe.

But this is not what I would like to put the emphasis on. As far as our subject is concerned, there are two things that can draw our attention in this film: first, what I call the mirror-effect, having Griffith's film in mind: a sequence of the film describes a rape attempt of a young black woman, a poor farmer, by one of the member of a White posse that has been set up on the occasion of the murder of a White man. Then, this girl's family is lynched, hanged by the White

mob – very KKK like. This sequence has been seen, at the time of the release of the film, as a direct response and counterpart to the infamous scene where Gus, the black renegade, harasses the innocent white virgin and forces her to suicide. In some cities, Micheaux's film was shown with cuts, for local authorities feared that scenes with lynching and an attempted rape or a Black girl by a White man would spark interracial violence – a precautionary action that never was applied to Griffith's film, it seems... So, this is the first figure I wanted to stress: Micheaux's film is an attempt to set up *a counter-narrative* from the angle of view of the black minority, that is the attempt to stage a minority narrative by inverting or diverting what already is a cult film, a monument of white cinematic culture. This he does in a context that is very heated, for in 1919, violent race riots occurred in Chicago, on whose occasion rabid White mobs killed numerous Blacks...

But, what Micheaux is starting is *a very asymmetric cultural war*, war in the sphere of moviemaking, for his film is very poor in terms of budget and means. He can only make one shot for each scene, he has to borrow the costumes and the props for the sets, use friends as actors, etc. But this is not the end of the story: while Griffith's film became a classic, Micheaux's *Beyond the Gates* disappeared, this to such an extent that, after WWII, it was considered as lost. It's only in 1970 that a copy was rediscover in a film institute in Madrid, under the title *La Negra*, with subtitles in Spanish, which makes that most of the original subtitles in English are lost. Since then it has been selected, in 1992, by the Library of Congress for preservation in the US National Film Registry as « being culturally, historically and aesthetically significant ». Better late than never...

This story is some sort as a fable or an apologue, concerning our subject: if you want to be free to arrange your own narrative on the criminal past of a nation like the US, as a counter-narrative, a minority narrative, *you have to be independent*. But independence has its own price: you cannot really challenge the industry, the corporations, the system, you are exposed to disappear as the history of the oppressed always does, vanishes, evaporates, becomes mute or inaudible. Besides, even if you succeed in setting up you own « minority » production apparatus for films, as Micheaux did it for some years, this will not guarantee that the counter-narratives you promote are *immune against the contamination by mainstream*, that is in that case, White narratives – *Beyond the Gates* and other films sponsored by Micheaux which are now available on DVD are, let's say very « assimilation »-orientated and, as such, don't exactly fit into the

general picture of Afro American black radicality today ! But, as a whole, it's a very « Benjaminian » story on the tradition of the oppressed and, as well, a very Deleuzo-Guattarian story on the condition of minor peoples, minor narratives, minor films (see on that a beautiful passage in Deleuze's book on cinema in two volumes).

I would like now to make my point clear on what I call chains of equivalence (an expression I borrow from Ernesto Laclau – *On Populist Reason*) in terms of appearance, look, features (that is here what an actor looks like, is supposed to look like, can look like or *pass for*) and specific typologies (that is what a Mexican farmer, a cattle thief, a bandit, a revolutionary are supposed to look like or how he is supposed to be embodied by an actor). What I want to insist on at this place is that what we have to do with, when this matter is at issue, that is the relationship between look and identity, is not realism, any kind of realism, but pure *conventionalism*.

What matters is not likeness or veraciousness, but just conventions that have to be complied with by the people who make the films and that have to be accepted by the public. This is where the (always implicit) grammar of species has much in common with *symbolism*. A Mexican character doesn't need to be a real Mexican (the actor, I mean), but he has to look like a *dago* – to be *dark* (eyes, skin), bearded, not clean-shaven and hairy, and, finally speak English with a heavy alleged Spanish accent. But for this, you can pretty well take, if you need a star, *Omar Sharif* – an Egyptian actor (*MacKenna's Gold*, J. Lee Thompson). If it's a star you need for playing a Mexican woman, no problem, you can take Claudia Cardinale (*The Professionals*, Richard Brooks), she is Italian and speaks English with an Italian accent, but who cares, a Southerner is a Southerner, man or woman, makes no difference and even, the chain of equivalence is loose, easy and approximate enough for an « Oriental » to pass for a Southerner – what matters is that his-her look testifies for his-her *otherness*, difference – the standard being, of course, White Anglo-Saxon whiteness (fair skin, fair hair, blue eyes, good size...).

This is the matrix and starting from it you can make all sorts of variations, infinite variations. You can say: OK, this is how it works and we can do nothing about it, since cinema has to make characters visible in a reconstructed tangible world, and for this reason, has to establish a sustainable system of correspondence between appearance and identity – what I call a grammar. But, on the other hand, we cannot think about these questions without having a critical approach of the political and moral dimension of this symbolism – darkness as opposed

to whiteness or fairness, the symbolism of colors, blue eyes, blond hair as moral signs or emblems, the hierarchy of accents when people speak the autarkic language of Hollywood — American English, etc. When you pass to the « field work », that is to films, watch films, these moral and political stakes involved in the chain(s) of equivalence or intertwined with them become obvious.

First, it always goes through contrasts: for example, in the above mentioned western, *MacKenna's Gold*, Omar Sharif embodies a Mexican villain, obsessed with gold and prepared to do anything for getting it. The incarnation of the good is an American marshal played by Gregory Peck, a moral hero, brave, honest, ready for any sacrifice — the struggle between the evil and the good is entirely racialized through the contrast between these two characters — the dark sun-tanned fake Mexican and real Egyptian Sharif and the handsome tall incorruptible Gregory Peck (Peck very rarely plays the villain — as he does in *Duel in the Sun* — he is specialized in the roles of moral heroes, the constant incarnation of the good and morally impeccable White American).

Second, it never stops, I mean the specic/racial stereotypes « rebound » from an epoch to another. Take for example the Mexican villain, cattle thief, revolutionary having gone astray — a very common character in *westerns*. More recently, this stereotype has rebounded in *drug films* — Mexican cartels, illegal trade of heroin over the Mexican-American border, etc. — Rio Grande as a symbolic border, as ever. The same racialized stereotype of the Mexican delinquent can easily be recycled in these drug films that appear in the 1990 — Alexandro Gonzalez-Inarritu, or, more recently, Ridley Scott (*The Counselor*, 2013), etc. As a rule, racial stereotypes die hard and the way they survive throughout the history of cinema is a good example of that.

Now, let me enumerate, a bit at random, from various films. Matters of racial logics or arithmetics. Let's begin with a riddle: four people, two Whites, an Indian and a Mexican woman are lost in a desert after a long search. They have only three horses left. Question: whom do you think the Mexican girl has to ride with, on the back of the horse? *The Indian of course*, not the White riders, you fools! It's from a western shot by a renowned filmmaker, Raoul Walsh — *Gun Fury*, 1953.

Another crucial issue: until the 1960s, the end of the 1960s, even, as a general rule, non-Whites could not play, act as main characters in Hollywood films, even if the character they embodied was a Black, an Indian, an Asian, an American native, etc. In the first James Bond of the series with Sean Connery, *Dr No* (Terence Young, 1962), the character of the evil Chinese villain who has set up an international network for nuclear terrorism is performed by a white actor, Joseph Wiseman, who doesn't look Chinese at all, in spite of his heavy make-up. Only walk-on parts, that is very minor parts of Asians can be played but real Asians. This is an iron law that has been enforced in Hollywood from the very beginning, *The Birth of a Nation* is one of the inaugural films in this respect, but I could mention dozens of examples of that.

It's a rule that is applied in any genre of films, westerns, exotic films, adventure films, colonial films. Take for example a lavish colonial film like *The Rains of Ranchipur* (Jean Negulesco, 1955), an adaptation of the famous Novel *Monsoon* by Louis Bromfield, a romantic love story set in India under the British rule, between an American woman and an Indian medical doctor from very humble origin – a pariah kid that has been adopted by a rich maharaja – the doctor's part is performed by Richard Burton, the widow of the maharaja who has been his constant support is played as well by a white actress in an Indian attire and make-up, totally unconvincing as an Indian aristocrat – but never mind, all you want but « native » actors...

What does that mean? It doesn't only mean that Hollywood is a manufacture for colonial or white-centric stereotypes and representations, *it means that this cultural industry is obsessed by racial « purity »*. Everything happens as if racial diversity on stage, as far as the main characters of a story, a film, are concerned would be some sort of a pollution of the show the viewers would not accept. In that sense, it teaches us a lot on what American (US) society was in this extended first part of the XXth century, basically, intrinsically representing itself as exclusively white. The *racial others*, in a film, can only be extras, supernumeraries, on the background, or as crowd, servants, etc. This white America cannot see itself in the mirror of films where the set of actors would not be ethnically homogeneous. It's a bit distressing. It looks like an obsession, a phobia – as if the presence of a main part performed by a non-White would be some sort of a *stain* or *scare* the audience away...

In another colonial film allegedly located in India *Life of a Bengal Lancer* (Henry Hathaway, 1955), shot in Hollywood and the Sierra Nevada, Afghan insurgents are played by a extras

hired from a local native (Indian American) tribe, living on a reservation and called Piute... and they look very much like Al Qaeda or ISIS fighters! This example shows that the principle of equivalence of a colonial dark body with another, any other, *has no limit*. If you can convert (turn) an Indian Piute into an Afghan rebel, for the sake of a colonial film located in the Northern part of India under the British rule, you can do all you want. Dark is dark, and it's just the opposite of white – this is the basic opposition on which all this intrusive, invasive and overwhelming grammar relies.

An objection to that is that Hollywood, in all these years, would have rejected racial others, as actors, not because of prejudices against them, but for pragmatic and trivial reasons – just because these others had not been properly trained to play in films, they wouldn't know how to act and make a disastrous effect on screen... For me, this argument is unconvincing and weak: if you look at the career of most of Hollywood stars between WWI and WWII, you immediately notice that they have not been trained in actor's studios, schools or whatever, they have learned on the job – leaving apart those who have come from Europe in various circumstances – and this is precisely what makes the difference with theater, between cinema and theater.

If French or German speaking actors could learn English and make honorable careers in Hollywood in spite of their accent, and for some of them become stars, women mostly, like Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo (who came from Sweden) – why not English-speaking Blacks, Indians (from India), American natives?

These are the reasons why I'm not inclined to take this « pragmatic » argument too seriously – basically, the rejection of actors who « look different » on a phenotypical basis relies on cultural/racial prejudices and this constant rejection make of the first Hollywood (until WWII) a white planet or continent, in terms of power, representations, hegemony.

Until the 1960s and 1970s which are a turning point, Hollywood and its (their?) ideological outbuildings militate(s) actively against interracial unions of any kind, love, sex, marriage. If we go again to the lavish colonial film I mentioned previously *The Rains of Ranchipur* (1955), we immediately see how imperious the message: « No racial mixing or crossing! » can be. Some sort of a « story » can take shape that brings together an American idle wife more or less dropped by her English husband and a brilliant, handsome young Indian doctor – a « story »

based on sensuality and maybe a bit more, but limits have to be set! It appears rapidly that this story's function is to spice up a colonial melo – at the end, the divide between white (master's) world and colonial world has to be restored and reasserted and the American woman will go back to her English husband – boring but white. The message is clear: you can cross the color line, but occasionally and shortly, as it were just « by accident »....

Now, and to finish with this rough sketch on the grammar of species, I would like to draw your attention on a facet of our problem – the prolific narrative of the « two races » and how it « travels », circulates in films – how cinema constantly relaunches and re-intensifies this narrative.

It is well known that the image of national history or collective history at a broader scale, regional, continental (etc.) as a long-term struggle or war between two « races » is something very common, you can spot it in very different areas, eras, cultures. In France, what we call « le roman national » (literally « the national novel ») conveyed by public school and the institutions of the Republic is saturated with these stories where « our » ancestors the Gallics or Gauls fight against the Germanic invaders; in Britain's history, it's about Saxons and Normans; for the Russians, it's where the Slavs clash with the Teutonic conquerors – see on that Serguei Eisenstein's patriotic film *Alexander Newski*. I imagine that this matrix or model can be easily located in Chinese-centered narrations of the past – Hans against Mandchus or Mongols, etc. This matrix travels too, for specialists of colonial history in Central Africa generally agree on the fact that the alleged conflict between Tutsis and Hutus that is the background of the genocide in Rwanda actually relies on a projection on African reality of European narratives or fantasies – the Belgian colonizer as exporter of the theory of the « two races », history and politics reduced to the dimension of this war or immemorial clash between two races. Many colonial films bear the mark of this inexhaustible narrative.

In one of his courses at the Collège de France, « Society has to be Defended », Michel Foucault has shown that this theory has played a decisive role in the shaping of the national narrative and of the making of the state in France at the dawn of political modernity (XVIth and XVIIth centuries). These races don't need to exist or have existed in historical reality, they are, before all, narrative constructions. But, as such, they become reality and can play a role of outstanding importance.

Now, what we have to be attentive to is how this very notion of an immemorial, endless and restless struggle between « two races », whatever these « races » might be made of, this ritornello is something that travels through cinematic narratives in the most various ways, explicit or implicit, sometimes even in the most unexpected forms or genres of films. A long-term narrative that films, all sorts of films, constantly reenact and re-intensify.

Colonial films are, of course, an inexhaustible source here, as they stage in a direct and brutal way how White people (the colonizers as civilized) and Black people (natives as savages) clash in a fight to the death. A perfect example for that is a film called *The Naked Prey* by Cornel Wilde (1965), a film shot in what was then Rhodesia. It's the story of a professional safari guide who leads two White men and their troupe on an elephant hunt through the African veldt. They intrude on a local tribe's territory and the two hunters offend and insult the natives. As a consequence of that, the tribe capture the entire party and kill all of them in the crueler way. They only give the safari guide a chance to save his life: he is stripped naked and chased by the tribesmen. It's struggle for life – the White man by himself in a hostile environment chased by warriors who are « at home » in the veldt and equipped with spears and arrows. He succeeds in escaping by killing some of them, hiding, etc. and after many days returns to a colonial fort. After he has reached safety, he turns and exchanges a salute with the leader of his pursuers.

It's a very interesting film because of its brutality – it goes straight to the point: Black Africans as savages who have not yet subdued to colonial order against White intruders, engaged in a struggle to the end. But, at the same time, it is not Manichean: at the beginning, we see how the natives are brutalized by the White hunters, real villains, so, they have their reasons to take revenge, they have their own rules. They have nothing in particular against the safari guide, it's just that he has been involved in a fatal combination of circumstances which makes that he becomes the « naked prey » – it's some sort of a ritual game, cruel but fair to some extent. But, as he has to face various ordeals and tests, to fight desperately to save his skin, he himself becomes some sort of a savage too: the veneer of civilization disappears and what is left is the survival instinct on the background of the struggle to death between the two enemy races which some sort of an immemorial hostility seems to set against each other...

This is some sort of basic, elementary form of this figure, the atavistic struggle or war between Blacks and Whites, colonial films are some sort of a repository of (see also the impressive *Zulu* by Cy Enfield).

But there exist many more versions of this very « rich » and profuse narrative. « Race » can be delinked from color, for example. *Alexander Newski* (1938), for example, very famous film by Sergei Eisenstein, depicts the attempted invasion of Novgorod in the 13th century by the Teutonic Knights of the Holy Empire and their defeat by Prince Alexander known popularly as Alexander Newski. The clash between the two parts is depicted as a struggle opposing to archfoes as « races », « Teutons » against « Slavs », this in the context of the coming fight to death between Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union (Russia extended). The two protagonists of the fight are White, European, Caucasian – but it doesn't prevent the famous Soviet director whose mission is to make a patriotic film from coining a narrative that ostensibly deals with a war to death between two archfoes typified as races – it goes through phenotypes, equipment (armors, helmets, arms), language, body language, etc. This is visible, in particular, in the purple patch of the film – the battle on the frozen lake.

In different contexts, class struggle can be depicted as *some sort of* a confrontation between different human species, « races » – take the British director Ken Loach's abundant cinematography – this « specic » dimension of class struggle is constantly put forward and emphasized – plebeian bodies by contrast with middle class or patrician bodies, a matter of appearance, gestures, behavior, accents. Ken Loach insists that his characters, (when they are people from below, workers, housewives in poor urban areas, plebeian characters having a problem with alcohol or drugs), should speak with their local, natural accent... This is such a strong « specic » marker that some of his films need subtitles when they are shown in the US or even in England (*Kes*, his first, wonderful, film).

What Ken Loach's films show is how Britain has passed from a society where *class struggle* is the matrix of division and conflict to another « model » which is *dual society*, that is divided into two entities that hardly communicate with each other anymore, they are separated by an abyssal gap, in terms of wealth, way of life, spacial distribution, etc. In a society where classical forms of class struggle prevail, interactions are constant and vital between the rulers and the ruled, the capitalists and the workers, etc. In the contemporary dual society that Ken Loach's

films describe, people from above and people from below hardly interact, they have less and less in common and nothing or almost nothing to argue or bargain about.

They have become *species* that are not only hostile to each other but more and more alien. A new plebs made of unemployed workers, outsiders, new poor, losers of all kinds, outsiders, homeless, young delinquents, crazy people, addicts, etc. has appeared as a new « mob » as the classical working class or proletariat fell apart. At the same time, a cast of parvenus, the new rich has appeared whose ostentation infuriates the new poor. It is this new form of the divide less between classes than between social species that seem to have less and less common ground Ken Loach films describe. And this is why these films are very much focused on *bodies*, that is how the abyss that is gaping between those from above and those from below reflects and condensates in bodies. What comes « after » class struggle in the classical sense is a form of struggle where radically different and opposed human species are clashing. Cinema, as always is both *the witness and protagonist* of these mutations in the forms of social conflict. Not only showing, displaying or staging a « representation » of these changes, but being part of them, a participant, a player, working them out and opening a space where a public « conversation » about them is liable to take place.

This is one of the main functions of cinema: encouraging us to engage in a conversation on such crucial issues...