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Nomadism in the Cinema of Trinh T. Minh-ha

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This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Gender Studies

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other University for a degree. Parts of Chapter 1 have previously been published as a journal article in *Uncanny – Philosophy and Cultural Studies Journal*, 4, 2017, *Nomadic Silences in Trinh T. Minh-ha*, pp. 109-136, bilingual version, ISBN-13:978-1541015753 / ISBN-10:1541015754 Lexington: Croft-Mazell Publishers.

Marina Fuser

Dedication

This PhD thesis is dedicated to my grandmother Lída Costin, who bravely survived the Holocaust, played a significant role in my life and recently passed away.

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Abstract

The concept of nomadism - which stems from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and evolves into feminist and postcolonial critiques - provides an analytical framework to address the undetermined, multifaceted portrayal of tribal and diasporic women in the cinema of Trinh T. Minh-ha. The thesis explores subject positions in selected films by Trinh through the work of Braidotti (2011) and the “*mestiza* consciousness” proposed by Anzaldúa (1987), that provide an embedded and embodied philosophical basis for a nomadic film aesthetics and frame of analysis. The border is discussed as a site of encounter across cultures and social demarcations of alterity. The second chapter explores the nomadic film strategies that destabilise the time-space configuration of the film narratives in *The Fourth Dimension* (2001) and *Night Passage* (2004). Chapter 3 analyses Trinh’s tactics that create a politics of “speaking nearby” in *Reassemblage* (1982) and *Naked Spaces - Living is Round* (1985), and to what extent a nomadic approach can suspend utterance about Third World women. The last chapter looks at borders between Self and Other, the West and the rest, and how these lines are defied, blurred, or displaced in *Tale of Love* (1995). The history of “Third Cinema” (Solanas and Gettino 1969) is examined as a prelude to a postcolonial position on a cinema of exile. The notion of “third space” in Homi Bhabha’s critique of Third Cinema, “haptic visualities” in Laura Marks and the “crossroads” in Gloria Anzaldúa are evoked to examine “spaces in-between”, where the border is deterritorialized.

Key-words

Nomadism, Nomadic Cinema, Feminist Cinema, Poscolonialism, Trinh T. Minh-ha

Table of Contents

Declaration.....	i
Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Abstract.....	v
Key-Words.....	vii
 Introduction.....	 1
 Chapter 1: Nomadism: A Feminist and Postcolonial Perspective.....	 11
1.1 The Concept of Nomadism.....	16
1.2 A Nomadic Subject Position.....	29
1.3 Representing Women from Elsewhere.....	37
1.4 The Nomad and Alterity in Trinh T. Minh-ha's Theory.....	50
1.5 Conclusions.....	58
 Chapter 2: Nomadism and A Critical Use of Time and Space.....	 60
2.1 Lost in the Dark.....	60
2.2 The Heterotopic Path.....	66
2.3 The Filmic Tracks of a Nomad: Heterotopias as Sites of Imaginary Voyages in- <i>Night Passage</i>	73
2.4 Heterotopias of Time: "Time Traveling" in <i>The Fourth Dimension</i>	87
2.5 Relay Points and Introspective Spaces in <i>The Fourth Dimension</i>	95
2.6 Conclusions.....	100
 Chapter 3: For a Nomadic Ethnography that Speaks Nearby.....	 104
3.1 The Aesthetics and Politics of Speaking Nearby.....	107
3.2 Strategies of Speaking Nearby.....	121
3.2.1 Looking nearby: Reflections on the Ethnographic Gaze.....	122
3.2.2 The Poetics of Bodies in Space, and Space as Bodies.....	132

3.2.3 Reinscribing “the Power of the False” in Ethnography.....	136
3.3 Conclusions.....	140
 Chapter 4: Crossing Borders of Alterity, Unravelling Veils.....	 142
4.1 Crossing Borders of (Neo)Colonialism: Spaces of Encounters.....	148
4.2 From Exile to Loving Intransitively.....	171
4.3 Conclusions.....	195
 Conclusions: The Gender Pivot.....	 198
Bibliography.....	202

Introduction

This thesis explores how post-structuralist, postcolonial and feminist theorizations of nomadism may be used to explore the cinema of Trinh T. Minh-ha as she constructs her critical approaches to non-Western women in her films. Nomadism has been used as a category in film theory, mainly concerning specific film genres, such as Laura Marks' reading of films of the desert. Marks specifically focuses on the representation of nomads based in the Arabian desert and the Rub al-Khali in the South of the Arabian peninsula, the deserts in Nubia, Lybia and Syria, the Sahara, which she later calls "asphalt films of the desert" understood as "asphalt nomadism. (Marks 2015, p. 148). Dudley Andrew's emphasis on nomadism in cinema (Andrew 2000, p. 215) tackles a broader cinema filmed in non-Western settings, mostly in West Africa, and produced by both African and Western filmmakers. These films, argues Andrews, somehow create a new film aesthetics that undergoes processes of deterritorialisation, producing ruptures in the representation of alterity, a conceptualization which can help introduce the idea of nomadism as point of departure in my reading of Trinh's cinema.

Both of these theorists base their work on Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of nomadism. "There are itinerant, ambulant sciences that consist in following a flow in a vectorial field across which singularities are scattered like so many 'accidents'", argue Deleuze and Guattari (1986, p. 32), making a claim for nomadism as an "itinerant science" that bends or breaks the socially built vectors that structure thought in rigid categories and compartments. They propose a hybrid flow that frees thought from striated pathways, rendering meanings open-ended. Nomadism is a mode of thought that crosses boundaries, changes routes, and remains open to multiple coalitions and articulations across fields. The

nomadic strategy is a “line of flight”, an escape route through “vectors of deterritorialisation” (Ibid.) that displace meaning from fixed definitions and cognitive demarcations. They write:

There is an extraordinarily fine topology that relies not on points or objects but rather on haecceities, on sets of relations (winds, undulations of snow or sand, the song of the sand or the creaking of ice, the tactile qualities of both). It is a tactile space, or rather “haptic,” a sonorous much more than a visual space. The variability, the poly vocality of directions, is an essential feature of smooth spaces of the rhizome type, and it alters their cartography. (Ibid., p. 46)

This passage in which Deleuze and Guattari make a claim for a smooth nomadic space can be very powerful when put on a screen. This figuration of thought is given bodies, sounds, textures and lights to play with, reconfiguring and combining different sensorial experiences and modes of relationalities, in creative reveries and dynamic cartographies that challenge the striates of representation. When writing about alternative African cinemas in “The Roots of the Nomadic”, Dudley Andrew poses the following question: “Can Deleuze’s alluring concept of the ‘nomadic’ be imported as an intercessor for cinema studies just as he imported it into philosophy?” (Andrew 2000, p. 215)

Andrew goes on to speak of “a deterritorialised cinema, a cinema of images without representation, a desiring machine functioning on a smooth surface without the responsibilities and reassurances of ‘identity’” (Ibid., p. 239). He is enthusiastic about the roles played by Deleuzian “intercessors” (Ibid.), whose stories are yet to be told, or, at least, are not given the attention they deserve. “Deleuze opens ‘thought’ to movements and rhythms outside its traditional purview. Intercessors break open the walls of the theatre of philosophy and allow thought to move in ‘lines of flight’ beyond its traditions, beyond its history, beyond its identity” (Ibid., p. 216). Film subjects play the role of nomadic agents, intercessors of deterritorialisation, regarding cinematic representation, taking the screen as the brain in nomadic

philosophy. Andrew notices that postcolonial and feminist theorists, such as Gayatri C. Spivak, historicise this figuration of thought, taking nomadic intercessors to a geopolitical perspective. I elaborate on this debate in the first chapter. He goes on to address the absence of this concept in Deleuze's two volumes on cinema. Whilst concepts such as time-image are analogous to Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of nomadism, "of nomadic cinema itself we hear nothing." (Ibid.) He then encourages readers to research nomadic tactics in cinema.

By the same token, Laura Marks follows the tracks of a nomadic film aesthetic, regarding the desert as a smooth space, as opposed to striated spaces structured and regimented by the State. Nomadism is thus associated with the unruly, indocile, disobedient, outlaw: "Many of the nomadic poets, the authors of odes to traces of ruins in the sand, were outcasts and misfits. Their difference from their society gave rise to art." (Marks 2015, p. 148) Nomadism is neither the desert, nor the state patrolled highway, but what cuts across them. Asphalt nomadism is in the spotlight of Marks' analysis of Arab road movies, as she writes:

The new cinema of the desert... is set on the asphalt. The new self-organized, nonteleological narrative from these parts of the world is the Arab road movie. A history of practices of striating the desert, more or less continuous with the history of the cinema, pushes the nomad onto the open road – and the road into ruin (Ibid.).

Nomadism in cinema escapes the linearity of a road, leading to multiple off-tracks, non-determined pathways that avoid and challenge the common territorial divisions, so the desert in road-movies can be allusive, not only of a desert as a film theme, but also as an aesthetics of undetermined empty spaces that go across borders, such as the desert in "Nomadology: The War Machine" by Deleuze and Guattari (1986). The feminist theorist Caren Kaplan sees nomadic cinema as embracing "modernist critical strategies" to

bypass nationalist cinemas: "...The generalised figure of the nomad [is] a symbol of hybridity, mobility, and flux; in short, the metaphorical nomad and theories of nomadology counter assertions of purity, fixed dwelling or being, and totalitarian authorities and social practices" (Kaplan 2000, p. 92).

These fluid and dynamic micropolitics assemble gaseous trenches of resistance towards power structures: nomadic cinemas are sharply political. According to the film theorist Patricia Pilsters:

Contemporary nomadic films function precisely as such micropolitical acts of resistance, first and foremost by proposing for the spectator an intensive, affective encounter that can provide a slightly new perception of the world... It does not lead us out of this world but directs us (through works of art) precisely to that which we share in this world, outside the framework of the work of art. (Pilsters 2012, p. 265)

Nomadic cinemas formally break with the conventions of storytelling and aesthetics ruled by the industry. They draw highly on experimental cinema practices as acts of resistance, of making cinema "outside the framework" of cinema. For the film theorist Teshome Gabriel, a nomadic film tells stories beyond the borders of storytelling. It "smashes down boundaries-between documentary, travelogue, experimental and narrative fiction" (Gabriel 1990, p. 404). It experiments between categories, to escape the burden of representation of alterity. It takes a process of deterritorialisation to scatter the pillars of the representation of Otherness and sharply cut across the dividing lines that impede meaning from flowing smoothly. This is what Trinh T. Minh-ha does in *Reassemblage* (1982), when resorting to multiple procedures to sabotage the vectors of ethnographic representation of tribal women.

Trinh produced eight films between 1982 and 2016, with a variety of scenarios that highlight transculturality, points of passage, spaces in-between different reali-

ties, and deviations, as she sheds light onto what has been perceived as invisible. These films take place in West Africa, rural Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Togo, Benin, Japan, Vietnam, China and the United States. Although the context shifts drastically from place to place, in every film Trinh emphasises the subject of alterity within a frame portrayed as the “aesthetics of travel”. Caren Kaplan alludes to nomadism as a means of building critical categories, based on theoretical and practical points of approximation. According to Kaplan, nomadism engenders “continuities and discontinuities between terms such as ‘travel’, ‘displacement’ and ‘location’, as well as between the particularised practices and identities of ‘exile’, ‘tourist’ and ‘nomad’.” (Kaplan 1996, p. 2) These figures move across maps, producing displacements of the narratives that are difficult to frame. The images captured by camera must be fluid, open to complexity and heterogeneity, within specific cartographies that cannot be linearly traced.

The experimental film theorist Akira Mizuta Lippit claims that Trinh's films are not about specific people or places but they are related to places. “There is, it seems, something fundamentally nomadic about (...) [her] work both in its geographical momentum but also in its intellectual or creative capacity to wander, as it were, and move” (Lippit and Trinh 2005, p. 44). Trinh justifies this hybrid movement as an on-going process of openness and closure which “addresses the impossibility of framing reality in its subtle mobility” (Idem:45). This openness can aim in different directions, and the sense of belonging to a particular time and place dissipates, displacing borders only to be foreseen as part of different possibilities of identity. As she defines it:

The notion of the migration self, which has taken on a new lease in our times, is very relevant (...) The self-in-displacement or the self-in-creation is one through which changes and discontinuities are accounted for in the making and unmaking of identity, and for which you need specific, but mobile boundaries. For example, when do you call yourself a feminist, when you do not call your-

self a feminist, when do you see yourself as part of the East and when do you tell people the West is also in me? When I am speaking about the West I am not speaking about a reality outside myself. It is not a question of blurring boundaries or of rendering them invisible. It is a question of shifting them as soon as they tend to become ending lines. (Trinh, 2005, p. 130)

This lack of ending lines is analogous to the way in which Trinh defines her film: she refuses all categories of genre, because she feels they presuppose and reinforce hierarchical ideas and expectations of what should be viewed on the screen. They also limit the possibilities that are yet to be explored in the process of filmmaking. She refuses the label “experimental film”, since “there is no experiment when 'experimental becomes a genre of its own” (Trinh 2005, p. 28). Instead, she prefers to designate her films as “boundary events”, films that remain open to a wide range of interpretations. It is possible to experience them from different angles. She explores a visual spectrum of imagery not only in the sense of putting it into display, but of implicating the off-frame. In *Reassemblage* and *Naked Spaces*, for instance, she singles out specific body parts, and explores angles that produce a sense of absence. In her words:

The way we frame people tells not only about how and what we see, but also about the off-screen, the space excluded or not visible in the frame. (...) That image 'on the move' (as differentiated from 'the moving image') is at the same time a reference to the possibilities of filmmaking and to its limits. The focus is on both the literal and the figural limit of the image. I show this by offering a mobile reframing, tracking the rectangle left and right, up and down, letting it trace its own boundary while hitting against the boundary of the screen frame. (Trinh 2005, p. 37).

Over this thesis, I argue that Trinh's cinema is nomadic in that she uses these strategies of mobility and displacement as processes for deterritorializing representation. Trinh raises the stakes of filmic storytelling when she incorporates the process of filmmaking into the body of the story, alerting viewers that this is just a film, and not an unmediated reality on the screen. This encourages reflexive interpretations, but she refuses to enclose them in direct chains of signification. I want to make a claim for viewing Trinh's films in isolation because, while she has referenced prominent filmmakers, from Dziga Vertov (such as in the use of intervals) to Jean Rouch (as a mode of ethnography) as artists who have influenced her work, I do not see her pertaining to specific filmic traditions and movements. For instance, when the documentary filmmaker Harriet Hirshorn in "Questioning Truth and Fact", published in "Framer Framed", asked Trinh about her mentors, inspirations and influences, she was implacable:

No mentors. What inspires me most are usually people's sayings, music in villages, environmental sounds, and non-monumental "architecture". If I am to mention a few inspirational works, then I will say the poetry of Ho Xuan Huong (a Vietnamese woman poet), Trich Nhat Hanh, Basho, Aime Césaire, Ezekiel Mphahlele, and the prose of Assia Djebar, Clarice Lispector, Zora Neale Hurston (...) In film, I used to like Kurosawa, Ozu, Marker, Vigo, Mizoguchi, Godard, Satyajit Ray, Bresson. Today, I would rather see a film by Chantal Akerman, Valeria Sarmiento, Yvonne Rainer, or Sally Potter - recent encounters that have no influence on my film work... (Trinh 1992, p. 183)

She clearly avoids the idea of engaging with any film tradition, and names artists whose work may have impacted her more as a viewer and a thinker than as a filmmaker. In another interview conducted by Judith Mayne in the same book, "A Hybrid

Place”, she speaks of her inspirations as things that she incorporates, sensuous and travelling memories that she collects: “ Stories, songs, music, proverbs, as well as people’s daily interactions, certainly constitute for me the most moving sources of inspiration”. (Trinh 1992, p. 148) I choose to read Trinh’s body of work in accordance to what may have influenced and impacted its production. I see the benefit of looking closely in isolation, so that I can come to terms with the complex realm of her film construction, exploring her experimentations, the theoretical construction of her film aesthetics and the specific ethical implications that sustain her choices.

My goal is to identify and understand the processes of displacement, dismantling and destabilising cinematic conventions of the representation of alterity, that allow meaning to be open-ended. These processes are highly driven by feminist and postcolonial criticism in regard to the stereotypes with which ethnography and narrative cinema portray Othered women.

I start by exploring theory on Nomadism in the first chapter, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s “Nomadology: The War Machine” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986) so as to tackle the concept of nomadism and its unfoldings. It is the key concept of my thesis, hence I reflect upon how it enables me to interpret the complexity of Trinh’s film aesthetics. Her films and theory draw on nomadic threads. This chapter advocates a nomadic view of women from the Third World, based on the contributions of feminist and postcolonial scholars such as Rosi Braidotti, Gayatri C. Spivak, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Caren Kaplan. Giving it a historically and socially situated perspective, nomadism can be a war machine that deconstructs Western gazes that are dismissive of tribal women as exotic objects of curiosity.

Over the second chapter, I analyse two films: *Night Passage* (2004) and *The Fourth Dimension* (2001) drawing on Foucault’s “heterotopias” (Foucault 1997), Deleuze’s “ time images” (Deleuze 2013 b) and Trinh’s “intervals” (Trinh 1999), to explore

the moments in which the tropes of time and space are rendered abstract, forcing spectators to let go of trying to understand what goes on in the plot and to engage with the film's abstractions. I investigate the ways in which these breaks in the story can potentially compromise the film as a full-length experience.

In the third chapter I explore Trinh's politics of speaking nearby in two of Trinh's ethnographic films: *Reassemblage* (1982) and *Naked Spaces - Living is Round* (1985). I investigate her strategies of creating a point of view that can be perceived as "nearby". In other words: where is nearby? In shifting the vectors of representation of non-Western women by the power canons of ethnography, I state that Trinh deterritorialises utterance. I examine her constructions of closeness/distancing, which disavow a colonising voice of truth. First, I situate where Trinh fits within the debate that stems from a crisis of representation in ethnography over the 1980's and 1990's, looking at readings of Trinh's works by prominent ethnographers and film theorists such as Christopher Pinney and Henrietta Moore. Then, I look at how Trinh attempts to find a solution to this crisis in her ethnographic films.

The fourth chapter is about borders as events that segregate Us from Them, the Self from the Other, the West from the Rest in *Tale of Love* (1995). I go back in the history of film to Third Cinema (Solanas and Gettino 1997) so as to think through the transitions to a Postcolonial view of exiles, and the uprooting of boundaries. I borrow the notion of "third space" in Homi Bhabha's third cinema critique (Bhabha 1989), "haptic visualities" from Laura Marks (2000) and the "crossroads" from Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) in order to think of multiple encounters that occur in the spaces in-between borders.

The main purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the field of film analysis, with a nomadic approach to a cinematography that involves genres such as experimental, ethnographic, fictional films and documentary, but, in a sense, combines these categories in complex narratives that intend to question the cinema production of falsified truths

about alterity. I engage with Trinh's films, paying attention to filmic lines of flight that encourage reflexivity and a myriad of understandings while freeing the vectors of representation from patriarchal and (neo)colonial points of view.

Chapter 1

Nomadism: A Feminist and Postcolonial Perspective

This chapter is organised around the concept of nomadism, stemming from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and evolving into feminist and postcolonial critiques, which provides us with a philosophical basis for thinking of a nomadic film aesthetic. I argue that a nomadic film aesthetic is not reduced to a specific genre, but rather is an approach to viewing and analysing film. This chapter will be divided in two parts: I begin by defining what a nomad is and go on to discuss how this concept is criticised, adjusted and incorporated in postcolonial feminist philosophy.

In the second part, I look at categories such as the imperfect, transnational, diasporic, exilic films, which will take me through different possibilities of displacement that connect to a nomadic film aesthetic. The purpose of this chapter is to establish the main conceptual and analytical basis of nomadism as an approach to reading and interpreting Trinh Minh-ha's cinema. With this conceptual investigation, I plan to analyse how nomadism allows the blurring of boundaries between socially built categories such as gender, race and nationality, giving way to questioning alterity in Trinh's film.

Several feminist and Postcolonial scholars have raised the question of identity, often posed in the opposite vortex from the nomadic. I plan to verify the complexity of this debate between the fluidity of nomadic thought and the materiality of identities. How can nomadic thought account for the borders that cannot be dissolved in a world map that requires passports, bank accounts and birth certificates? This leads us to question how nomadism resonates in film, both as an aesthetic and as a means of viewing film, and, more specifically, how useful this concept is for analysing Trinh's film aesthetic.

This concept resonates with postcolonial feminist critics, such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) and Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), who question the exoticisation of non-Western, non-white, female bodies reinforcing the barriers that separate the West from the rest of the world, while commodifying them as both female bodies and as bodies that can be colonised. These marked differences between bodies is taken to the screens in filmic representations of third-world women, often depicting them as exotic commodities. The term “exotic” comes from the Greek *exotikos* – *exo* means “from outside”. The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology indicates that the word exotic was first registered in English in the late sixteenth century, employed as “from the outside” (Hoad 2003, p. 13). In 1942, this term was used to refer to strippers and dancers in gentlemen’s clubs, thus making its sexual implication explicit, alluding to the commercialisation of women’s bodies, a connotation that is also implicit in the colonial idea of “exotic”. Exotic is a term that becomes particularly important in the postcolonial nomadic cartography for being situated at the intersection between gender, nationality and racial oppression.

This term “exotic” has been questioned by postcolonial scholars due to the implicit sexualisation and commodification of non-Western women. My main goal is to use nomadism to question a colonial gaze often used in mainstream cinema. According to Graham Huggan, the term exotic implies (or turns explicit) “an aesthetic value” attributed to “cultural difference” inscribed in the “process of commodification” (Huggan 2003, p. 13). Huggan notes how the term involves “mystification” in respect of a politics of representation (Huggan 2003, p. 13). He understands that exoticism is “a kind of semiotic circuit that oscillates between the opposite poles of strangeness and familiarity”. He explains: “exoticism describes the systematic assimilation of cultural difference, ascribing familiar meanings and associations to unfamiliar things [or people – my addendum], it also denotes an expanded (...) distorted comprehension of diversity which effectively limits assimilation” (Huggan 2003, p.14). He calls attention to how “the exoticist rhetoric of fetishized otherness and sympathetic

identification masks the inequality of the power relations without which the discourse could not function” (Huggan 2003, p. 14). Huggan is using the term “fetishism”, present in Freud (Freud 1927, pp. 198-204) and Marx (2008, p. 26), insofar as it replaces “a spiritual presence” by “a physical absence”, and thus a “disavowing [of] difference in the pursuit” (Huggan 2003, p. 15). This term is used in Marx’s “commodity fetishism”, that is to say, the masking of the relations of exploitation that lie beneath the commodity (Marx 2008, p. 26). It means that the fetishist invests his or her desire towards the object of consumption as something completely detached from the process that has made this object what it is.

To put it briefly, Freud conceives fetishism as a man’s sexual perversion that derives from the fear of women’s castration in face of the realisation of the absence (lack) of a penis in his mother. This perception of a lack turns to the object of sexual arousal as something that symbolises a substitute for the woman’s missing penis. He elaborates:

Probably no male human being is spared the fright of castration at the sight of a female genital... One would expect that the organs or objects chosen as substitutes for the absent female phallus would be such as appear as symbols of the penis in other connections as well... It seems rather that when the fetish is instituted some process occurs which reminds one of the stopping of memory in traumatic amnesia. As in this latter case, the subject’s interest comes to a halt half-way, as it were; it is as though the last impression before the uncanny and traumatic one is retained as a fetish. Thus the foot or shoe owes its preference as a fetish - or a part of it - to the circumstance that the inquisitive boy peered at the woman’s genitals from below, from her legs up; fur and velvet - as has long been suspected - are a fixation of the sight of the pubic hair, which should have been followed by the longed-for sight of the female member; pieces of under-clothing, which are so often chosen as a fetish, crystallise the moment of undress-

ing, the last moment in which the woman could still be regarded as phallic.

(Freud 1927, pp. 200-201)

Based on Marx and Freud, for Huggan the idea of “fetishism” is present in the foundation of the term exotic, insofar as it “plays a crucial role in colonialist fantasy – structures, which draw on the relationship between the exotic and the erotic to set up narratives of desire for, and partial containment of, the culturally othered body” (Huggan 2003, p. 15, Bhabha 1997, p. 294). This concept has been criticised by the literature scholar Ana Margarida Dias Martins, who notices that Huggan addresses the habits of consumption in a global scale in a male-driven sense in literature, rather than including women, that is:

This suggests a reluctance to account for a female capacity to strategise and mediate, something which works as a barrier to a deeper understanding of the specific ways in which marginal writers use gender and sexual difference strategically to counter, in situated contexts, global as well as local patterns of commodification of cultural difference. (Martins 2013, p. 150)

Given Martins’ inclusion of gender under the category of postcolonial exoticism, this becomes rather useful in building the link between exotic female bodies and colonial discourses. These discourses find their written description in the Colonial aesthetics of the titillations and hypersexualisation through which the gynecologist and physical anthropologist, Dr. Carl Heinrich Stratz, described Javanese women while on a military medical mission in the Dutch East Indies. According to Ann Laura Stoler, Stratz attests a “scientific” value to sexism and the aesthetics of non-Western race by specifically distinguishing “what makes their bodies desirous to, and their bodies and minds so distinctive from, Europeans”. She goes on: “Stratz’s description of Javanese women attends closely to skin shade, to colour and quantity of hair, as he moves down from ‘their sleek dark hair’ to the ‘dark dusky eyes’ to the nearly hairless armpits and to the ‘thick-haired *mons veneris*’” (Stoler 2004, p.

185). Stoler writes an extensive description of how “the aesthetisation of race and the distribution of sexual desire that it invoked” had been registered, codified and catalogued by “colonial medical practitioners” (Stoler 2004, p.186). Basically, what is at stake is a set of discourses over bodies that escape European patterns of whiteness that hypersexualise them, associating them with a wild nature, apart from the ideas of civilisation and progress, which is sexually accessible to the coloniser, just like the land that they have just conquered. These female bodies are a part of their conquest. It is not simply the adding of oppression, but a combination between categories such as gender, race and origin which simultaneously make them seem sexually accessible and marks the difference from the West and elsewhere.

Critical analyses of the term exotic, such as those by Huggan, Martins, and Stoler, allow us to take a closer look at the role of discourses produced over the intersection of categories, combining “woman, native and Other” (Trinh 1989, p. 6), under a colonial gaze, which I will elaborate further on in relation to a film aesthetic. I am particularly interested in verifying how a nomadic approach can allow us to understand the connections between women across borders, in a way that defetishizes and deconstructs the discourses on the objectification of non-Western women. The questioning of filmic representation of alterity is key to displacing borders, as well as to seeing, hearing and feeling beyond historically and socially established identities – if not stereotypes – that define who is inside and who is outside of the Western hegemonic circle. This chapter aims to address the concept of nomadic subjectivity, from post structuralism to the feminism of difference, to arrive at a perspective on the nomad that provides a conceptual framework to analyse the film work of Trinh T. Minh-ha.

The Italian philosopher RosiBraidotti has used the concept of nomadic subjectivity as a figuration to designate a specific state of transition between borders. She took as a starting point her own nomadic life as a cosmopolitan academic who has been around the world to shape this figuration which does not directly refer to the traditional or

contemporary nomads, but to the very act of border crossing. This concept is key in the analysis of Trinh T. Minh-ha's films because not only does Trinh make direct references to the act of border crossing in her films and literature, but she also does this as a way of challenging a certain aesthetic – established by Western frames that depict non-Western women as Others. By Others, I am alluding to subjects often designated as “exotic”, commodified subjects whose difference is clearly marked and referenced by a supposedly civilised, superior West.

1.1 The Concept of Nomadism

I start by tracing back to the concept of nomadism as a touchstone that eventually gives way to a nomadic film analysis. Before we move on to the core of a nomadic aesthetic, I go back to the basics to explain what I understand as nomadism. The French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari borrowed the allegory of the nomad from Friedrich Nietzsche's “The Gay Science” (1882), in which the German philosopher defines the nomad as a person who throws him or herself into the world and follows non-linear paths, according to his or her will. In Nietzsche's words:

Oh Marvel! There he flies
 Cleaving the sky with wings unmoved - what force
 Impels him, bids him rise
 What curb restrains him? Where's his goal, his course?
 Like stars and time externe
 He liveth now in heights that live forswore
 Not envy's self doth spure:
 A lofty flight were't, e' en to see him soar!
 (Nietzsche 2006, p. 203)

The flight here can be interpreted as a rise to an open air, and yet the wings remain static, while he rises impelled by a mysterious force. He indicates that this flight

does not abide by the laws of gravity, meaning that it is moved by a force for which wings are useless. I interpret this flight as the intermittent flight of imagination and desire. This undetermined force is connected to Nietzsche's "will to power", that is, the flux of desire that reaffirms life in its potency:

[Anything which] is a living and not a dying body... will have to be an incarnate will to power, it will strive to grow, spread, seize, become predominant - not from any morality or immorality but because it is *living* and because life simply *is* will to power... 'Exploitation'... belongs to the *essence* of what lives, as a basic organic function; it is a consequence of the will to power, which is after all the will to life.(Nietzsche 1966, p.259)

As the "will to power" (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 259), nomadism is unstable, with an undetermined course, and moved by desire and struggle. This course and this goal that unfold as a process of becoming is put to play as an ever unfinished game plan, constituted by several lines of flight that unravel along a nomadic journey. By line of flight, I am particularly referring to the concept formulated by Deleuze and Guattari who define it as:

...The abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which [multiplicities} change in nature and connect with other multiplicities. The plane of consistency (grid) is the outside of all multiplicities. The line of flight marks: the reality of a finite number of dimensions that the multiplicity effectively fills; the impossibility of a supplementary dimension, unless the multiplicity is transformed by the line of flight; the possibility and necessity of flattening all of the multiplicities on a single plane of consistency or exteriority, regardless of their number of dimensions.(Deleuze and Guattari 1986, p. 9)

The figuration of the nomad is connected to living nomads, who need passports and means of transportation to cross borders. Borders are not so easy to cross, both literally and epistemologically.

I am using the nomad in Deleuze and Guattari insofar as the evolution of the term has made room for multiple nomadic cartographies across identities and dividing lines between people and modes of thought—the act of crossing borders beyond Nietzsche’s aphorisms, expanding its meaning in an epistemological route. By epistemology I am saying that the nomad, in Nietzsche and more evidently in Deleuze and Guattari, is not a real person, but an abstraction, a self-reflexive image of thought. From a figure of thought to a figure on the screen there is a process of creation that begins by a conceptualisation that is first imagined as such before becoming a character in the script. In using the nomad as a figure of thought, I investigate the topography as thought, insofar as thought encounters frontiers that draw imaginary lines between subjects of knowledge, or simply subjects in space, the territory of self and that of the Other.

The French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari define a nomad as someone who “has a territory”, and “goes from one point to another” across his or her path, that is to say, from a “water point” to a “dwelling point”; from a “dwelling point” to an “assembly point” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, p. 50), which are points of intersections, encounters and coalitions. In this research my aim is to walk through spaces of transition, explore nomadic shifts and points of convergence. Points are employed as references, not as fixed categories present in a linear structure.

The disregard for borders, walls and enclosures is very characteristic of the nomads. “The nomad’s space is smooth, marked only by ‘traits’ that are effaced and displaced with the trajectory. (...) The nomad distributes [her]self in a smooth space, she occupies, inhabits, holds that space; that is [her] territorial principle” (Deleuze and Guattari

1986, p. 51). Yet it does not allow the nomad to be trapped in this space. The smooth space of a nomad, which unfolds in multiple lines of flight, is particularly interesting to this research insofar as it establishes a balance between territorial detachment and the relational production of meanings that is key in cinema. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the nomad moves, but most of all, the nomad moves in space, in such way that arrivals and departures become insignificant, which leads them to conclude that the nomad is “deterritorialised par excellence”. As opposed to one who migrates, the process of reterritorialisation – that is to say, of making a land one’s own – does not apply to the nomad. The prefix “de”, associated with territorialisation, points to a constant process of deconstruction of the idea of establishing oneself, of becoming rooted in a given territory. It is in direct opposition to the idea of permanence, of making a territory one’s home.

The nomad is there, on the land, wherever there forms a smooth space that gnaws, and tends to grow, in all directions. The nomad inhabits these places, he remains in them, and he himself makes them grow, for it has been established that the nomad makes the desert no less than he is made by it. He is a vector of deterritorialization. He adds desert to desert, steppe to steppe, by a series of local operations the orientation and the direction of which endlessly vary (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, p. 53).

The relation between the nomad and space needs to be observed closely, in terms of what these local operations and orientations can potentially arrive at that constitutes the idea of nomadism. The lack of determination of the nomad’s shifts deserves to be taken into consideration. Forces of will, forces of nature, and the interaction with other beings, configured multiple intercalations of these layers can be at play in the unravelling of nomadic maps. Deleuze and Guattari provide me with an image that contextualises spaces of thought. Thought is not understood as passive but as dynamic, moving across smooth spaces.

The same terms are used to describe ice deserts as sand deserts: there is no line separating earth and sky; there is no intermediate distance, no perspective or contour, visibility is limited; and yet there is an extraordinary fine topology that does not rely on points or objects, but on haecceities, on a set of relations (winds, undulations of snow or sand, the song of the sand or the creaking ice, the tactile qualities of both); It is a tactile space, or a rather “haptic”, a sonorous much more than a visual space... The variability, the polyvocality of directions, is an essential feature of smooth spaces of the rhizome type, and it alters their cartography (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, p. 53).

In the nomad’s space, there are no borders or divisions between spaces, as there are in everyday world maps. The recognition of limits in space is assigned to a sedentary notion, which the nomad challenges by his or her undetermined paths across empty, smooth spaces with no predetermined directions, no game plan. Deleuze and Guattari define the nomad in such an abstract way that it seems like he or she is floating between and beyond striated spaces. This makes it very difficult for me to bridge their image of the nomad with a real, flesh and bone nomad. Not only is the nomad an abstract image of thought, but space is also conceived in abstraction. This abstract space in which Deleuze and Guattari situate the nomad is the space of thought, and more specifically, it is the space of thought that disregards hierarchies and social boundaries that produce fixed identities; isolating factors and designating them in terms of fixed categories, represented by crystalised images or stereotypes. Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of nomadism needs to be historically, geopolitically and socially situated, but it is rather useful as a figuration of thought that challenges striates and draws non-conventional connections and articulations in between points.

“Thought is like the Vampire, it has no image, either to constitute a model of or to copy. In the smooth space (...) the arrow does not go from one point to another,

but it is taken up at any point, to be sent to another point, and tends to permute with the archer and the target” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, p. 45). Thought itself constantly drifts in a complex web of interconnected elements from several positions, with more liberty to decide its own itineraries. Nomadism implicates the act of moving in between points of reference, not in a linear and orderly fashion. Thought, in Deleuze and Guattari, is a process; it is a relation, in a net of complex combinations, that can be assembled in the midst of in-between spaces. I am particularly interested in the extent to which these gaps allow space for a nomadic aesthetic; one that moves across possibilities of representation, speaking through multiple voices, in a fluid mobility that does not allow meaning to be fixed in conventional icons of representation, particularly of female subjects in third-world countries.

This nomadic figure of thought can be a helpful asset for an analysis focused on shifts and displacements, giving way to a cartography that articulates complexity in a dynamic world, which is unstable and in constant motion. The vectors of instability and the lack of spatial precision that defines nomadism give way to a series of cinematic experiments around diasporic subjects on the big screen. The sea is the analogy that best describes a nomadic space conceived in terms of human thought:

The sea is perhaps principal among smooth spaces, the hydraulic model par excellence. But the sea is also, of all smooth spaces, the first one attempts were made to striate, to transform into a dependency of land, with its fixed routes, constant directions, relative movements, a whole counter hydraulic of channels and conduits. One of the reasons for the hegemony of the West was the power (*puissance*) of its State apparatuses to striate the sea by combining the technologies of the North and the Mediterranean and by annexing the Atlantic. But this undertaking had the most unexpected result: the multiplication of relative movements, the intensification of relative speeds in striated

space, ended up reconstituting a smooth space and absolute movement. (...)

The sea became the place of the fleet in being, where one no longer goes from one point to another, but rather holds space beginning from any point: instead of striating space, one occupies it with a vector of deterritorialization in perpetual motion (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, p. 61).

The sea does not completely abide by the laws of gravity. Bodies become lighter in the water and move at different speeds, in non-linear trajectories. As much as one wishes to swim from one point to another in the sea, one's body deviates and is subjected to other forces that pull it according to the tide. As Deleuze and Guattari demonstrate, the sea is a space that is hard to control, it is a place where "absolute movement" is at stake, where the relationship between men and government, or even men and other men, is mediated by forces of nature. There are no rigid borders in the ocean, even though there is a technological apparatus of border protection and patrol that reinforces these imaginary lines. Analogically, the hybridity of this smooth space operates through what escapes from these mechanisms of control, under Western hegemony. Oceans and seas are also the space of diasporas, where actual nomads traverse under poor conditions to get to the other side.

The sea is also a space for diasporas, ever since the biblical expulsion of Jews from Judea during the 8th to 6th centuries B.C.. According to Steven Rawie, the term comes from the Greek "*diaspeirein* (διασπορά)", which means "'disperse', from *dia* 'across'+ *speirein* 'scatter'" (Rawie 2018, p. 109) and which literally alludes to the dispersal of people across the globe. This term has been presented in transnational discourses of displacement since the 1980s and is employed as a way of understanding fluxes of migration across borders. Jina Desai defines it as "scattered through or across, (...) generally emphasize[ing] physical and psychic displacement from a stable national home" (Desai 2012, p. 207). Desai highlights that this concept has acquired importance to postcolonial studies insofar as

“it has become a critical means for understanding global and transnational processes within the metropolis and postcolonial nation states”. She argues that the term diaspora provides a “conceptual frame” beyond its empirical meaning, that is to say, it is another metaphor for displacement. This term is useful for this research specifically because it has been employed by film analysts such as Hamid Naficy (1999), Avtar Brah (1996), Jina Desai (2012) and other authors that work with Third World Cinema. I will discuss diasporic, exilic and nomadic cinemas at length in the following chapter.

Speaking of diaspora, the diffusion of Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadic treatise has echoed across a multiplicity of academic fields, but it is its reception among postcolonial feminist scholars that deserves special attention. In fact, this highlights a central debate in the study of identities among critical theorists, which addresses the terms in which we can define a nomadic aesthetic in film. Caren Kaplan criticises Deleuze and Guattari for the lack of historicisation of the nomadic as a category of thought (Kaplan 2000, p. 66). She points out how metaphors of the desert have often been romanticised in Western academia.

In querying the deployment of the ‘nomadic’ through the affiliated concept of ‘de-territorialisation’ in Euro-American poststructuralism, I intend to caution against critical practices that romanticise or mystify regions or figures that can only be represented through the lenses of colonial discourse. (...) When poststructuralist theory constructs a ‘no man’s land’ that permits the erasure of the subject positions of the critic in the formation of theory, historically diverse forms of colonial discourse combine to create a postcolonial, postmodern practice of cultural hegemony (Kaplan 2000, p. 66).

The lack of a historically situated subject position is where Deleuze and Guattari drop their guard, leaving the nomad hanging in the air, without a positionality

that is so important to the study of transnational borders, not just literally, but also to the extent in which thought encounters dividing lines. Deterritorialisation and the occasional reterritorialisation that accompanies a nomadic cartography illustrate the idea of displacement in Deleuze and Guattari, through metaphors such as rhizomes, nomads, tidal waves, and so on. According to Kaplan, their idea of deterritorialisation is caught in the colonial framework. That is: “the movement of deterritorialisation colonizes, appropriates, even raids ‘other spaces’... Deterritorialisation is always reterritorialisation, an increase of territory, an imperialisation” (Kaplan 2000, p. 89). Her concern is that, in not providing a subject position anchored in history, Deleuze and Guattari legitimise the discourse of the oppressor, the coloniser, the imperialist. They fail to recognise the power relations that operate within borders. We can only look at the nomad as a privileged person who is granted access across borders. Kaplan points out that the Third World in Deleuze and Guattari works as “a metaphorical margin for European oppositional strategies” (Kaplan 2000, p. 89). The idea of “the West and the rest”, in which all places other than the West are considered margins, is present in colonial discourses. It reinforces a certain colonial gaze; a gaze which designates the people of non-Western cultures as “less than”.

The problem of this misconception is also located in the choice of the nomad as a metaphor for displacement. Kaplan notes that not positioning the subject within a context is dangerous because this figure of thought is an imaginary projection of real human beings whose narratives, histories, and modes of living are rather different and culture specific:

Throughout Euro-American modernity, nomads, Bedouins, and other mobile tribes have been geographically located outside metropolitan locations (in the desert or forest) or in the peripheries of metropolitan locales (gypsies, for example, who are portrayed as liminal, moving in and out of towns and always stay-

ing on the outskirts) (Kaplan 2000, p. 90).

Kaplan's critique of Deleuze and Guattari stresses that there are real nomads, and as much as this is a potent figuration of thought, it needs to be embedded in a perspective that connects with the trajectory of real nomads, that face multiple obstacles. That is, there must be a bridge between the real nomads and the figuration of thought. An embedded view of nomadism raises issues of language, history, modes of living, as well means of survival. Perhaps a certain level of abstraction is essential for the metaphor to work, but without anchoring this nomad in a specific context, we are given the impression that nomads constitute a homogeneous category. It falls under the dichotomy between West and margins, making way for a number of colonial assumptions which romanticise the supposed wilderness of nomads, while they are often looked down upon based on an all too Western idea of progress. Kaplan says:

These romanticised figures are always positioned in colonial discourse as closer to nature, always purer or simpler, and near to vanishing. Within this context, the nomad participates in the discourse of the other, signifying the opposite of Euro-American metropolitan modernity. More specifically, the nomad can be characterised as patriarchal and warlike, as well as migratory. As a sign of circulation or de-territorialisation, no historical people will probably fill the requirements to perfection. The nomad as a metaphor may be susceptible to intense theoretical appropriation because of a close fit between the mythologized elements of migration (independence, alternative organisation to nation-states, lack of opportunities, lack of opportunity to accumulate much surplus, etc.) and a Euro-American modernist privileging of solitude and the celebration of the specific locations associated with nomads... (Kaplan 2000, p. 90).

Following Kaplan's lead, let us take the idea of desert, for instance. In

reading Deleuze and Guattari's description of a desert, could you imagine this nomadic move across the Atacama Desert – a place inhabited by cities, coal mines, industries, commercial facilities, state patrol, schools, churches and other institutions that link it with the current economic system, the government, and so on? The relationality between urban and desert spaces shifts and, on top of it all, not all deserts are the same. The relation between real nomadic groups and space can be quite different. Some nomadic groups can actually plant from time to time and go through sedentary phases (like Quechuas in Peru, for instance). My point is that it is rather reductionist to simply throw an abstract nomad in an abstract desert space and associate her with specific patterns of behaviour. What makes them think that the nomads are free? Are they really free? Then again, which nomads are they referring to? This metaphor can be powerful to address displacement and deterritorialisation, but it must address the geopolitics of power-relations. Nevertheless, the concept of nomadic in Deleuze and Guattari has opened an important space to be filled: the challenge of anchoring nomadic cartographies in real life situations. It seems like there is something missing in this conceptualisation of nomadism, which is where I want to arrive. How can we bridge this nomad to real life situations? Can an embedded approach to nomadism allow us to deterritorialise fixed meanings? This is what I plan on verifying in the next section. It would be useful to first look at further criticism by authors such as Gayatri Spivak and Rosi Braidotti towards the concept of nomad in Deleuze and Guattari.

Gayatri Spivak points out that Deleuze and Guattari's disregard for "relations between desire, power and subjectivity" of non-Western people can be problematic (Spivak 1988, p. 273). Not positioning oneself ideologically is also a political act, and a very dangerous one at that. It appears as if it is implicit, but in not naming it, their work can be interpreted from rather contrasting perspectives. Spivak also observes that Deleuze and Guattari fail to situate their own standpoint as white, upper-class, Frenchmen in a prestigious academic ivory tower. Spivak and Kaplan coincide in criticising Deleuze and Guattari for being

too quick to erase boundaries of identities when these identities have been an important tool of resistance toward oppression, i.e., Black pride, LGBTQ pride, etc. One can pretend that there are no boundaries between black and white citizens, but this will not stop him or her from experiencing racism. The awareness arising from the identity of being an Afro-descendent can be empowering in the struggle for equality, which aims to erase this boundary from a discursive level to an embodied reality. As Spivak observes:

In the constitution of that Other of Europe, great care was taken to obliterate the textual ingredients with which such a subject could cathect, could occupy (invest?) its itinerary – not only by ideological and scientific production, but also by institution of the law. However reductionist an economic analysis might seem, the French intellectuals forget at their peril that this entire overdetermined enterprise was in the interest of a dynamic economic situation, requiring that interests, motives (desires) and power (of knowledge) be ruthlessly dislocated. To invoke this dislocation now as a radical discovery that should make us diagnose the economic (conditions of existence that separate out “classes” descriptively) as a piece of dated analytic machinery may well be to continue the work of that dislocation and unwittingly help in securing ‘a new balance of hegemonic relations’ (Spivak 1988, p. 273).

As described in this excerpt, Spivak accounts for the power of the State across the nomadic path. She also brings back the economic flux of desires and power relations that can make the act of border crossing a not-so- easy task. The fact that with capitalism, and precisely with global capitalism, societies are divided into antagonistic social classes, which can limit the means of circulation for those who are not well endowed. This also applies to matters of thought, production, as well as circulation, of knowledge. How easy is it for an undocumented worker who is constantly reminded of her boundaries and limita-

tions to allow herself to break free from borders and striated spaces of thought?

Hitherto I have looked at critiques of Deleuze and Guattari's formulation of nomadism from these feminist critics. I now turn to the work of Rosi Braidotti who acknowledges the limitations of their concept, but goes on to combine it with a more materialist account of the nomadic. In a lecture on critical theory at the University of Utrecht she admitted that Deleuze and Guattari did not say anything useful about women or gays. According to Braidotti, their flaws reside in not considering issues of "matter, body and experience" (Braidotti 2014). In her book "Nomadic Subjects", she provides a body for this nomad, a female body, with "mobile, specific strategies, which are resistant to systematisation" (Braidotti 2013, p. 279). Braidotti recreates the concept of nomad that engenders "multiple, traverse ways of thinking women's becoming" (Braidotti 2013, p. 279). She brings the nomad down to earth, accounting for the historicity of women's struggles, hence politicising this figure of thought. According to Kaplan, Braidotti's nomadism is an "emancipatory metaphor", which offers "a kind of cultural guerrilla warfare and the promise of escape from the oppressive reproductive machinery of capitalist nation-state formations" (Kaplan 2000, p. 91). According to Kaplan, Braidotti seems to fill the gaps in Deleuze and Guattari's theory of nomadism by "addressing historic-specific geographies in relation to strategic methods of nomadism (Kaplan 2000, p. 96). Kaplan situates Braidotti's assertion in her positionality as a producer of knowledge from the perspective of a lesbian woman, who is engaged in the struggles for gender and racial equality, and who is also part of the academy, but in a mostly marginal field. Although Braidotti, Deleuze, and Guattari belong to the same context of European academic settings, there is a subtle yet significant difference in their standpoints. Kaplan understands that Braidotti "rigorously address[ed] the transatlantic (...) relations between intellectual communities" (Kaplan 2000, p. 96).

What conclusions can we draw from postcolonial feminist critiques on Deleuze and Guattari's nomadism? Is the term still useful for accounting for a no-

madic approach to gender, race and nationality? The critiques of Deleuze and Guattari's nomadism are crucial to formulating a nomadic theory that is culture-specific and historically situated, hence positioning the thinking subject (or subject who thinks) in a world traversed by frontiers that are concrete realities. Even though the nomad in Deleuze and Guattari (as in Braidotti) is a metaphor for thought, thought is not a separate entity from a given context. There must be a bridge that connects abstract thought to a given materiality that places the being in the world. As I demonstrate in the following section, Braidotti's concept of the nomad articulates this bridge. The hybrid and mobile non-linear itineraries of the nomad can help formulate alternative ways of positioning subjects on the screen, and challenge the firm lines that separate the self and the Other. The nomad departs from an ahistorical abstraction to articulating multiple becomings that position the subject.

1.2 A Nomadic Subject Position

As demonstrated in the last section, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of nomadism gives rise to important critiques that provide a fertile ground for the formulation of a new nomadism, in which subjectivity is bridged with materiality and life experiences. In this section, I move from an understanding of nomadism as an embedded and embodied figuration of thought to discussion of a nomadic aesthetic. We begin by positioning the nomadic subject following Rosi Braidotti's lead. Braidotti situates nomadic thinking, or nomadic consciousness, as an image of thought that escapes the binary opposition between soft and hard sciences but transits between them, tracing multiple assemblages and interconnections across different fields of knowledge. She uses Deleuze and Guattari's figuration of a rhizome, a root that grows underground, horizontally, in multiple directions, with non-linear, yet interconnected ramifications. Just like the nomad, there is no end and no beginning to the rhizome's path, and

their evolutions are continuous works-in-progress marked by multiple passages and transitions. Braidotti points out:

The nomad enacts transitions without a teleological purpose; Deleuze also gives as an example of this nomadic mode the (...) rhizome. The rhizome is a root that grows underground, sideways; Deleuze plays it against the linear roots of trees. By extension, it is “as if” the rhizomatic mode expressed a non-phallogocentric way of thinking: secret, lateral, spreading, as opposed to the visible, vertical ramifications of Western trees of knowledge. By extension, the rhizome stands for a nomadic political ontology that (...) provides movable foundations for a post-human view of subjectivity. Nomadic consciousness is a form of political resistance to hegemonic and exclusionary views of subjectivity (Braidotti 2011, p. 23).

I am interested in how Braidotti accounts for the nomadic unfoldings of deviant paths from specific normativities and long-established patterns of behaviour and exclusion that seem to be predominant in Western civilisation; that is to say, the canons of a patriarchal, ethnocentric, Eurocentric, heteronormative and capitalist society, which produces a long semantic corridor of exclusion based on gender, race, nationality, sexuality and class, among other categories of second or third-class citizenship. The nomad shifts between and away from these categories, tracing alternative roots for that which constitutes the Other. I want to verify how Braidotti’s concept of nomadism helps us reframe Western representations of alterity.

Regardless of how tempting it is to represent people in specific categories or images, these categories are established vertically, from a position of power which has the power to determine one’s place in society, the little box where he or she belongs. These boxes are grouped hierarchically, exclusion being the filter through which one is given

a specific position or identity. Deviating or taking an alternative route from these established boxes does not place the subject in a submissive, or even defensive position. Instead it can potentially empower the subject through encouraging their own agencies, their power to make their own articulations, and self-definitions. By refusing the imposition of hierarchical categories, one can move with more independence against or away from the mainstream. It involves taking an active role, embracing his or her process of becoming in the direction of his or her desires at the moment. Subjectivity is conceived as a process. One which denies any permanent self-definitions, but a constant work in progress. Braidotti claims:

The nomadic tense is the imperfect: it is active, continuous; the nomadic trajectory is controlled speed. The nomadic style is about transitions and passages without predetermined destinations or lost homelands. The nomad's relationship to the earth is one of transitory attachment and cyclical frequentation; the antithesis of the farmer, the nomad gathers, reaps, and exchanges but does not exploit (Braidotti 1994, p. 25).

In Braidotti, nomadism shifts away from a nationalist sentiment of belonging. She makes a statement that the nomad transiting near the city gates is not “seeking readmission” (Braidotti 2011, p.32). The nomad just passes by, or stops for a pause, before he or she gets on with their journey. Please allow me to pose a Latin American example of nomadism in regards to borders and territorial demarkations: Andean ethnic groups like the Quechuas and Aymaras in Bolivia challenge the idea of belonging to a specific land in terms of borders and territorial demarkations. *Pachamama*, the term for the Quechuas and Aymaras in Bolivia, means “Mother Land” (Kaijser 2014, p. 17), or the spirit of the land. Yet the “land”, in the Quechuan and Aymaran languages, has little or nothing to do with nationality. According to Anna Kaijser, there is no specific location attributed to *Pachamama* since she is the very “condition of locality” (Kaijser 2014, p. 17; Rockerfeller 2010, p. 80). In Kaijser's

words: “she represents a holistic notion of the world, encompassing all living beings, including humans” (Kaijser 2014, p. 17). In fact, *Pachamama* is a transnational mythical figure: she is worshiped in the Andes, between Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador. Unlike other spiritual icons of the Andes, *Pachamama* is refused any “visual representation” (Kaijser 2014, p.17, Harris, 2000, pp. 201-219, Poupeau 2011, pp.256-258). Kaijser points out that she is invoked as a collective myth of “pre-colonial origin”, alternative or oppositional to Western values (Kaijser 2014, p.18). This allows us to establish links between *Pachamama* and the figure of the nomad as a perspective that drifts away from Western ideas of border, territorial demarkations. Kaisjer observes that “she stands for interconnectedness” between the Andean peoples, “along with the strive for decolonisation and liberation from imperialist patterns” (Kaijser 2014, p.18). For Olivia Harris, *Pachamama* “stand[s] at the intersection of indigenous knowledge and the various cultural needs of different outsiders” (Harris 2000, p. 201). She is, in fact, a “cosmopolitan character”, as observed by Kaijser, who stands for “a universalised indigenous worldview” (Kaijser 2014, p.18) and who translates the knowledge produced in indigenous settings to the outside world. In this respect, *Pachamama* provides us with a clear example about the relation of the nomad with the land, in the extent to which she is the entity that unites the Andean peoples, traversing frontier regions insofar as she engenders the alchemy between multiple sites of knowledge, which the nomad also does as an intersectional image of thought – in Deleuze and Guattari’s nomad, and also in Braidotti’s. From a postcolonial perspective, *Pachamama* is a whole indivisible spectrum. As is the case with the nomadic journey, *Pachamama* is recreated from pueblo to pueblo. She is the road through which the nomad moves about, sharing pre-Incan and Incan heritage and ancestry. As a divine figure, she requires no logical explanation.

Just like in the Andean mythic figure, there is not a perfectly logical explanation for a nomadic path: moving in a certain direction might have been circumstantial, but by no means was it predetermined. What is the relation between the nomadic way of

thinking and Western centrality of logic or *logos*? The nomad is not exempt from rational thinking, but this is not the only force that impels him or her. Reason fails to explain the deviations that can be affected by logical predetermined aspects, such as seasons, but also passions, changes in interest or even in mood. In the nomadic path, the exception becomes the rule, deviations become the route.

Jacques Derrida thinks of Logocentrism as what he calls “a metaphysics of presence” (Derrida 1997, p. 49) (what I understand as a spiritual dimension of *logos*, or logic), which is impelled by the organising principle that transcends meaning, beyond signs and names associated with that which he calls the “transcendental signifier” (Derrida 1997, p. 252). It is how the Western canon structures thought, using logic as a godlike organising principle that transcends all signifiers. The nomadic disregard for Logocentrism as the source of explanation of all things rests upon the limitations of reason, that is to say, the impossibility to adequate all subjects to a “scientific norm” (Braidotti 1994, p. 32). It embraces the excesses, the subjects that are difficult to categorize, variables that cannot easily fit into a cause-effect equation. Nomadic thinking is one which travels through categories, but does not allow itself to be entirely shaped by them. It traces its lines of escape from established norms and categories, it slips through fissures, cracks in the walls of reason. Braidotti is precisely interested in the fissures or cracks through which nomadic thinking escapes Logocentrism, the radical rupture with linear, cause-and-effect thought processes and the refusal of names and categories. Nomadic thinking can allow us to draw a decentred, rhizomatic cartography, open to new possibilities of articulating alliances in between commonplaces. It is a means of decentering thought, casting away canonical subject positions that are considered pillars of Western thought, such as white, European, male, heterosexual, etc. I am using Braidotti’s nomadic cartography insofar as it allows me to move between the centre and the peripheries without excluding or recreating pre-existing hierarchies in between them. In Braidotti’s words:

Nomadic thinking is the project that consists in expressing and naming different figurations for (...) decentred subjectivity. Politically, the nomadic style expresses my doubts about the capacity of high theory to reflect upon the very questions that I see as central: phallogocentrism, ethnocentrism, the positivity of difference. Philosophy – as a discipline of thought – is highly phallogocentric and antinomadic; it maintains a privileged bond to domination, power and violence and consequently requires mechanisms of exclusion and domination as part of its standard practices. Philosophy creates itself through what it excludes as much as through what it asserts. High theory, especially Philosophy, posits its values through the exclusion of many: non-men, non-white, non-educated, etc. The structural necessity of these pejorative figurations of otherness makes me question the theoretical capacity – let alone the moral and political willingness – of theoretical discourse to act in a nonhegemonic, non-exclusionary manner (Braidotti 1994, p. 33).

Braidotti questions the criteria through which the process of producing knowledge is indexed, compartmentalised, and adjusted to a frame that is compatible with the scientific norm or with a frame of representation. Does the academy enable the indexicalisation and compartmentalisation of knowledge? To what extent does the academy make way for the criticism of Logocentrism and the formulations of alternative cartographies of thought? On one hand, the academy seeks to reassure and reinforce its status quo (as with cinema), dominated by those who get to call the shots, those in a position of power and authority to make decisions. On the other hand, the academy makes room for its own criticism, taking certain liberties in terms of allowing some level of critical thinking and questioning, but it is not an isolated entity in relation to the Establishment, the very structure of power which sustains it. In knowing that, Braidotti's idea that it is established not so much in "what it asserts", but in what it "excludes", is quite pertinent (Braidotti 1994, p. 33). The academy

(like the cinema industry), participates in the exclusion of subjects that are marginalised by society, based on the same criteria: race, colour, nationality, gender, sexuality, etc. These criteria go beyond granting or denying access to the academy. They are applied in discourse analysis to designate what is valid, and what is not; what is relevant and what is not. Sustained by the status quo, the academy tends to preserve and legitimise the exclusion-based pillars which sustain its own privileges. The discourses that allow a deeper questioning of these categories of exclusion find their place in the academy through fissures of the educational system, spaces that open in between fields, in between disciplines and lines of research. It is through struggle that some of these fields have conquered some level of academic legitimacy.

How does the nomadic subjectivity move about socially built categories? What does it mean to move in between categories of exclusion? Braidotti uses the figure of the nomad to shift fixed categories attributed to women, with designated functions in the social division of labour, as well as designated roles and voices; voices which are levelled according to other devices of exclusion, for instance those which place women of color at the bottom of a social hierarchical pyramid. The ability to transit through these categories is a way to displace them and blur boundaries bringing about a different idea of identity, defined not so much in terms of what it excludes, but in what it can potentially become – in terms of pathways, connections, bonds, associations. To put it in Braidotti's words: "The nomadic subject functions as a relay team: s/he connects, circulates, moves on; s/he does not form identifications but keeps on coming back at regular intervals. The nomad is a transgressive identity whose transitory nature is precisely the reason why s/he can make connections at all" (Braidotti 1994, p. 35). Interval is used by Braidotti to highlight fragments of time and space in the midst of these itineraries, that is, the nomadic's transitory nature.

What precisely expresses these nomadic transitions across identities? In the constant act of becoming, one no longer is. The verb *to be* can only be employed

in the past, since one is constantly on the move. “Nomadic cartographies need to be redrafted constantly; as such they are structurally opposed to fixity and therefore to rapacious appropriation” (Braidotti 1994, pp. 35-36). The idea of an on-going change of directions, and the refusal of permanent homologation, challenges discourses inside and out of the academy; blurring borders between spaces of political activism and intellectual analysis of marginalised subjects, more specifically, for women as the subjects and social actors engaged in the deconstruction of Logocentrism. It is, therefore, the refusal of a permanent form of reterritorialisation that enables the process of deterritorialisation. It does not mean that reterritorialisation does not happen in Braidotti’s nomadic cartography, but that it happens in an intermittent process of creating and discharging meaning, building punctual alliances across the map. In Braidotti’s words:

Figurations of female subjectivity (...) can be taken as different maps by which critical readers can identify points of exit from phallogentric schemes of thought. They attempt to work through established forms of representation, consuming from within. I have referred to this technique as metabolic consumption of the old in order to engender the new. (...) In this sense I [defend] (...) the practice of “as if”, of mimesis as a political intellectual strategy based on the subversive potential of repetitions. Metabolic consumption attacks from within the stock of cumulated images and concepts of women as they have been codified by the culture we are in. Women need to repossess the multi-layered structure of their subjectivity as their site of historical sedimentation of meanings and representations that must be worked through (Braidotti 1994, p. 39).

This discussion is important insofar as transitory forms of representation are connected to female subjectivity and agency. As we will later see in Trinh’s cinema, this can

potentially dismantle stereotypical icons of representation of alterity on the big screen. My main goal is to identify how we can translate nomadism as a figuration that deterritorialises and reterritorialises the idea of identities of non-Western women in terms of film. We must first look closely at the postcolonial critique of the Western discourse of *women, native, other* so that we can think of a postcolonial and feminist reflection of how they are represented cinematically.

1.3 Representing Women from Elsewhere

Postcolonial scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty (Mohanty 2003, p. 14) have put the representation of non-Western women in crisis in Western discourse. According to Mohanty, the idea of gender as a monolithic, homogeneous concept present in discourses produced by Western scholarship “defines third world women as subjects outside relations” (Mohanty 2003, p. 40). Mohanty claims that “third world women” are relegated as a part of the whole miscellanea called “underdeveloped” or “developing” (Mohanty 2003, p. 40) from which the supposed image of third world women emerges. Mohanty calls this process of standardisation of third world women a “third world difference” (Mohanty 2003, p. 40). It implies that all third world people are more or less the same, so the strategies for social inclusion, when present, can be quite shallow and inaccurate, based on a series of generic assumptions. Mohanty sketches the production of the “third world difference” as follows:

Third World women as a group or category are automatic or necessarily defined as religious (read: not progressive), family-oriented (read: traditional),

legally unsophisticated (read: they are still not conscious of their rights), illiterate (read: ignorant), domestic (read: backward), and sometimes revolutionary (read: their country is in a state of war; they must fight!) (Mohanty 2003, p. 40).

She points out that these Western assumptions about third world women are based on a line of evolution which is regarded as not having happened to the extent it has in the West. The problem with this approach is that, as Mohanty says, “homogenising and systematising the experiences of different groups of women in these countries erases all marginal and resistant modes of experiences” (Mohanty 2003. p. 41). For her, these analyses reinforce the perspective of the West as being superior to the rest of the world, and produce representation stereotypes such as “the veiled woman”, “the powerful mother”, “the chaste virgin”, “the obedient wife”, etc. (Mohanty 2003, p. 41). The universality of these artificial icons casts away their histories, their cultures, and other aspects of their subjectivities. These categories are inherent to a colonial discourse that “exercises a very specific power in defining, coding and maintaining them” (Mohanty 2003, p. 41) and creating the dichotomy between the West and the rest. This leads me to the question of how we can draw a map of cultural difference that shifts the focus from discourses produced by the West? According to Mohanty, alliances can be articulated between different cultures and across these categories:

What seems to constitute “women of colour” or “Third World women” as viable oppositional alliance is a common context of struggle rather than colour or racial identifications. Similarly, it is Third World women’s oppositional political relation to sexist, racist and imperialist structures that constitute our potential commonality. Thus, it is the common context of struggles against specific exploitative structures and systems that determines our potential political alliances (Mohanty 2003, p. 40).

Mohanty points out that even in cases where there is a clear refusal of the term “feminism” as a struggle for women’s liberation, “... Third World women have always engaged with feminism, even if the label has been rejected in a number of instances” (Ibid., p. 40). For her, any possible bonds that connect women are mediated by ideological divergences both between and within groups. For instance, we cannot assume that all women are feminists. Mohanty considers that just belonging to a specific group does not determine the level of engagement with struggles of resistance. In her words:

I challenge the idea that simply being a woman or being poor or black or Latino, is sufficient ground to assume a politicised oppositional identity. In other words, while questions of identity are crucially important, they can never be reduced to automatic self-referential, individualist ideas of the political (or feminist) subject (Mohanty 2003, p. 77).

Oppositional identities are marked by political agency, consciousness and awareness-raising discourses and negotiations of consensus. A map of cultural difference that escapes Western universal discourses must consider the ideological assemblages that prevail within communities and then mark possible coalitions that can happen across borders. For Mohanty, “strategic coalitions that construct oppositional political identities for themselves” (Mohanty 2003, p. 37) work as temporal, punctual intersections. Meaning has to be constantly negotiated between groups, and, due to their different positionalities, at some point meaning dissolves. In this sense, intersectionality is connected to a nomadic perspective. The provisional and short-term aspects of these alliances do not allow identities to be captured in fixed forms. The process of unmaking petrified roles and identities is nomadic: it shifts between categories, highlighting the ambiguity of what is neither nor, of spaces where different colours stand out between what is black and what is white. It affords an alternative to that of binary oppositions, where one can only affirm oneself through assuming the opposite vortex, invert-

ing, rather than subverting, the premises. A nomadic representation embraces ambiguity and unmake categories through smooth spaces that open up in the course of the process of becoming.

According to Braidotti, in a lecture at Utrecht University in August of 2014, becoming is “a deprogramming exercise” (Braidotti 2014), a process that functions through “the awareness of one’s cartography of power” in the multiple, complex, and shifting power relations. As we have seen, the main difference between Deleuze’s and Braidotti’s theories of nomadism is the fact that she accounts for subject positions. While a Deleuzian-Guattarian cartography refuses the idea of points, or departure or arrival, a nomadic approach, according to Braidotti’s reformulation, starts with identity. For her, identities are “embedded” and “embodied” (Braidotti 2014), which solicits a “temporary, nomadic and action-oriented” approach to the representation of identities. Braidotti thinks of identity as “a matter of self-representation in the sense that it is an image in your body; a mental representation” (Braidotti 2014). Indeed, it is also socially built. She describes it as “an entire archive that falls on you; it comes with a baggage, a repertoire” (Braidotti 2014). To free subjectivity from identities would require getting rid of “structures that position you, that locate you”; which, on a map, translates into the move from “potestas” to “potentia”, that is to say, the move from the power structures that “prevent you from” to those which “allow you” (Braidotti 2014). Braidotti claims that: “power gets conjugated with the verb *to be*, not *to have*”, as she writes. “The conditions of the emergence of change rests not on negation, but on creative affirmation, on the vital bodily forces” (Braidotti 2014).

So far, we have seen how nomadism relates to identity, and now we go further to a women specific nomadic approach to a body. How does a nomadic representation of alterity relate to the idea of embodiment? In her book “Woman, Native, Other”, Trinh T. Minh-ha notes: “Women must write through their bodies. Must thoroughly rethink the

body...” (Trinh 1989, p. 36). The idea of “writing through the body” is quite complex. Braidotti borrows from Jacques Lacan and Luce Irigaray the idea that gender expectations exist prior to the constituted subject: “they play in you”, she says (Braidotti 2014).

In the realm of the symbolic, orchestrated by “imaginary constructions” (Braidotti 2014, Lacan 1956, pp. 39-42, Irigaray 1985, p. 61, Jameson 1977, pp. 349-350), while universalities are usually expressed as masculine words, women are expressed as an “absence” or a “lack”. Women are perceived as subjects who “lack rationality, lack self-control”, but on top of all, they are dismissed for lacking a “phallus”, as opposed to the penis in Freud (Freud 1977, pp.195-196), which manifests through language (Irigaray 1985, p. 61, Braidotti 2014).

Lacan reserves the word penis strictly as a biological genital organ, and prefers to use the word “phallus” (Lacan 2006, pp. 576-584) to designate its function in terms of fantasy, that is, how it manifests in the imaginary. In Lacan, the phallus has a symbolic role regarding its anatomical representation. To put it in his words:

The phallus can be better understood in the basis of its function... In Freudian doctrine, the phallus is not a fantasy, if we are to view fantasy as an imaginary effect. Nor is it such an object (part-, internal, good, bad, etc.) inasmuch as “object” tends to gauge the reality involved in a relationship. Still less in the organ - penis or clitoris - that it symbolises. And it is no accident that Freud adopted as a reference the simulacrum it represented to the Ancients. For the phallus is a signifier, a signifier whose function, in the intersubjective economy of analysis may lift the veil from the function it served in the mysteries. For it is the signifier that is destined to designate meaning effects as a whole, insofar as the signifier conditions them by its presence as the signifier. (Ibid., p. 579)

As it is shown in Lacan, the “phallus” plays a major role in the production of meaning and the imaginary representation of the male genital organ and its lack. Irigaray argues that his phallic representation of masculinity, and the representation of women as its lack, makes us conceive women’s desires as passive, associated with the role of maternity. She questions:

Why would the libidinal structuring of the woman be decided, for the most part, before puberty (...) unless it is because those feminist characteristics that are politically, economically and culturally valorised are linked to maternity and mothering? Such a claim implies that everything, or almost everything, is settled as woman’s allotted sexual role, and especially as to the representations of that role that are suggested, or attributed, to her, even before the specific, socially sanctioned form of her intervention in the sexual economy is feasible, and before she has access to a unique, “properly feminine” pleasure. It is understandable that she only appears from then on as “lacking in”, “deprived of”, “covetous of”, and so on. In a word: castrated” (Irigaray 1985, p. 64).

Irigaray suggests that women bring the body back to language, back to the symbolic system that has “castrated” her, defining her as a “lack” or as a subject outside of discourse, hence redeeming language from the separation from the bodies that articulate it. It is in the body that the “encoding as speaking subjects is inscribed” and “where the objects of (...) desire are projected”. Irigaray says that the body is a material site “marked by (...) signifiers” (Irigaray 1985, p. 132). At the gaps, the spaces in which the masculine voice of truth and rationality cannot penetrate, Other fluids of signification can take place. Different modes of elaborating the world that are not oriented around the phallic structure operate at these interstices. The idea of embodiment, for Irigaray, involves the development of a “syntax” (Ibidem)

that can potentially alter our modes of perception, freeing it from the function of “appropriating the [female] other” through the “abstraction” of her “body” or through “reducing to passivity the activity of [her] senses” (Irigaray 2000, p. 43). Irigaray’s “syntax” is based on “nearness, proximity”, insofar as “it would preclude any distinction of identities, any establishment of ownership, thus any form of appropriation” (Irigaray 1985, p. 132). Braidotti questions the essentialism of Irigaray’s “feminine syntax” for generalising women’s positions, arguing that “anatomy is not destiny” (Braidotti 2014). On the other hand, she agrees with Irigaray that the imaginary can dispose of playful negotiations to change the “symbolic law” (Braidotti 2014), such as figures of “lips, fluid,” (Irigaray 1992, pp. 09-15). Braidotti argues that we are yet to consider “the roots of embodiment”, or “the uniqueness of the placenta”. She explains:

The lack in Lacan is not fear of castration like in Freud (it is dated in Freud).

The only people that suffer from castration are men. The penis does not represent something significant in Lacan. It is different from phallus (symbolic). The lack means that ontologically, we come from others. We are the effect of the desire of others. Lack means we need to enter the symbolic language and we enter it by surrendering to representation. We need to give it a pound of flesh! (Braidotti 2014)

Braidotti expands the idea of flesh as something that goes beyond the body. It is the point of encounter with others through a “sensorial system that is oriented to pleasure” (Braidotti 2014). It was also in vogue among feminists throughout the 1980s, when the body was distinguished from the idea of sexuality, hence becoming more complex and non-unitary. Categories overlap at the surface of the body: class, age, gender, sex, etc. – these are structuring categories in terms of subjectivity. In Braidotti’s words: “A nomadic vision of the body defines it as multifunctional and complex, as a transformer of flows, energies, affects, and imaginings” (Braidotti 2011, p. 25). It is a dynamic way of thinking the body, not

just as a group of organs, but as space of encounter between multiple forces at play. The nomad is a figure that stands for freeing thought from the temptation of placing subjectivities within categories which are named by a “phallogentric dogmatism” (Braidotti 2011, p. 29) radically uprooted in the Western canon. A nomadic notion of the subject opens a space for a creative imagination of him or herself. One that is free of social devices of exclusion, but that is instead employed on a positive mode, for self-reassurance. A nomadic feminism could open up a space for a positive valuation of the self, inventing new embodied politics that displace the subject from those of Phallogentrism:

The feminist subject is nomadic because it is intensive, multiple, embodied, and therefore perfectly cultural. I think that this new figuration can be taken as an attempt to come to terms with what I have chosen to call the new nomadism of our historical condition. (...) The task of redefining female subjectivity requires as a preliminary method the working through of the stock of cumulated images, concepts, and representations of women, of female identity, such as they have been codified by the culture in which we live (Braidotti 1994, p. 169).

The task of “redefining a female subjectivity” is quite complex, because it has to go through a process of redefining, or displacing, several categories of subjectivity that overlap in this big umbrella of “female identity”. As I demonstrated earlier in this chapter, Braidotticriticises female essentialisms such as Irigaray’s development of a feminine syntax. Braidotti seems to be engaged in a rather open perspective of women’s subjectivities, and, in fact, refers to women in the plural. Nevertheless, the task of “working through the stock of cumulated images, concepts, and representations of women, of female identity, such as they have been codified by the culture in which we live” (Braidotti 1994, p. 169) can be a dangerous road if this task is not combined with a critical analysis of Western discourse. These codified images must be deterritorialised, and deconstructed, which is what Trinh does

in her cinema. It is key to challenge a Western gaze that looks down on tribal women.

I do not think that Braidotti is engaged with a Western gaze toward Third World subjects, but it is imperative that this distinctive gaze be marked every time we suggest an analysis of cultural difference. The West already performs this task of redefining and interpreting these subjectivities according to Western standards. As Mohanty points out, the “discursive self-representation” of Western women “as secular, liberated, and having control over their own lives” (Mohanty 2003, p. 42) feeds into and reinforces the understanding of women of non-Western cultures are inferior, or less developed; less civilised or less free than those of the West.

Reworking through the optical categories is a work of decolonisation, as defined by Mohanty:

Decolonisation involves profound transformations of self, community, and governance structures. It can only be engaged through active withdrawal of consent and resistance to structures of psychic and social domination. It is a historical and collective process, and such can only be understood within these contexts. The end result of decolonisation is not only the creation of new kinds of self-governance but also ‘the creation of new men’ and women (Mohanty 2003, p. 7).

Decolonising the representation of non-Western women is crucial to nomadic aesthetics. Indeed, a nomadic approach must go through a radical process of decolonisation of discourses and imagistic representations. This is a rather significant riposte to Deleuzian-Guattarian abstraction insofar as these all-too-foreign women can speak, at last. The role of the analyst is to give a voice to these subjects of oppression. Analysts should be careful not to put words in these women’s mouths. As we will see further in this chapter with Trinh T. Minh-ha, it is vital to engage with “the politics of speaking nearby”, as opposed to speaking for, or “speaking about” (*Reassemblage* 1989) the subject of alterity. , Gloria Anzaldúa’s *mestiza consciousness*

is a concept that goes hand in hand with nomadism, insofar as it transits through the in-between of racial borders, which she defines as follows:

At the confluence of two or more genetic streams, with chromosomes constantly “crossing over” (...) [a] mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool. From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination, an “alien” consciousness is presently in the making – a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands (Anzaldúa 1990, p. 377).

The difference between consciousness and subjectivity is that consciousness requires awareness, hence a *mestiza consciousness* is armed by a political project: a mode of relating the Self to others by moving across racial borders, in a hybrid movement that dissolves power relationships and hierarchical structures. Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* extends the concept of nomadism in Braidotti, by opening up to the space of the encounter, the crossroads, which resonates with Trinh’s conception of boundary events. If nomadism is a figuration of thought, the *mestiza* stands for a consciousness that embraces ambiguities resulting from “the clash of voices” (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 78) that coexist amongst different women. It also coexists within one’s subjectivity. These voices can speak different languages and different volumes. According to Anzaldúa:

Being tricultural, monolingual, bilingual or multilingual, speaking a patois, and in a state of perpetual transition, the *mestiza* faces the dilemma of the mixed breed: which collectivity does the daughter of a dark-skinned mother listen to?” (...) Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, and inner war. Like all people, we perceive the version of

reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming-together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes unchoque, a cultural collision (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 78).

There is a nomadic trait to Anzaldúa's *mestiza consciousness*. Both figurations of thought – the nomad and the *mestiza* – transit between cultures, connecting points of encounter and crossing borders that are not only understood in terms of skin colour, but also in terms of multiple cultures, multiple languages, multiple voices that intersect. This idea of moving across cultures, languages, voices, colours and other categories has been a central debate for postcolonial scholars such as Anzaldúa (1987), Mohanty (1984), Moraga (1981), and Trinh (1989), among others. According to Mohanty, these authors have made common efforts to criticise discourses produced on the “experiences and struggles” (Mohanty 2003:18) of women who are not privileged white women in the United States within the broad umbrella of feminism (which is predominantly white and privileged). These scholarships gravitate around two categories that overlap very intimately: women of colour and Third World Women, and both are excluded from the privilege of having their voices heard in the feminist movement (from a hegemonic perspective). But how do these two categories overlap? According to Mohanty, the “distinctions” and “hierarchies” (Mohanty 2003, p. 18) between races and cultures are organised around a colonialist ideology, which is based on a positivistic idea of economic and political progress (or the supremacy of a White, Eurocentric canon). Indeed, the institution of slavery and the mass-murder of native Indians were both experiences orchestrated by the colonial establishment, although their survivors have long been incorporated into these cultures as second-class citizens. I agree with Mohanty that “However sophisticated or problematical its use as explanatory construct, colonisation almost invariably implies a relation of structural domination and suppression – often violent – of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question” (Mohanty 2003, p. 18). Mohanty is interested in the “strategic coalitions

across class, race, and national boundaries” present in the debates of these scholars, which used intersectionality as a political tool to articulate links between categories in a non-binary way (Mohanty 2003, p. 18). She agrees with Anzaldúa when she says:

At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somewhat healed so that we are on both shores at once, and at once see through the serpent and the eagle eyes... The work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem of the white race and the coloured, between males and females, lies in healing the spirit that originates the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in the best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war (Anzaldúa 1987, pp. 78-80).

Caught in the border space, the subject is split between dissonant voices; it is therefore non-unitary and cannot be simplified through binary oppositions. Just like Anzaldúa's *mestiza*, the nomad is caught between different points of view, shifting from one point to another, in an inner battle that prevents meaning from being petrified in fixed definitions, angles, narratives, and, most importantly for this research, it cannot be represented under fixed patterns. It communicates through multiplicity and embraces ambiguity as voices and images that often collapse. According to Anzaldúa:

Numerous possibilities leave la *mestiza* floundering in uncharted seas. In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, she is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can't hold

concepts and ideas in rigid boundaries. The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behaviour; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. La *mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality towards a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterised by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 79).

The *mestiza* must see beyond the lenses and think outside the frames that were socially constructed and socially acquired by a given culture. This process of border crossing is aimed at the transitivity between spaces, grasping for reassemblages that can free meaning from the rigidity guarded by dominant structures. It seeks critical questionings of what is perceived as truth by a given culture and searches for different frames, different points of view, a multiple-perspective mode of viewing one's identity. La *mestiza* loses her sense of belonging in walking along nomadic pathways. In Anzaldúa's words:

As a mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am cultureless because as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect to each other and to the planet. I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has

produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings (Anzaldúa 1987, pp. 80-81).

Anzaldúa's *mestiza* is embedded in the quest for new stories, new narratives around this woman who moves away from Western standards. This concept has an intimate connection with nomadism in Braidotti, but it is complementary in that is highly focused on the relationality and coalitions that take place in points of encounter, when nomadic pathways cross. Emphasis is driven towards articulating narratives of alterity. There are multiple ways to articulating narratives, to give these narratives a body that is not captured by Western universal stereotypes of alterity. The cinema is potentially one powerful means of telling narratives of women that cross borders, whether they are physical borders or mental borders that separate us from them. In the following section, I go back to Trinh T. Minh-ha's theory to understand the connection between borders and nomadism, giving way to thinking of a nomadic film aesthetic that deals with these female subjects of alterity.

1.4 The Nomad and Alterity in Trinh T. Minh-ha's Theory

The conversation established between Anzaldúa's reflection on the borders as points of encounter and articulation between women and Braidotti's nomadic subjectivities that build identitarian bridges across identities blend with Trinh's theory, for her attention is driven towards the in-betweenness. She looks at the boundary as an event across hierarchical subject-positions. Trinh denies these boundaries:

Constantly guarded, reinforced, destroyed, set up and reclaimed, boundaries not only express the desire to free/to subject one practice, one culture, one

national community from/to another, but also expose the extent to which cultures are products of the continuous struggle between official and unofficial narratives – those largely circulated in favour of the State and its policies of inclusion, incorporation, and validation, as well as of exclusion, appropriation and dispossession. (Trinh 2011, p. 45)

The lines that separate white Anglo-Europeans from people of colour – those often designated as Others – are moved by the threat that difference poses. Borders and boundaries are guarded by a fear of living together, the potential danger that a neighbour might present as far as violence, or a fear of being substituted in an increasingly competitive labour market. In this context, identities become more and more explicit, and the borders that determine who is the same and who are the Others (or the West's Others) quickly expand, producing a feeling of discomfort inside and outside national territories. Trinh defines the “boundary event” (Trinh 2011, p. 45) as the shaping of identities and borders that emerge not only between national territories, but within a demarcated territory, in movements that shift extra and inter subjectively. In other words, these shifts in landscape traverse one's body and subjectivity. There is an epistemological movement, which travels within the very core of split-subjects, multi-faceted cultures and discourses. According to Trinh:

Never has one been made to realise as poignantly as in these times how thoroughly hybrid historical and cultural experiences are, or how radically they evolve within apparently conflictual and incompatible domains, cutting across territorial and disciplinary borders, defying policy-oriented rationales and resisting the simplifying action of nationalist closures. The named “other” is never to be found merely over there and outside oneself, for it is always over here, between Us, within Our discourse that the “other” becomes a nameable reality. Thus, despite all the conscious attempts to purify and exclude, cultures are far

from being unitary, as they have always owed their existence more to differences, hybridities and alien elements than they really care to acknowledge (Trinh 2011, p. 45).

For Trinh, there is a hybrid “back and forth between maintaining/creating and undoing/passing over borders” (Trinh 2011, p. 47); in the sense that they can be transcended at many levels, at least in an epistemological sense, asserting points of passage in which meaning can be transformed through the interaction with the other side of the dividing line. These points of passage in which cultures meet, or even clash, can open up a gap of communication and identification between Self and Other, thus blurring boundaries and un-making power relations. In Trinh’s words:

Passage: the state of metamorphosis; the conversion of water into steam; the alternation of an entire musical framework. Intervals-as-passage-spaces pass further into one another, interacting radically among themselves and communicating on a plane different from the one where the “actions” of a scenario are explicitly situated. In intensity and resonance (more than in distance actually covered), the journey here continues (Trinh 2011, p. 49-50).

These points of passage allow ideas to flow across dividing lines and take on new shapes – new directions that resort from alternating points of view, subtle displacements of perspective that come across one’s journey. In these intervals, oppositions can potentially dissolve and make room for the acceptance of complexity, displacing borders between the central and the marginal, and reshaping nomadic maps. Anzaldúa sees this interval space as a “consciousness of Borderlands”, the space of encounter between cultures, races and women (Anzaldúa 1990, p. 377). Trinh relates to borders in an analogous way that a *mestiza*-consciousness challenges *la frontera*. She goes beyond the striated lines, beyond the lines of social demarcation.

Survival – to those who live along the margins, or to marginalised groups – seeks openness: it is possible to broaden one’s view rather than to reproduce or reinforce dividing lines among people and set ideas. A critical thinker is able to reverse the logic of dominance that shaped their identity; one may claim these identities, resignifying them as a means to empower their marginalised voice(s), yet this flight is a rather low one, for it reinforces rather than transgresses the separating lines. Identities serve as punctual tactics, but never as strategy. According to Trinh:

For many members of long-silenced cultures, if the claim to the rights of (self-representation) has been in some ways empowering, the shifts to the politics of representation proves to be still more liberating, for what is renounced is simply an exclusive form of fictionalising; namely the habit of asserting/assigning identity by staking out one’s/the other’s territory. Africanising the African or Orientalising the Oriental, for example, and reproducing thereby the confine-and-conquer pattern of dominance dear to the classic imperial quest (Trinh 2011, p. 51).

The counter-discourses which embrace silenced identities and names as weapons against their oppressors fail once they ask themselves which identity they are speaking from. Am I talking as a woman, as a lesbian, as a person of colour, or as working-class citizen? How can one embrace one’s identity without disregarding their multiple conscious Self, caught up between various power relations that confine them into empty, fictional labels? As Trinh observes, “positionings are radically transitional and mobile”. Moreover, “they constitute the necessary but arbitrary closures that make political actions and cultural practices possible” (Trinh 2011, p. 51). The numerous splits that cross one’s consciousness provoke inner battles, while identities are often externally displaced by circumstances and political shifts. The dichotomy between marginalised groups alternates according to what is

beneficial to the Western canon (which can also be National or local powers, but those who have the authority to determine who is in and who is out of the frame). As Trinh points out:

The question as to when one should “mark” oneself (in terms of ethnicity, age, class, gender or sexuality for example) and when one should adamantly refuse such markings continues to be a challenge. For answers to this query remain bound to the specific location, context, circumstance, and history of the subject at a given moment (Trinh 2011, p. 51).

The subject position cannot be assumed as a stable place on a map, but as the intersectionality of conditions that simultaneously position the subject within a complex net of relations. This cartography can only be drawn as a dynamic work in progress, since these conditions change. How can we draw such a map in a territory when the Self encounters the Other? Trinh speaks of creating a territory detached from the idea of belonging, overthrowing all control, including that of its creator; a territory where alterity is well-grounded by the affirmation of its potency, which seeks a reinvention of difference apart from relations of dominance, blurring the line that delimits who is an insider from who is an outsider. As the insider sets foot on foreign grounds, s/he immediately becomes an outsider. Trinh states that:

It is a rather tenuous line that dislocates the latter and replaces the issue of exclusion. The nomad sees the world from the inside with the eyes of an outsider. Trinh claims: “She is (...) this inappropriate other or same Who moves about with at least two gestures: that of affirming: ‘I am like you’ while persisting in her difference and that of reminding ‘I am different’ while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at (Trinh 1997, p. 416).

Trinh T. Minh-ha is concerned with the fragility of identities in the context of coexistent layers of exclusion. Words are loaded with social meaning and stereotypical attributes that reinforce exclusion. The randomness of depreciative attributes must be

taken into consideration, yet identities are more complex and imbricated than what falls under Patriarchal stereotypes and distinctions. Hegemony operates through the levelling of differences and standardisation of trivial contexts and expectations. According to Trinh:

Hegemony is established to the extent that the worldview of the rulers is also the view of the ruled. It calls attention to the routine structures of everyday thought, down to common sense itself. In dealing with hegemony, we are not only challenging the dominance of Western cultures, but also their identities as unified cultures. In other words, we call attention to the fact that there is a Third World in every First World and vice-versa (Trinh, 1991, p. 148).

The concept of “hegemony” from the perspective of Raymond Williams stems from a culture taken “as a ‘whole social process,’ in which men define and shape their whole lives, and that of ‘ideology,’... in which a system of meanings and values is the projection or projection of a particular class interest” . (Williams 1977, p. 108) Culture is, therefore, a site of conflicting views and meanings, a struggle for hegemony. To put it in Williams’ words:

[Hegemony] sees the relations of domination and subordination ... as in effect a saturation of the whole process of living ... to such a depth that the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as a specific economic, political, and cultural system seem to most of us the pressures and limits of simple experience and common sense (Williams 1977, p. 110)

It is necessary to reach social hegemony in order to project one’s ideas as universal, hence determining what is preferable, what the rules of conduct are, what can or cannot be published in mass media, or, in other words, the canons of a given society. But these ideas can be refused. New counter-hegemonies can play a role in the dispute, penetrating the gaps in the power structure, negotiating new consent, discarding ideas or interlinking

them with new ones, in a complex scenario. According to Stuart Hall, the concept of hegemony “conceives ideological change, not in terms of substitution or imposition but rather in terms of the articulation and disarticulation of ideas” (Hall, 1996, p. 34). The idea of counter-hegemonies can be interesting insofar as it helps us to think of a cartography in which directions shift against, or simply apart, from canonical discourses. It involves mobility, and can potentially change the configuration of power relations, hence blurring borders of identity and articulating new consensus.

Identities are formed in temporal battlegrounds, in which hegemony must be constantly reassured and socially negotiated by those in a position of power. The verticality of their imposition still allows space for refusal and for nomadic identitarian claims apart from dominance relations. Identities can dissolve from the peripheries to the centre, moving from the base up, rearticulating borders, and flexibilising the lines that cut across cognitive maps.

By subjectivity, I mean how the subject intimately relates to his or her specific contextual framework in terms of economic, social, legal, class, etc. The sociologist Kathryn Woodward notices how identity and subjectivity are two terms that are often perceived as “interchangeable”, while they frequently “overlap” (Woodward 1997, p. 39) so she makes an effort to unpack them:

Subjectivity includes our sense of self. It involves the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions that constitute our sense of ‘who we are’ and the feelings that are brought to different positions within culture. Subjectivity involves the most personal feelings and thoughts. We experience our subjectivity in a social context where language and culture give meaning to our experience and where we adopt an identity. (Ibid.)

She then proceeds to showing how these concepts tie together insofar as these personal feelings are subjected to the norms and codes of their specific contexts, such as language, and meanings:

Discourses, whatever sets of meaning they construct, can only be effective if they recruit subjects. Subjects are thus subjected to the discourse and must themselves take it up as individuals who so position themselves. The positions which we take up and identify with constitute our identities... The concept of subjectivity allows for an exploration of the feelings which are brought and the personal investment which is made in positions of identity and of the reasons why we are attached to particular identities. (Woodward 1997, p. 39)

Woodward touches this thin line between how one feels regarding to their position of subjection and how they identify in the complex socially built categories. The complexity of human subjectivity can be taken into account in order to trace lines of flight in which identities fail to designate one's subject position, for the human subject is not unitary. Bodies are flooded by a myriad of fluxes of will, desires, and poetics that extrapolate the limits of the skin. They form connections and articulations between subjects, bringing people together rather than separating them. In other words: if subjects are to form categories of identification, identities could be conceived not so much in terms of distance, but in terms of proximity, creating links and new temporary alliances between the self and others. For Trinh:

It is probably difficult for a normal, probing mind to recognize that to seek is to lose, for seeking presupposes a separation between the seeker and the sought, the continuing me and the change it undergoes. Can identity, indeed, be viewed other than as a by-product of a manhandling of life, one that, in fact, refers no more to a consistent pattern of sameness than to an inconsequential process of otherness. How am I to lose, maintain, or gain a female

identity when it's impossible for me to take up a position outside this identity from which I presumably reach in and feel for it? Difference in such a context is that which undermines the very idea of identity, differing to infinity the layers of totality that forms I (Trinh 1997, p. 418).

Trinh T. Minh-ha's approach to difference seeks to readdress the socially constructed stereotypes around alterity. The ambiguity of the parenthesis in "Inappropriat(ed) Other", with the suffix "ed", suggests that the other cannot be appropriated by fixed social categories. As the Western's Other, he or she is perceived as inappropriate according to Eurocentric standards. The suffix displaces meaning from an adjective to a passive voice that is implicated in the past participle, indicating that they are taken for inappropriate by someone else. In abandoning the permanent condition of the adjective, meaning undergoes a nomadic slide towards the questioning of utterance: "inappropriated by whom?"

1.5 Conclusions

In "When the Eye Frames Red", Akira Mizuta Lippit points out that he intends to "follow the nomadic qualities of her expansive work" (Lippit 2005, p. 43), just before he begins his interview with the filmmaker. Indeed, nomadism is something that marks Trinh's work, as I intend to explore over this work. This literature indicates that Trinh's "nomadic qualities", which remain unnamed by Lippit, are perceived by several scholars; sometimes clearly stated, others by proximity. Trinh follows the thread of Deleuze and Guattari's nomadism, but in a less abstract approach, given the critique by authors such as Rosi Braidotti and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who have contributed to the development of an idea of nomadism as embodied, embedded and articulated with the materiality of those who remain on

the margins, in the complex grounds of cosmopolitan centres where the margins and the centre collapse and must cope with coexistence.

By focusing on the spaces of transition and encounter, we can understand the subject position through its nomadism, which is dynamic, which shifts, which cannot be defined as one single identity. Although we cannot get rid of identities altogether, due to the importance of the claim for identities in the struggles for equality, a nomadic look can actually focus on identities as cartographies of relationships between them. Mohanty's "politics of solidarity" (Mohanty 2013, p. 8) can perhaps point to a direction in which the subjects that speak from the margins can escape the "inappropriateness" (Trinh, 1997, p. 418) of being the Other, as Trinh T. Minh-ha has put it.

The concept of nomadism can potentially open up a space for a film analysis that draws on displacement, from geopolitical locations, colours, genders and nationalities, in the complex context of a world that is marked by the intersectionality of categories that make it difficult to situate a subject position. By unravelling the complexity of these overlapping layers, we can escape a simplistic analysis of this mystical or mystified encounter between the Self and the Other. What is caught in the space that lies within different subject positions? I begin my analysis by focusing on the spaces of transition, drawing on Trinh's critical use of time and space. Nomadism in cinema has a rather spatial implication, so my point of departure for an analysis of Trinh's nomadic film aesthetics begins with two particular films that deal with train journeys, and how she puts the very idea of itinerary under suspicion.

Chapter 2

Nomadism and A Critical Use of Time and Space

2.1- Lost in the Dark

The relation between the nomad and space is marked by a series of heterotopias which deterritorialise the striates that configure conventional cinematic time and space. I analyse *Night Passage* (2004) and *The Fourth Dimension* (2001), because both films deterritorialise cinematic conventions through breakages in the time-space configuration, by the use of “heterotopias” (Foucault 1984, p. 3), “intervals” (Trinh 1999, p. xii) and “time images” (Deleuze 2013 b, p. 41). The lack of precision in the film’s time-space configuration can potentially make spectators feel lost. I investigate Trinh’s strategies of deterritorialisation, which produce temporary abstractions of space and time in these two films. That is, how can a nomadic approach to film puzzle viewers’ expectations, so as to open interpretation to endless becomings?

The Fourth Dimension is a film about a voyage across Japan and its rituals, landscapes and traditions. Mostly, it is about the journey and the connecting points, rather than the portrayal of each specific fixed location. In fact, they are barely mentioned and are not contextualised. It solicits viewers’ engagement in the act of travelling and dwelling across Japan’s landscape and what associations come with this apparently undetermined itinerary across a country of contrasting urban and rural sites. The narrator travels around Japan aboard a train that traverses multiple layers of time across the mundane rituals of Japan.

The train is introduced as a structure that moves amongst the fog. The uncanny aspect of the fog is that of a partial and temporary blindness that deterritorialises the principle of a journey by bringing fog into an establishing shot. This opening scene avoids informing viewers about the place and the context in which the story is told. The passage through a tunnel which renders the screen pitch-black invites viewers to let go of the temptation to grasp for a meaning. Meaning is partially suspended, just as the sight of the train is also compromised by the fog. The scale of the screen shrinks onto a small rectangle that moves sideways, up and down a black screen, putting the very film journey into suspense, drawing attention to the screen's artificiality, an artifice of the editing process. Facing a black screen, the process of deterritorialisation is partially suspended, however briefly, first through smoke and light, then through the complete absence of light. The feeling of loss is accentuated through the impossibility of situating oneself. It takes a while until the narrator's voice comes in, and we learn that this is Japan.

Night Passage is a film about two girls and a little boy that embark in a mysterious voyage in a train journey in a dark night between life and death, with multiple stops, where they access dreams, imaginative rituals of time and rhythm, as paths of inner discovering and contemplation and transitions. This train journey invites viewers to access the anguish facing death as characters disappearing in the dark night, and the lights and sounds that ritualise the passages of these characters.

As in *The Fourth Dimension*, this film also starts with a black screen, and a feeling of loss of reference is produced with the sequence of squares that emerges on the black screen, by traversing the center of the frame from right to left. Each square is like a screen: the first two squares are two identical still images, which appear to be the empty seats of a train. The third square is a still shot of the heads of a man (Storyteller 1) seated in front of a girl (Nabi). The following square is a shot with the boy's head. The positioning of his body

in relation to the window in the back gives the viewer an impression of continuity, as though this sequence of squares were spatially connected. It looks like another still shot, but he makes micro-movements with his head. The following square replicates the same still shot of the first two squares. This repetition might go unnoticed at first, since empty seats may look alike. The process of deterritorialisation here is not related to the images that the cinematographer captures while filming outside the window. Instead, it places viewers outside looking through what appear to be the windows of a train. While *The Fourth Dimension* opens with an image of a train “getting lost” in the fog, hence deterritorialising a sense of location, in *Night Passage* it is the very existence of a train that is put into question, taking the issue of location to another perspective or dimension. Characters move from one square to the next. The sequence goes on for a while, intercalated with still images of the empty train seats. Still images contrast with moving images, in multiple interstices, which emphasise the nature of this journey, which may not appertain to this dimension. There is no commitment to a regime of verisimilitude (for film to be rendered believable), since the nature of this train journey is not material. There is a sense of loss that forces viewers to imagine where they might be so that they can follow the narrative. The loss of reference takes them away from the plot to a personal reading.

In being lost, viewers’ attention is driven to the film’s metalanguage. Cinematic artifices such as the zoom in and the change of scale and squares that move like a roll of celluloid unraveling make us conscious of the film process. According to Angela Prysthon, artifices can be used “to elaborate the real, producing heterotopias, establishing alternative worlds”. (Prysthon 2016, p. 69) In “Furious Frivolities: Artifice, Heterotopias and Strange Temporalities in Contemporary Brazilian Cinema”, Prysthon reflects upon an artificial aestheticism that is based on Baroque anti-naturalist aesthetics where excess and heterotopias are used to create a suspicion regarding familiarity.

Artifices make way for cracks and fissures in the film narrative where the reality of the plot is put into question. According to Prysthon, excessive artifices “destabilize and disarticulate the effects of the real” (Prysthon, 2015, p. 68), thus producing an estrangement in facing the trivial, the imaginarium of an everyday life. As in Brechtian theatre, estrangement (*Verfremdungseffekte*) is a concept that is employed as a means of creating intervals, gaps that make the familiar feel strange, evoking shock, astonishment relating to a lack of awareness of trivial moments of reification (when issues of exploitation and social injustices are disguised or rendered invisible). Walter Benjamin (2003, p. 2), Ernst Bloch (2012, pp. 5-6), Mara PolgovskyEzcurra (2012, p. 1) and Bruna Della Torre de Carvalho Lima (2014, p. 37) amongst other interpreters of Brecht, direct their attention to moments of interruption in epic plays or alternatively in a sequence-frame in film, which can create reality shocks, that potentially produce reflexivity of everyday events that are often overlooked.

Estrangement evokes surprise... and lets the beholder contemplate experience separated, as in a frame, or heightened, as on a pedestal... This leads increasingly away from the usual and makes the beholder pause and take notice... Thus... estrangement already inheres in the kind of spoken inflection that will suddenly make the hearer listen anew. (Bloch 2012, pp. 5-6)

These moments of realisation, however, do not necessarily expose reality, dismissing fantasy or illusion. They only give a material basis for a new understanding, or evoke the questioning of common-places that could possibly unfold into multiple understandings. I am using estrangement not as a mean of clarifying consciousness, but of reflexivity. When Prysthon looks at these gaps in which the cinematic device is revealed, illusion is not out of the picture. For her, “the celebration of the artifice affirms the imagination over reality” (Prysthon, 2015, p. 68). Imagination is not used as a means of escapism, but as a means of establishing creative lines of flight. She sees “a conjunction of heterotopias which

seem to underestimate a vehement protest against contingency, despite never failing to comment on the present and all the things that really matter” (Prysthon, 2015, p. 69) in different film genres, from science fiction to musicals, horror film, and even documentary.

Discontinuous actions taking place simultaneously in the different squares projected on a black screen can be read as multiple screens in a theatre, using the artifice as a destabilising metanarrative of the screens and the theatre being portrayed as a train journey. Whether it is seen as a train or as a film, the sequence of squares ceases and the end of a journey reaches yet another black screen. It draws attention to the black screen, evoking questions such as: Is it the power that went off? Is there a technical problem? Or is it part of the film? The puzzling effect of darkness is what destabilises a sense of location, while it draws attention to the very site of the theatre.

On more than one occasion in *Night Passage*, Trinh abandons spectators in the dark, recreating the theatre experience through fissures that interrupt the sequence shot, such as when the characters enter an engine room. The two main characters, two young girls named Kyra and Nabi embark on an adventure at the already mentioned phantom-like train ride. At one of the stops, they enter a room that belongs to Prof. Woolf, a mysterious professor who studies words in rather peculiar ways, such as hanging them up on a clothes line, exploring their sounds, their genders, etc. We can still listen to Prof. Woolf’s voice mumbling in a delusional way from the end of the last scene but the camera shows the characters walking up the stairs in deep focus. Attention is driven to pipes and chains that stand in front of their bodies in the distance. The professor is no longer visible at this point. They walk along a fence, upon which sunlight reflects. The boy bounces back and forth holding on to the bars in the fence, but he quickly moves in the same direction. A voice echoes loudly, then spectators are left with silence. The three characters climb down the stairs in a surreptitious way into an engine room. It is dark. The screen fades to black, moving on to a shot of Kyra opening a door in the pitch dark in the center of the screen. The absence of lights and

mid-tones around the door creates an illusion that Kyra opens a door in the screen and quickly slams it. We hear an acute sound, possibly of a bird. The characters sit and watch the darkness, as if they are spectators in a theatre. Viewers become aware of the space of the theatre, hence approaching characters and spectators, as if they both shared the same space.

Black screens do more than recreate the theatre space in *Night Passage*. When all the light is taken out, spectators can reflect where the film has taken them so far, digest it, and return to the oxidation parody introduced by the Sculptor, both the film and the spectators can take a deep breath (“oxidation”). While the retina takes a break, we become aware of sound, and of the theatre as a sensory experience. Trinh uses a black screen as a means of isolating the audio and hence freeing the eye also in *Reassemblage* (1982), when she makes the audience gaze onto a black screen in the first minutes of the film. The drumming and ambient noise force spectators to imagine the scene while facing the pitch-black screen and denying them control through sync sound and image. She isolates the audio through completely removing visibility. This technique introduces a pause, a breathing gap. With a “rarified” imagery, the audience experiences film as film, not as an uninterrupted voyage as in conventional Hollywood action-films.

According to Deleuze:

Sometimes... it is necessary to make holes [in the images], to introduce voids and white spaces, to rarify the image, by suppressing many things that have been added to make us believe that we were seeing everything. It is necessary to make a division or make emptiness in order to find the whole again (Deleuze 2013 b, p. 8)

The void, which in this case appears as a black hole, that takes over a full screen, is precisely what allows us to come back to the sequence shot invigorated, perhaps having given it some thought over a dark interval. The black screen creates an impact on how we see the film as a whole. The image is rarified, not experienced as a “false continuity”, as Deleuze puts it (2013 a, p. 27). The film is entirely constituted by cuts which are woven onto

each other making the transition seem natural to the viewers, almost imperceptible. To break this flow of “false continuity” is the main function of intervals in Trinh’s film, yet the black screen takes it to the most radical degree.

2.2 The Heterotopic Path

As discussed in the first chapter, heterotopic spaces are spaces of passage, of transition between places. Foucault defines them “in relation with all other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they appear to designate”. (Foucault 1984, p. 3) That is, they could be anywhere, and yet the identity of the place is contingent, unclear, indiscernible. Heterotopic spaces are tangible physical places (they do not constitute quite a utopia or a non-place), yet their lack of precision defines them through the use made of these spaces, what they connect, what they represent. Their meaning is fluid, heterogeneous, abstract and engenders more than one possibility. The space of Trinh’s film narratives, and the screen, acquire an elastic trait, since she turns windows, transparencies and boxes into screens, and the very space of a theatre is sometimes stretched, extended onto the seats of a train, or through the adding of shadows of silhouettes in the dark that appear occasionally in one scene or another.

The concept of heterotopia may help me to investigate Trinh T. Minh-ha’s use of spaces as grounds or places of transition. For instance, as the camera follows the three characters dancing and wandering crossed by colourful lights, they reach the space of a dinner table, which seems to establish the connection with a home, rather than an empty room. Attention is driven to lights and bodies, until the camera tracks across the room and reveals a different environment. The same room is also the set of a film, where sound mixers and lighting personnel operate their apparatus behind the dinner table. There are multiple spaces condensed in one, making it difficult to define what this space represents, and how

bodies relate to space. Multiple activities and objects contrast in the way that this space is established. The level of openness leaves room for multiple interpretations, but most importantly, it leaves room for more than one interpretation simultaneously, by the same viewer.

In both films, Trinh employs several operations that create a sense of disengagement with space and time. Travelling detaches the predictability of space and time of a linear film narrative with arrivals and departures to draw attention to nomadic lines of flight. In order to understand the nomadic strategies of deterritorialisation of the space configuration, I start by investigating the act of traveling in both films. Traveling is often defined by itineraries. Can a nomadic pathway be defined in terms of an itinerary with to and from? In *The Fourth Dimension* it is possible to identify an itinerary: the narrator travels around Japan aboard a train. The cities are not listed, but they can be easily tracked by people who are familiar with Japan's topography. While the film space is territorially anchored, we come across moments in which the tracks disappear, creating a feeling of indetermination, and a partial suspension of space. Space becomes abstract, hence creating a feeling of loss of a roadmap. The film is about a journey that cuts through multiple layers of time across the mundane rituals of Japan. Time traveling can only be referred to here in a metaphorical sense: the towns and temples where the film take place can be found in travel brochures or booklets. The ruptures with the ambience of the narrative take on a spiritual and a cultural meaning, which I intend to explore further in this chapter. For now we are starting with the nomad's travel plan: where will this journey take place?

The space of a journey in *Night Passage* is more radical than in *The Fourth Dimension*, because it cannot be pinpointed on a map. There is not a moment of realisation, when the journey gives viewers a sense of a territoriality. The site of travelling in *Night Passage* happens within the train and its multiple stops. The train tracks do not disappear. In fact, they are never rendered visible. The very existence of the train is interrogated, once it runs neither by "steam" nor "electricity". It "just runs" (Trinh 2013, p. 30). It becomes

a heterotopic site mainly because it calls for a questioning of the very core of a journey, hence suspending the idea of destination. While an airport, a port or a bus terminal might be the points of either arrivals or departures, the film's space configuration is located neither in the arrival point, nor in the departure, but in the space in-between them. The lack of determination renders the space nomadic. By the same token, the stops of the train are imprecise points of relay, with no precise directions.

In this chapter I move towards interrogating two train rides that cut across these films as a means of reflecting upon physical, mental and film space and time of the journeys. What connects and structures the film narratives in terms of two coherent stories are the trains. The train lines link Tokyo's urban festival with the Buddhist temple in the scene that follows. The abstract places where Kyra and Nabi lose themselves in the dark only make sense once they return to the train. Then we understand that they are train stops, and the course of the film makes sense to the viewers. Before we explore the specific ways in which the trains establish a connection with a regime of verisimilitude, that is, to convey reality, rather than reproduce it, I intend to look at Trinh's strategies of producing heterotopias and exposing the artifices resorting to a metalanguage of cinema that can break the codes of cinematic conventions. These ruptures introduce lines of flight in the film narrative, which can make way for active viewers' interpretations.

I start by questioning the train as a site of heterotopia in both films: their interior spaces, their tracks, the sounds they produce, the importance of a train to think of these analogous versions of road movies, except that none of the characters is driving. Who gets to drive the train? Viewers do not see a machinist making a move in neither film. And yet the trains move in space and in time. The characters are passengers in transition between relay points. What is it that moves them?

The train is one among the first examples of heterotopias mentioned by Foucault: "a train is an extraordinary bundle of relations because it is something through

which one goes, it is also something by means of which one can go from one point to another, and then it is also something that goes by". (Foucault 1984, p. 3) Once it is given a physical space, the train ceases to be utopian, at least insofar as it materially exists in the film. On a second level, this materiality is constantly put into question in the film, as we will see later in this chapter. Yet the train fits Foucault's description of a heterotopia. It is impersonal in the way that windows and seats are distributed, with a uniform repetition of color, shape and disposition between one seat and the next. It is both transitional and an in transit site, which is drawn to a set of relations that are external to it: the relation between departure and destination (in *Night Passage* it remains unclear), the relation between the train stops that create intervals and engender multiple journeys within this journey. The train does not refer to itself, but to these relations. In the core of every relation that it establishes is the idea of a journey. Kyra begins her journey by riding her bicycle from her home to the festival of lights just besides the main road, in long-shot across a dry sandy landscape. She makes her first stop at a small shrine. She closes her eyes, embarks on this spiritual journey (which can be interpreted in different ways) and in the end she opens her eyes, gets on her bicycle and leaves. The film ends before she reaches a destination. This ride could possibly lead to her home, but this is up to spectators to decide. Nevertheless, the journey that matters is what happens in the interval, jumping from one interval to the next, from one heterotopia to the next, placing the emphasis on the transitory aspect of a journey, temporarily suspending space and time, as well as the time of space, and the space of time...

In *Night Passage*, everything about the nature of the train is transitory, including the bodies that inhabit it. For instance, the sound of deep chords at first appears to be disconnected with the train on the move, yet it gives the moving train a certain tempo and rhythm. It can be read as the sound of awkwardness, of entering in an unknown dimension, moving faster and faster, like the heartbeat escalating into a climax moment (which is never reached). Indeed, the rhythm is not organised in a classical orderly fashion so as to

reach a climax; it is just the beginning of a journey. The sounds and images of a train make us think of a train space, yet space is puzzling, between reality and fantasy, between dimensions of journey, between sounds that take us someplace other than images. A panoramic shot of Kyra cycling across what appears to be a desert space is connected to the tempo of a jazzy harmonic extra-diegetic music. As the rhythm escalates, she cycles faster, and the camera follows her, also at a faster pace. The camera angle privileges a view of a stream in a space with absolutely no plaques, no buildings, no interference of human activity other than Kyra riding her bicycle in the distance. As I have explained in the first chapter, desert landscapes are nomadic par excellence, once there are hardly any points of reference, barriers, fences, etc. The lack of determination, as in Deleuze (2013 b) is precisely where Kyra begins her journey, in this musical crossing of a non-striated empty space. Although we see a train in the opening scene, the story starts, not with a train, but with her bicycle, before she embarks on yet another journey, which takes place in another dimension. The train is announced first as a sound, and only on a second moment it appears visually. Trinh makes this moment last for a while, before she moves to a recollection close-up of Kyra's face, as a moment of dwelling on the past, remembrance, and uncertainty of a direction. As Deleuze points out:

In the same place or in space, a woman's body achieves a strange nomadism which makes it cross ages, situations and places (this was Virginia Woolf's secret in literature). The states of the body secrete the slow ceremony which joins together the corresponding attitudes and develop a female gest which overcomes the history of men and the crisis of the world. (Deleuze, 2013 b, p. 202)

The crisis of the world is experienced intimately, at the level of a body in relation to space and in relation to a journey with no planned destination. This journey is announced by a whistle of the train, and the noise of the wagons cruising along the trails. Her slow reaction to the train (image-wise it is completely unrelated) is to turn sideways and walk away from the camera, towards the stream, revealing that there is absolutely no sight of the

train. The film quickly switches to a shot of Kyra sitting on the bench of a wooden altar in the middle of an empty space. The sound of the train whistle refers to a presence-absence, which interacts with the nomadic space due to the breakage in image and sound. The disconnection produces a feeling of estrangement, soliciting the question of the train's very existence. For instance: is this train real? We could think of it as site of utopia, since it is not enacted as a "real train"(plot-wise), but it is rather a virtual train, a materialised figure of thought, a nomadic means to a voyage of the imaginary. Foucault claims that heterotopias serve as "counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted". (Foucault 1984, p. 3) While they can be situated in specific locations, they remain undetermined, as pure points of passage or transitory perception, which refer to yet another place.

In *Night Passage*, departure feels just like a point of relay in a nomadic pathway, making the beginning of the journey less precise than in the train station where we get a glimpse of a train departing at a station briefly after the introduction in *The Fourth Dimension*. As soon as the train departs, Trinh takes a while with a continuous full frame of a woman who seems exhausted after completing a work journey. The speed is rapid, too quick to even grasp landscape. Fugitive colours and light alternate while we watch the woman sleep, through the invasive gaze of a camera. Soon the film switches to a slow shot which contemplates landscape out of the window. The train does not seem the same. The speed of the images shown across the window slows down, allowing room for contemplation. The landscape of the sunset by the sea seen from the window inside the bullet train appertains to a glossary of aesthetics of travelling. It solicits the sensation of train traveling, where the camera assumes the angle of the traveler's eyes gazing out of the window, contemplating the sunset. A voice over comes in asking "where are you now?". The landscape does not help us to answer the question: it could be anywhere. It is nothing but a train passing by a sunset by the sea. The where is not easily identifiable. So she answers her own question: "in a train..." and soon

gives us details about her travels, such as “a second class seat”. Speed is represented by black bars which cross the window, like a structure of a track. It is so fast that it is like a shadow across the landscape view. The bars are what give us a sense of a window frame of a train on the move. The panoramic shot of the sea landscape does not include any other aspect of a window. In fact, it might not even be a window, however plausible is the suggestive sight. Trinh takes us back to the shot of the woman asleep, only this time, the camera closes in, reaching a close-up of her hands. It is as though as the camera touches her (first the distanced gaze of a long shot, then the touching gaze with a close-up). The camera moves subtly as if the tracks become bumpy and chords come in. Her hands are closed fists. They are crossed, as in a defensive position. It draws attention to her fragility, as a woman traveling on her own. Kyra’s crossed arms positioned at the bench of the wooden altar in *Night Passage* also seem defensive, or self-protecting, but it feels more like an introspective attitude of shutting off to the exteriority, the beginning of an inner voyage. While the sight of a woman sleeping in a train may feel like day-dreaming, this woman is not a character in the plot, while Kyra is a character who reaches another dimension as soon as her eyes close.

I argue that the altar-bench structure where Kyra lies down in the midst of the desert is “heterotopic” (Foucault 1984, p. 1), considering its transitoriness, its detachment from any symbols that reveal its nature. Other than the sound of birds, there are no traces that indicate the presence of other living beings. The altar is isolated from any human presence. Kyra is alone, sitting on the bench, on the right side of the frame. There is a bright red light shining on her face, which may seem slightly distracting, since it has no direct connection with the scene. I argue that this is one of the resources that Trinh uses to give us clues about the artificiality of film. There is, however, something uncanny about these dancing lights in *Night Passage*, and particularly about the red light, because a red light is used to represent a scorpion’s fire outside the train’s window as a saturated red light that captures the passengers’ attention in a later scene. It is perceived as uncanny due to its unnatural, artificial

trait. It is only through the storytellers' speech that we understand that it is a scorpion's fire. A medium shot depicts Kyra, as she holds on to the altar and cries. At last, she seems safe there, in contrast with the previous scenes, in which she shows clear signs of anguish in her facial expressions. She lies down on the bench and covers her face. The screen fades to black, as if her eyes were closing. From the nomadic landscape, Trinh proceeds to a heterotopic bench of the small altar, as the screen goes completely dark, just briefly before the second journey begins. Space is deterritorialised through twists in perception of spatiality, revealing not only a sense of disengagement with space on a scenic level but taking it to a metanarrative of space: the film shown as film. If a nomadic track is the one that shifts from a linear path of a train journey, what happens when the journey escapes the aesthetics of travelling and takes on a rather abstract path, that is, a journey of thought?

2.3 The Filmic Tracks of a Nomad: Heterotopias as Sites of Imaginary Voyages in *Night Passage*

The abstract space in which Deleuze and Guattari situate the nomad is also the space of thought. It is the space for a thought that disregards dividing lines that produce fixed identities, isolating factors and designating them in terms of fixed categories, represented by crystalized images or stereotypes. "Thought is like the Vampire, it has no image, either to constitute a model of or to copy. In the smooth space (...) the arrow does not go from one point to another, but it is taken up at any point, to be sent to another point, and tends to permute with the archer and the target." (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, p. 45) If we substitute film for thought, we could trace this nomadic pathway to the level of the film as film, that is, a film that draws blood from its very specimen, like a strange cannibalism from an apparatus that is fed from its own flesh. The apparatus invades the screen, rendering visible a film that thinks itself on screen. The metanarratives in *Night Passage* can portray the screen as a no-

madic smooth space, that is, a voyage where the film process projected onto the screen requires no tracks for a journey to take place.

The most radical way in which a screen becomes a heterotopia which conjures physical space with film space is in the scene at Uncle Borges' House of Immortality, where multiple screens invade the screen space. After the image of two dancers freezes, as soon as we hear a strong beat of a drum, the image dissolves into a white luminous screen. Kyra's shadow is projected onto the center of the screen. Nabi comes in from the right side of the frame and they meet in the middle. As soon as the girls enter this pitch-black room, their bodies emerge like black silhouettes in contrast with a white screen. They look around the room and seem disturbed about the intensity of the light. Kyra states that she has the sensation that they are being watched on a screen. Nabi agrees with her, alluding to eyes that look at them without being looked at. She shivers, as a reaction to this uncanny presence which places film viewers in the position of stalkers, of invisible eyes that spy on them.

What is the role of metanarrative in this film? How does this exposure of the apparatus produce nomadic lines of flight regarding meaning production? The answer to this question takes us back to a coding system that creates verisimilitude. Roland Barthes refers to molecules of this coding system as the immediate sign, "the mainspring of the spectacle" (Barthes 1972, p. 26), which is taken for "what is signified", cast away from its ambiguity, just like the fringe of Roman soldiers which is not a historically rooted trait, but it conventionally connotes that they are Roman soldiers (Ibid.). "It presents itself at once as intentional and irrepressible, artificial and natural, manufactured and discovered" (Ibid., p. 27). They could either be "reduced to an algebra, like a Chinese theatre, where a flag on its own signifies a regiment", or, just as in Trinh's cinema, it could be "deeply rooted, invented, so to speak, on each occasion, revealing an internal , a hidden facet, and an indicative of a moment in time..." (Barthes 1972, p. 28) Trinh's use of metalanguage poses a breakage with the film coding, revealing the hidden process of film production, reinventing the pathway with a lan-

guage that uses film in film and as such. Meaning is therefore not conveyed, but constantly questioned by the revelation of the film's very mechanisms. *Night Passage* uses "a critical metalanguage of technique" (Comolli 1985, pp. 431-432), in which, according to Jean-Louis Comolli, "the status of meaning is modified by the work in the signifier". He draws on Julia Kristeva's idea of the "cine-signifier" (Kristeva 1969, p. 424) to explain:

It... sets signifying processes in action on the "other scene of significance" – that of the production of meaning (as opposed to representation of A Meaning); and as work, it represents a break with "the ideology of signification" insofar as that "censors the problematic of work"... It can give rise to an other cinema object, one which would not always be assigned the same sole – ideological – function (expressing, representing, specularizing, spectacularizing, changelessly distracting, tirelessly reconducting). (Comolli 1985, p. 424)

In exposing the screen, the dark room and the apparatus, amongst other devices and technicians that work behind the camera, these passages become metacritical, self-reflexive, like interruptions in the film journey that remind film viewers that this a film, keeping them from being fully absorbed by the diegesis. The screen behind Kyra and then Nabi as well is a film screen in a theater. The direct representation of the space of a film theatre is actualised by the whispering conversation between Kyra and Nabi. The idea of a screen in a dark room, where the audience looks, but cannot be looked at, is inverted from the perspective of who is on the screen when we see Kyra and Nabi's silhouettes, like two bodies in front of a screen (not projected onto a screen). They also whisper to each other, which is the manner in which people communicate in a theatre so that their voices become less distracting for other remaining viewers. The screen space and the theatre space exceed one another, bringing bodies that appertain to the screen into the theatre, leaving the screen empty, or rather, just filled with light. Kyra and Nabi's lines accuse spectators of *voyeurism*, in a sudden

realisation of their foreign presences and their creepy gazes. According to Nabi's line, our presence is felt rather than seen or heard. Her bodily response is to shiver, as though the spectator's gaze make her feel uncomfortable.

Both girls walk into this dark room and the heterotopia unfolds in multiple screens, which are shaped like small wooden squares with light inside. They are disposed like a museum installation on a table structure: objects are on display arranged like toys or science fair inventions, inviting people to touch and explore them. The tridimensionality of these screens that can be touched puts into display multiple layers of a screen, suggesting possibilities and yet again, no images are projected onto the screens. On the other hand, they have a sound. Each girl picks up one box: they are black squares perhaps made of wood, like giant black dices with no dots, that produce the sound of whispering voices speaking at the same time. These squares are like miniature theatres seen from the perspective of inside the screen, playing with the scale between bodies projected on a film screen and the bodies of spectators, which are indeed smaller. It is as though as all spectators decide to whisper at each other at the same time from those squares. Kyra plays with one of the boxes and asks Nabi if she is also under the impression that there is an eye gazing at them from these boxes.

Again, she alludes to the spectator's gaze. This time it comes from inside these squares. The same situation doubles, yet from a different perspective. Except the characters do not whisper. Spectators whisper instead. This nomadic twist in perspective and sound solicits the audience to displace their own perspectives and imagine what is inside the boxes. The camera does not explore what is inside them. It quickly shifts to a mid-shot of the girls who observe the boxes with enthusiasm. A black box with light and sounds inside re-creates a film theatre.

Trinh resorts to a critical excess of film references to impede viewers from experiencing the journey as something disconnected to the event of film viewing. An apparently diegetic white noise resonates, as a reminder of sound signals and frequency in

film, while a square-shaped light floats across the room. The square eventually multiplies, and many squares move from the right to left of the screen at a fast pace. The image is swiped by another square, and the scene goes on. These screens only reflect pure light, and no images are projected onto them. They are virtual projections of light that wander across screen space. The repetition of the square produces a pattern that is detached from space, free-flowing across a long shot of the room. Uncle Borges is placed at the center of the shot, as he lectures about robots to Kyra and Nabi. Trinh uses excess, employing multiple devices simultaneously to exhaust the possibilities of reproducing a screen space.

The images projected on Uncle Borges's screen displace attention from explicit suggestions of film as film towards a rather indirect representation of film, materialised in the figure of automatons. The idea remains, but with a nomadic twist. Automatons are figurations of the encounter between men and machines, the machine becoming human, the human replication of life except as machines. Drawing on Deleuze, Réda Bensmaïa claims that a "spiritual automaton" is "one of the finest examples of a philosophic-conceptual persona that film theory has ever invented to account for its object" (Bensmaïa 2005, p. 144). The several automata shown on slides projected onto a screen by Uncle Borges and his assistant pose a question of film, thinking of film as an embodied form of technology. According to Deleuze:

Spiritual automaton means first of all that an idea, being a mode of thought, has its (efficient and formal) cause nowhere but in the attribute of Thought. Equally, any object whatever has its efficient and formal cause only in the attribute of which it is a mode and whose concept it involves. (Deleuze 1990, p. 115)

Regardless of how abstract this concept may seem, Bensmaïa sees this as a radical way of thinking cinema: "the spiritual automaton acts as a transformer of the regime of concepts and images in film... From the moment of its confrontation with the disjunctive logic of work in cinema..." (Bensmaïa 2005, p. 147)

The apparent post-humanity of a robot is raised in the film in a rather peculiar way: all the automatons in the slides smoke cigars. The displacement of the prop, which appears in the professor's hand, can be read as a reference to Mr. Maelzel's chess player (Poe 2018, p. 175) in a tale by Edgar Allan Poe which goes hand in hand with Trinh's use of metanarrative in this film. Poe's tale is based on a newspaper article about a hoax of an automaton that plays chess and smokes a pipe. The pipe gives it a human trait, a bad habit, possibly a prop to make it seem imperfect, like humans. On the other hand, the automaton was believed to be a "pure machine, unconnected with human agency in its movement". (Ibid.) The display of the mechanisms of the automaton's engines left the mystery unsolved, since apparently there was nothing that provided a logical explanation as to how the automaton made its move. Poe's speculations lead to the discovery of a dwarf manipulating the automaton's arm in order to move the pieces on the chess board. The illusion of a machine which is intelligent enough to play a complex strategy game makes a significant impression on the 18th century spectators, to whom the dwarf's existence remains unknown. The dwarf is small enough to hide behind apparently heavy machinery, which serves to him as a disguise. While the apparatus is on display, the human behind the machine lies beneath it. In "On the Concept of History", Walter Benjamin refers to this dwarf as a figuration of "historical materialism" (Benjamin 2003b, p. 389), which is bound for a check-mate in every match:

There was once, we know, an automaton constructed in such a way that it could respond to every move by a chess player by a countermove that would ensure the winning of the game. A puppet wearing Turkish attire and with a hookah and its mouth set before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent on all sides. Actually, a hunchbacked dwarf - a master of chess - sat inside and guided the puppet's hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophic counterpart to this apparatus. The puppet, called historical materialism, is to win all the time. It can easily be match for any-

one if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is small and ugly, and has to keep out of sight. (Ibid, p. 389)

Benjamin understands that the dwarf is for the automaton chess player what historical materialism is for Capitalism: the secret labor that our eyes cannot catch. It is but an illusion, a reified “magic trick”. The illusions of a cinematic apparatus are constantly revealed in *Night Passage*. The secret forces and machinery are placed at the centre of the pro-filmic space. The nomadic twist of Trinh’s use of metalanguage is this rupture with a film convention that refuses to show how a film is made. She insists on showing film as a labour process, involving technology. It is as though Mr. Maelzel was to reveal the hidden dwarf at the box beneath the chess board. The automata’s appearance in the slides informs viewers of what Deleuze warns us: “You can’t escape the shock which arouses the thinker in you. A subjective and collective automaton for an automatic movement: the art of the masses”. (Deleuze 2013 b, pp. 156-157) Deleuze refers to the experience of a shock from the already mentioned Brechtian interruptions, the invocation of estrangement, the fissures in the narrative that make way for viewers’ reflexivity. The automata take the experience of shock to a different level, especially when the automata are not an interruption of the plot, but figures that appear within the plot as a part of Uncle Borges’ lecture. They acquire a rather radical metacritical meaning when they are projected on a screen.

The camera follows the two girls as they walk across the room behind white screens. The camera focuses on the haptic quality of texture of one of the screens with a close-up. From the close-up of the screen, Trinh frames a shot of the silhouette of the girls’ heads as they cross the screen once again, in a repetition of the same gesture. Repetition works as a means of making viewers rethink their first passage by the white lit up screen after the screen has undergone multiple processes of deterritorialisation. The multiplicity of screens that give layers to this room since Kyra and Nabi’s silhouettes are projected on a screen, the fluctuating screens across the room, the small black boxes and all the hints that suggest the

screen space are given a body that stands for the entire film apparatus.

The screen is deterritorialised in several nomadic lines of flight: not only it does become a film subject, but it is taken to multiplicity, it replicates and is constantly recreated to draw attention to what is placed in front of viewers: the screen as the site of film viewing. In these metacritical events, the encounter between the “actual and the virtual” (Deleuze 2013 b, p. 69) is condensed into one image, like a crystal which condenses several images, disposed like mirrors with direct figurations of the screen time, the time that unravels at the present of film viewing which is actualised in the constant passing of the screens across the room. The screen time is taken into evidence. In reverse of the screen that multiplies its unit, we could think of a screen that splits into multiple particles. According to Deleuze:

Time consists of this split, and it is this, it is time, that we *see in the crystal*. The crystal-image was not time, but we see time in the crystal. We see in the crystal the perpetual foundation of time, non-chronological time, Cronos and not Chronos...The crystal constantly exchanges the two distinct images which constitute it, the actual image of the present which passes and the virtual image of the past which is preserved: distinct and yet indiscernible, and all the more indiscernible because distinct, because we do not know which is one and which is the other. This is unequal exchange, or the point of indiscernibility, the mutual image. The crystal always lives at the limit, it is itself the “*vanishing limit*” between the immediate past which is already no longer and the immediate future which is not yet. (Deleuze 2013 b, p. 81)

He goes on to explain the moment in which the crystalised image stretches into multiple replications to the point of indiscernibility:

What we see in the crystal is therefore a dividing in two that the crystal itself constantly causes to turn on itself, that it prevents from reaching completion, because

it is a perpetual *self-distinguishing*, a distinction in the process of being produced; which always resumes the distinct terms in itself, in order constantly to relaunch them.(Ibid., pp. 81-82)

The virtuality of the endless splitting of the screen in *Night Passage* creates a diversion from the girls' adventure, taking the time of the narrative to the actual time of the film. The lack of a centre of determination makes the scene quite difficult to follow without creating a suspicion about the screen where the film unravels. The abyss is a fissure in the narrative, that does not cease to unravel, only it is condensed with images of screens that could potentially tell us yet other stories, which are yet to come, not quite there. The vacuum that is produced by the abyss is reaching a screen that is pure light. There is no message, no story, no utterance, just the potentiality. Drawing on Deleuze, Thomas Carl Wall shows how these crystal images of time suspend utterance:

The time-image presents that which language will get hold of and form into linguistic units, but the utterable itself is the thing itself of language and as such it refuses to be spoken just as the 'it' in 'it's raining' is not rain. (There is no actual 'it' that causes, produces, induces, or gives the rain. It is raining nonetheless. Cinema 2 approaches the 'it'. (Wall 2004)

The floating screens have no anchorage while the center of the scene is taken elsewhere, shifting between the girls' discoveries, Uncle Borges' lecture and the screens taking over the whole pro-filmic space.

The film then cuts to a shot of the characters arriving at a dark room with small dots of white light on the ceiling, like stars in the night. The two characters move around space with no clear direction, like molecules. As the camera tracks to the right, we see a blue intense light while a man adjusts the sound system. Another man who wears a silver coat, with a silver stripe painted over his eyes, stands in front of small televisions or devices.

The film apparatus becomes part of the pro-filmic space, meaning, the film equipment and technicians are placed in front of the camera. The camera then moves onto a long shot of a man who adjusts the lights, like a revelation that this is the result of the light projector. The mystery of film is exposed: a meta-discourse presents it as a work in progress and its means of production, that is, the apparatus.

Trinh's metalanguage plays with roles in the film. The camera tracks across a dark room until it reaches the sight of Nabi's shadow behind a white screen holding a camera. Both characters and crew members intermingle, making it hard to follow the thread of the plot. In this reflexive scene, many questions may be asked about roles in the film production process. The crew members and the apparatus are at work, hyper-visibly placed at the core of the narrative. Dr. Kennedy's costume resembles that of a super-hero drawn from comics perhaps, and yet his super power is articulated through a film apparatus. Just like the automaton, the technical staff are given bodies, only this time they are human bodies making it a direct representation of the film labourers. The technical crew are shown in the film, therefore breaking the pattern of not exposing the film process and personnel, but they use costumes and make up. They become characters in the film, blurring the boundary between fact and fiction, the plot and the film as a process. The metallic suits and the make-up strips across their eyes suggest a costume of superheroes, possibly space travellers. But they do not operate a spaceship. Instead, they operate their designated functions in the technical crew.

Nomadism is a language created through these shifts of roles and pattern breaks that produce fissures in the way the film is experienced. When the technical crew is given material and diegetic matter, the filmmaking process is taken to another level, that of a metanarrative of film representing itself, creating a distance between viewers and the film narrative. It forces viewers to remain aware that this is a film, produced by this crew, and these artifices. Awareness to the reality of film interrupts the film experience.

Although this scene is mostly visual, the sound space is also con-

nected with the heterotopia of a screen in *Night Passage*. While white noise suggests that there is a sound apparatus at work throughout the scene mentioned above, and the whispers coming from the luminous boxes personifies the theatre, sound is taken more radically to the level of space (or space filler) in the scene in the water room. The white noise is apparently diegetic, connected to a television screen over bricks, angled on the left upper edge of the room from the perspective of the camera, captured by an establishing shot. The television screen is on, and the room is filled with water, with square-shaped stones across it. An extra-diegetic and disharmonic sound of piano and flute follow the girls as they jump from one stone to another. A time image is built by sound sensations rather than imagery. Dissonance divides and replicates with disconnected tunes, creating nomadic twists, ruptures with the film tempo through notes that never allow spectators to follow the thread in a harmonic way. This experimental noise interacts with space and bodies in the scene: bodies are rendered musical, as Kyra takes off her sweater and starts kicking the water with her feet in the same tempo as the notes. Each kick is synchronic with a noise, creating an illusion that sound spreads with the splashes, taking over the room. Nabi walks along the rocks, while Kyra dances across the room with her feet on the water. Strings and violin come in, along with percussion all at once, making dissonant noises. The space is filled by sound, which intensifies and accelerates. Nomadism is painted using sound as a brush, not as a means of pictorial representation, but on the contrary, as a break with the realm of signs, or at least an opening gap that impedes the image from being fully formed. Attention is shifted to the actors' performance, but not as much to the action as to how sound connects to moving bodies in space.

The screen in this scene connects with the previous one, but the screen is only relevant insofar as it connects with sound. White noise is mostly audible in the beginning and again towards the end of the scene, calling attention to technology. A visual aid is provided as the water is so limpid that it reflects light onto it, like another screen that moves with the intensity splashes. The bodies of the two characters play the role of intensities which

vibrate with the strings, and piano notes. The water that is splashed around the room is like a liquid echo of these intensities. It is mostly rendered visible through the reflection of light, being a flash that derives from sound vibrations. The breakage with the signs takes place as the sound renders meanings indiscernible. Just as sounds, lights are intensities, but they remain sensations. Spectators experience loss while meaning is dissolve into pure sound and optical sensations. To put it in Trinh's words:

For a sign to unsettle itself and to break loose from its fixed representations, duration is made audible, space between syllables is spelled out, and time, deferred. Delete, replace, return, then let be. The r in nature is the gray zone between sound and sense. To leave both the n and the r in, therefore, is not to revert to nature in its 'original', non-dismembered state, but rather, to listen again carefully, critically, ecstatically, to its musical intervals. (Trinh 2011, p. 59)

These musical intervals are not speech, nor silence, but noise in a way that is hard to grasp. It's rhythm, musical and yet not music. This scene articulates a rupture with utterance through interruption in the flow of sound by the same token as the previously mentioned scene has done with images of screens. Except in this scene, the shock is produced foremost by sound. The boundary is crossed by these sudden shifts. To put it in Trinh's words: "The fragile moment when in the shift to a lower note, sound becomes sight and word fades to breath". (Ibid., p. 60) The nomadic path here is assembled by these interruptive sound curves that refuse to form a harmonic musical piece.

This scene solicits the spectator to let him or herself go with the flow and suspend utterance, since it is an abstraction, and again a sensuous experiment. The water on the floor gives space a more profound dimension. No matter how shallow it is, it blurs the room's square shape. The camera, placed in a bird's eye view angle, allows for a full perception of space, and the simultaneous movements of the characters, although the visual pleasure is drawn to the splashes, rather than bodies. It is never clear what the water room represents in

Night Passage. I choose to read it rather as a performance in a sonic installation, a heterotopic interval.

The self-reflexive qualities of film as film can be thought of as what Hollis Frampton refers as fictions that “remain events in themselves”. (Frampton, 2014, p. 79) These events are powerful assets of dismantling “naïve intuitions of causality by deliberately ignoring mere temporal chronology” (Ibid.) while putting the idea of truth of history into suspicion. Avant-garde filmmakers turn to this suspicious gaze that looks back at film as a process to capture what Frampton describes as the “exact instant at which tables turned, and cinema passed into obsolescence and thereby into art”. (Ibid.) This endoscopic switch that film set forth potentially drives film to infinity. *Night Passage* stretches this inner gaze to a constellation by the proliferation of devices that are key to making films. It goes hand in hand with Frampton’s idea of an “infinite film” which he describes as: “The infinite film contains an infinity of endless passages wherein no frame resembles any other in the slightest degree, and a further infinity of passages wherein successive frames are as nearly identical as intelligence can make them.” (Frampton 2014, p. 84) The night where the film takes place conjures incommensurable passages that constitute an everlasting chain of events where film is constantly questioning itself, but however numerous these events become, their sum always amounts to one single event: the film event, where the actual and the virtual meet. This journey walks spectators through multiple layers of film so as to interrogate film in the core of the journey.

Akira Mizuta Lippit speaks of these boundary crossing events, or passages that allow us to think of a journey in this film from an outside within film. He indicates:

This vanishing limit, of a time that begins in the instant of its end, born at the instant of death, and signed always by an engraver that addresses itself elsewhere, returning from the outside to itself, operates according to a logic and work of the outside: because the exergue is not only outside the work, but also a work of the

outside. It works the outside as an instant vanishing limit. The exergue is also thinking and excavation of the outside. It gives shape to the outside, signs and dates an outside made visible from the work, but which also makes the work visible. (Lippit 2012, p. 3)

Not only is the work of film rendered visible, but it dares to look at spectators from an exteriority within the film. The distance creates a hiatus within the film through the use of a metalanguage that displaces the apparatus to the frame's interior. The question Lippit poses goes hand in hand with the idea of passage, or nomadic border crossings: "What if the medium was thought here, as the word also suggests, as a passage rather than a fixed body, as a movement rather than a form, as the possibility of contact with another medium?" (Lippit 2012, p. 5) What Lippit designates as exergue cinema (or ex-cinema) implies the haunted act of cinema looking back at film viewers, a cinema inhabited by a spirit that returns the gaze to the viewers in the theatre.

A cinema from a cinema, ex-cinema that form in the space of an exergue, second cinema and medium double, which generates its own grammatology pieced together from the languages of cinema, from its spaces and times and images, often quoting cinema in excerpt and extensive revision. A cinema that describes cinema within the frame of cinema, along its borders... (Lippit 2012, p. 6)

It is important to notice that a film that distances itself from its purpose in order to interrogate film as a process is not the film process in itself. The grammatology that results from this ex-cinema is mediated and therefore modified by the apparatus. The film is not accidentally placed within the frame, moved by spontaneity. Instead, it is a decision of *mise-en-scène* to create this metalanguage of film. Nevertheless, this exteriority, however conditioned by the very film process, encounters spectators sitting in a dark room. Since the metalanguage creates fissures in the narrative which are filled by an exterior look at film-

making and film viewing, the space for interpretations remain open. If filmmaking is a collective process, film viewing is experienced in singularity, of multiple filters of interpretation that meet at the heterotopic space of a theatre.

The theatre is the final heterotopia. The use of heterotopias is what makes the notion of space and location rather abstract, imprecise, drawing attention from the invisible tracks of a train that is not run by fuel or electricity to these visual metaphors of film as the common thread that links these heterotopic spaces. They are empty spaces, with not a specific designation that informs viewers as to where they are. Emptiness is filled mostly by shadows, lights and sounds, which inhabit the place without giving us any clues of space. They make viewers let go of the anxiety for territorialising the image: it does not matter where they are. It invites viewers to go along with the time images and lose track of space altogether. The movie screen is a heterotopia, since it is the very track in which space is put into suspension, that is to say, it is a virtual space seen in relation to the viewer's gaze. In a single movie theatre, it is possible to travel to many places. Multiplicity derives from the rectangular structure of a screen. In that room with several rows of chairs positioned at different levels to view the screen, multiple universes unravel.

2.4 Heterotopias of Time: “Time Traveling” in *The Fourth Dimension*

Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time - which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time.(Foucault 1984, p. 6)

Specific heterotopias which connect to speed, light, and technology belong in the same semantic corridor as a machine time, linked to a modern representation of Japan. Rituals of a technological Japan contrast with another mode of tradition: that of the parade, the festivities. Japan's traditional rituals recreate an idea of an everlasting time which repeats year by year... There is yet another layer of time, which is not allusive of a tradition nor of a modern present: that of contemplation, or stillness and a slower pace that is characteristic of rural Japan. The time of a temple is situated outside time, as void, the interval, a space for silent introspection in search for emptiness. I want to unfold these layers of time using Bakhtin's idea of chronotope to designate the specific symbols that represent time in a film narrative (Bakhtin 1981, p. 84), or to put it on his words: "We will give the name chronotope (literally, 'time space') to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed." (Bakhtin 1981, p. 84) Heterotopias of time, or heterochronies in Foucault involve "an absolute break with traditional time" (Foucault 1984, p. 6)

In *The Fourth Dimension*, the train knits together several heterotopias of time, which put both time and space into suspicion. The sole fact that a bullet train is the site chosen to travel across many traditional festivities and temples of Japan departing from Tokyo creates a hiatus between the high-tech hectic metropolis and the serenity of Buddhist temples, of many different Japans. Tradition is the glue that brings all these Japans together, and it starts in Tokyo, with the scene of Japan's national parade in Tokyo. The dramatic contrast between the journey's starting point and its multiple layers of Japan produce a sensation of travelling between several traditional Japans that coexist in the present. The journey across Japan grapples with different speeds, rhythms, cultures and aesthetics. The train that travels in between these spaces makes them transitory, in flows in between them, without naming them, without informing much of where and what we see on screen. The lack of references solicits from viewers to experience the rituals as timeless, places outside the map. Indeed, it drives people to accept the fact they might not know where and when exactly this takes place.

I suspect that this is not a documentary about Japan, although it travels between many Japans. It seems more about time than place, or perhaps layers of time spread across space. In this section, I intend to dive into the heterotopias of time in order to investigate to what extent this train travel disrupts the idea of time-space in this film narrative. In interrogating time through the use of heterotopias, of places outside clearly stated places and time, I am hoping to extend the idea of nomadic pathway to yet another dimension: time travelling.

There is one city which is named: Tokyo. The city could easily be recognised by viewers, regardless if they have been there or not. Indeed, it is rather a common place in the cosmopolitan's imaginary. The images of the parade start by an establishing shot with an overview of the festivity, and yet the camera drifts fugitively toward the city lights and its reflection on the river. The sound of drums remains audible while the camera dollies away from the parade only to give a quick glimpse of the calligraphy of neon signs across the city's topography.

These images of Tokyo by night, invaded by the excess of neon and red lights that make everything about that city centre seem high-tech are assembled with the sound of ritualistic drums, which can be read as two contrasting chronotopes of time (times being future and past). Technology (standing for future) and Japan's millennial tradition (as past) are condensed in one scene, making the parade almost seem like a rave with young people dancing in a massive crowd. The camera moves quickly, while the voice over with Trinh's voice speaks about the speed of light. From the external night shot, we get an internal day shot of a train station and the film quickly moves on to an internal shot of the bullet train. The idea of high technology is once again celebrated by the hyper-modern trope of a bullet train, that is, high speed travelling. Spectators do not actually see the train in motion, but imagine it, while looking at the window behind the woman who sleeps on the train. The lack of precision in the view and the moving light across the window behind the sleeping woman is allusive of high-speed, cutting-edge technology which ritualises a cosmopolitan urban Japan.

In the introduction, just after the credits, the screen shrinks to the scale of a small square drifting on a black background. On the mobile screen, it is possible to contemplate the lights on the side of the bullet train in the fog. The artifice of a screen is rendered explicit, in a heterotopia that pays attention to the process of montage playing with scale for a while, stretching the square to a vertical rectangle, then moving it about the black screen and placing it in the center of the screen just a bit wider than a screen in a movie theatre. It soon gets wider, taking over the screen. This playfulness with geometric procedures of editing clearly states that this time is also a film time, an artificial time fabricated in the rituals of post-production. Trinh moves on to a low-angle shot spying through the glass of a gym, where it is possible to see the heads of people taking a spinning class. Speed goes hand in hand with modernity. The gym is heterotopic insofar as it could take place anywhere in the world. It involves the same pattern. It is a temple that celebrates the shape-building of a modern body. The same applies to the previous image of the train light in the fog. It is not Japan that Trinh wants to show us, which is not visible across the window. Instead, what is at stake is speed. The spinning class that ritualises the act of pedalling as fast as possible at a machine-bicycle is contrasted with the sudden transition to a close up of the head of woman wearing a yellow traditional vest with a yellow flower on her head. The chronotopes of a machine time shifts to the chronotopes of a traditional parade time, symbolised by the costume, the festivity vest. The quick shift from the gym class with the city lights to the face of a woman in the parade presents a twist in the chronotopes which assemble the representation of modern and ancient rites, technology as opposed to a millenary tradition, and yet they coexist in the same urban space, in the same contemporariness. This twist is not created by the *mise-en-scène*: these layers of time inhabit Japan. Nevertheless, this clear-cut transition from a long shot of the gym directly to a close-up of the geisha brings awareness of the collision between Japans.

The festivals (not just in the scene in Tokyo) introduce a specific heterotopia of time associated with what Foucault describes as “time in its most flowing, transito-

ry... time in the mode of the festival” (Foucault 1984, p. 7) The festival happens in the present tense, and yet it evokes some continuity of a time that is no longer the present: the everlasting repetition of a previous time, like a nostalgia which constantly updates itself. The transitory aspect of the festival is that of a brief moment where this past is solicited, like a simulacrum of a past event, not quite the same, and yet repeating the traditional costumes, the props.

Let us take another scene of the parade: from an overhead shot of the carp swimming in a pond, a typical Japanese fish, the film cuts to a shot of the heads of men cross-dressed as women, with wigs and make-up. It dollies a little to the side to show them off, and soon it tilts down to reveal a man’s hula skirt, which is typical of Hawaii rather than Japan. One of the wigs is of a Rastafari, which is an important tradition from Jamaica. But the aesthetic concept which is simply to cross-dress does not require a traditional code. The repetition of tradition is rendered flexible. This pastiche of images of men wearing improvised women’s costumes with traditions that are not quite their own is the twist where tradition reinvents itself, adapts to what is available in their wardrobe. A layer of an elsewhere is introduced. The hula skirt is made of plastic, not quite the traditional leaves, as a contemporary elaboration of a time that is not present, of an elsewhere that is present at a local festival. One of the wigs is a metallic colourful mullet wig, which makes the actor look more like David Bowie than a geisha. The chronotopes get more and more complex, hard to pinpoint when exactly the action takes place. On the other hand, tradition accumulates layers of different times and places. They are all incorporated in the present of the festival.

In a point of view shot, the camera moves like an extension of the neck. This perspective-eye observes faces then looks away at a full frame of the whole picture, like an eye-witness who contemplates, a tourist, perhaps. It does not interact with the people in the frame. The film gains distance, moving to a full frame of all of the cross-dressers posing for a picture and quickly moves to a medium shot of the geishas walking by.

It takes us back to a Japanese tradition, symbolised by the geishas, but by displacing the speed of the parade, it calls attention to the editing artifice: with technology in evidence, the traditional festival feels anachronic, blurring once again the sensation of time: speed gives it another duration.

The sudden transition from a series of close-ups of little girls dressed up as geishas to a Dutch angle of a camera tilting towards the train's wires creates a hiatus from the delicate camera approach that produces a sensation of an eye that touches the girl's cheeks to the roughness of wires. The camera assumes the perspective of the travelling train while holding on to the image looking up at the wires. It moves fast, like a bullet train travelling at full speed. The subtle shift between the girl in the parade and the train's wires also brings awareness to the instant in a nomadic pathway: one moment you are in a parade, and next instant you are back in the train in motion, leaving that pleasurable softness behind. From the wires, it moves to a travelling shot of the locomotive departing from a train station. As soon as we lose sight of the train, the camera pulls back as if it were in the back of a train departing in the opposite direction from the previous one. The shift in direction produces a sense of a freer ride, with no set direction, breaking with the expectation of a linear pathway. This opening up to other directions put the train's multiple wires into suspicion. The camera's emphasis on wires is not just a chronotope of technology and speed, but also a means to interrogate directions and itineraries. It breaks with a linear expectation of an arrival. The path is no longer that of a straight line to and fro, but rather a wide gamut of possibilities of directions.

As the camera pulls back, the image is a full frame of the train tracks, wires and structures. In showing the engines and wires of the train, Trinh reveals a certain mechanics of traveling, which she does with the camera apparatus. It holds this full frame while red transparent filters swipe the image horizontally from the margins to the center, leaving the frame with a pinkish tone and a cottony exposure. An orange filter wipes from the

center of the screen to the right. Colours merge, taking attention away from the tracks towards colour filters. Another trick of the editing table is revealed, while the track is relegated to a second level, it becomes blurry, out of focus. The image is still visible, and yet the discrete loss in sight renders it slightly abstract. The tracks of the train turn into this cottony canvas background while Trinh's voice off speaks of itineraries, lines that go through processes of "metamorphosis", "repetitions", "improvisations". She speaks of the relation between humans and trains, claiming that engines are manipulated by humans, and not vice-versa, and hence humans can change the itinerary if they wish to.

While Trinh explains her understanding of the train system in Japan, the words "Train time / Machine time" fluctuate on the screen, accompanied by the sound of deep chords. This play with editing artifices emphasise the presence of yet another machine besides the train: the materiality of film, the role of editing this film voyage. A machine time is at the core of Hollis Frampton's reflection on the time which culminated and ended in the invention of cinema (Frampton 2014, p. 82). He explains:

A machine was a thing made up of distinguishable 'parts', organized in imitation of some function of the human body. Machines were said to 'work'. How a machine 'worked' was readily apparent to an adept, from inspection of the shape of its 'parts'. The physical principles by which machines 'worked' were intuitively verifiable... We believed it would go on forever, but when I was a little boy, the Age of the Machines ended... Cinema is the Last Machine.(Ibid., pp. 82-83)

It is arguable whether a machine time ends with cinema, as we constantly see innovations within film, in communication (such as the internet, for instance), amongst other fields where technology keeps inflecting space and the perception of time. In *TheFourth Dimension* a machine time is taken through and past cinema to the level of a bullet train. Through this device the human body moves rapidly across Japan's topography travelling at high speed.

Trinh's play with the direction of the train is a way of showing the *mise-en-scène* using her human hand to modify the itineraries according to her desires. The machine works for humans, not the other way around. The infinity of the lines of which she speaks are shown in the train crossing, where a man on a bicycle and a few cars cross the tracks in both directions, multiplying directions to spaces that overflow the space of the railway. She uses multiple means of travelling, including film (such as in *Night Passage*) to show these "metamorphoses of the lines". I understand these train tracks as a 'line of flight', which according to Deleuze and Guattari's definition in the first chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus* are abstract lines which produce a process of deterritorialisation that "can change in nature and connect with multiplicities" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 9-10). This abstract line takes us from the actual to the virtual, from the realm of materiality and direct representation to the abstract pathway of imagination and thought, which can go in multiple and mutable directions.

In the film, once directions become malleable to the human hand, at our own service, it suggests that it is possible to decide one's own itinerary, switching directions as one wishes. In both operations – switching directions of the train and filming the bicycle and cars at the train-crossing - attention is driven to the multiplicity of the track as the transitory film pathway, with flexible directionality. In *TheFourth Dimension* the machine time is not linear, it unfolds in multiplicity. The open-ended nature of time in this film through the use of heterotopic abstractions and the emphasis on technologic rituals of time puzzles the perception of the film's chronotropes, especially when contrasting them to the stillness of a spiritual time. Over the following section, I look at the representation of a time that ceases the frenetic rhythm of a machine time.

2.5 Relay points and Introspective Spaces in *TheFourth Dimension*

In this section, I explore a specific layer of time that slips in and out of the idea of a heterotopia while it addresses a time of transition, of introspection, or delaying time, and the physical act of traveling. These are perhaps relay points in a nomadic pathway, where the pathway assumes figurations of thought, journeys where the train is no longer the figure which holds the narrative together, other than by contrast or comparison.

A long shot of a red *torii* gate in the water and its moving refracted image in the water marks the passage from the sight of the first Buddhist temple to the bullet train. According to Jim Olhoff (2012, p. 31) the *torii* structure is known as the gateway between the sacred and the mundane world. Indeed, it allows an escape route from the realm of the sacred, just after Trinh walks us through the geometric architecture and long hallways of the exterior side of the temple in a continuous subjective shot. The *torii* is placed in the passage between the train's heterochrony of modernity and the perennial temple, separating the urban signs from a sacred zone designated for prayer. This transition image makes way for a montage of the bullet train, after a very quick image of deer and women walking in a park.

The image of three women walking in the park with umbrellas works as a "relay point" (Deleuze & Guattari 1986, p. 380). A relay point in Deleuze and Guattari is a stop along a nomadic path, such as "water points, dwelling points, assembly points, etc.". These points are only spaces where a nomad stops according to his/her desires or necessities. "Every point is a relay and exists only as a relay. A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, p. 380). The park is a place to stop for a rest and contemplation. The camera observes these women walk fugitively past the deer, following a different path. Emphasis is given to the act of walking, and on the gendered subject: women. At

another relay point, the film captures a close-up of a woman's hip while she reads the paper. It dollies further away, revealing the window view of cars and buses behind her: establishing the urban space physically mediated through the contour of the body of a woman who reads. This passage is again fugitive, and this is how the film shows women: in these brief shots in between spaces and travels. Their bodies are approached in this combination of close-up and long shot, nearness and distance. They are characters with no names, no speech. They seem to be travelling companions, female presences that the film gently observes along the way. Perhaps Trinh connects with them and draws connections with the topography of their bodies without objectifying them. First the close-up of a woman's hands previously in the first scene at the bullet train. Now the focus is on the hips, which could have been portrayed in a sexual way, and yet it is a side view, a woman seen from "nearby". Travelling takes the form of reading in a café, a point of relay while others transit outside. The interiority of the scene in the café evokes some level of proximity, of coziness in hot tint as opposed to the cold colours of the window view. Again, delicateness is composed in contrast with roughness, warmth and coziness with coldness and the hecticness and speed (cars and buses outside). A café could be at any-place-whatever, a relay point inhabited by these women on the move: both the woman who reads the paper and the woman who films and speaks with a voice off. This quick interval serves as a resting point to shift from the bullet train to the scene in the temple. Between the festival and the temple, this interval changes the whole of the film, like a brief relay point that places the travelling female body in the picture.

While tradition is unfolded in the passages that relate to the festival, there is yet one more layer of time associated with an idyllic past which collides with the bullet train. Transition is sealed by the sound of women screaming and a piano note which marks the sudden shift to an eye-level shot of a person aiming a bow and arrow. Then the film switches to an extreme close-up of the tip of an incense stick, which by association looks like the tip of an arrow with smoke. What could be more allusive of a line of flight than an arrow:

it travels at full speed impelled by a desiring hand, and yet the direction may change due to the wind, to a lack of precision or a slippery hand. The allusion to fire can also be interpreted in the realm of tradition. According to the historian Stephen Turnbull, while the first fire arrows were reported in Southern Wu, China in 904 A.D., they also subscribe to a Japanese tradition. Fire arrows were formerly known as *bo-hiya*, employed by Japanese pirates in the 16th century. (Turnbull, 2012, p. 55). The bow and arrow combine speed with tradition, ancestry, a heterochrony allusive to the past, not the future. Technology here goes backwards, taking our imaginary back to the transition to gunpowder weapons. This fire arrow complicates the association of technology with speed; we enter the realm of the sacred.

It is only after showing just the tip of the incense with smoke that the camera pulls back, revealing the incense already in the temple's hall of entry. The mirror placed on the side of the table where the incense burns shows visitors walking in the temple, with a woman's hand holding the camera (at last the camera is included in this self-reflexive film narrative). As the camera continues to pull back, the mirror frame and the incense burning appear inside yet another frame, perhaps in a game of mirrors, but it quickly cuts to a long shot of a school group wearing green hats sitting on the floor of the temple. We are informed this is a temple based on the triangular architecture of the roof of the building and because of the monk's chant in the background, which begins with the archer's shot. I choose to read this figure of the archer as connected to the whole context of the temple. At first, the scene depicts the temple as a touristic site, including the bodies of visitors who do not necessarily take part in the ritual in a more rigorous religious sense. We know we are inside the temple when we see a close-up of an altar. The film quickly shifts to an eye-level side shot of women monks praying, looking at books set on small tables in front of them. Here we cease to see the scene from a visitor's perspective, but we enter in the realm of the sacred, the religious ritual. While the festival is depicted as a tradition of popular culture, where religion could possibly be implicated but indirectly, a temple has a different notion of time. Time is not measured the same

way in a temple. The temple is a place situated outside time, insofar as time appertains to the perennial, to the tribute to the dead ones, to a spiritual time that operates in its own metric.

Temples are not designated as heterotopias by Michel Foucault, since they are spaces with very specific designations. They are well-anchored space-wise. On the other hand, the film does not limit the image of the temples as the enclosed sanctuary. Indeed, Trinh explores the surroundings of the temples in the film, where the sacredness only exists as a vibration, an intensity which we arrive at by association, or free-flowing imagination. I am referring specifically to the garden.

The film follows monks with a long shot. They chant and walk on a cue out of a temple with black and bright orange vests and carrying black umbrellas. When we get closer to them, one of the monks looks back and then keeps walking in line past the temple's external gate. The camera pulls back and focuses on a black and white squared pattern, which could possibly be part of a door or a divider. It zooms in and switches to an establishing shot of the temple's garden with the mountains in the background. The frame catches the bottom silhouette of the temple's roof, indicating that it has not left the temple yet. Then it switches to a haptic extreme close-up of the petals of a lotus flower with dew. It dollies to the left, revealing more lotus flowers and leaves, dwelling on their silky textures, and drops of water. It connects these lotus flowers with the temple through the sound of the monk's chant while Trinh's voice off speaks about how lotus leaves blossom from muddy waters.

The figure of the temple's garden with the monks' walk and the lotus flower is quite typical of Japan, and then again the film shocks with the bullet train scenes. The garden draws on stillness, on the natural beauty of an extension of the temple. The penetrability of the garden allows the presence of visitors, but then again, it is inhabited by very specific people, who dress and walk in apparent uniformity and devotion to the sacred. It is closed and yet open, just like the lotus flowers, some of which are yet to blossom. The time of the blossoming is also not compatible with the machine time, the speed of a bullet train.

Again, the sight of delicate petals contrasts with the roughness of the train's engine and wires we saw briefly before this scene. The lotus flower is a flower that emerges from polluted waters, from mud (as mentioned by Trinh's voice off). The lotus flower engenders this contradiction between softness and roughness, of a flower that blossoms from the rotten gases, from toxic residues of modernity. And yet the drops of water that we see are limpid, crystalline.

Foucault includes the garden in his list of heterotopias: "The garden is the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world. The garden has been a sort of happy, universalising heterotopia since the beginnings of antiquity". (Foucault 1987, p. 6) In the garden it is possible to contemplate nature in a semi-private way, nature touched by human hands, well-nurtured and organised according to culture and taste of humans. And yet nature takes its course, it has a life of its own that emerges and recreates microcosmic forests, flowers that blossom. The way a garden, as a heterotopic space, contributes to the idea of nomadic pathway is through the awareness of the time of the blossoming, of nature taking its course completely oblivious to the machine time, to the bullet train. And yet it is a relay point in the train journey, where the pathway opens up to introspective journeys, contemplation of nature and the natural cycle of life, the shift from a physical journey in speed to the nomadic journey of thought.

The mere sight of the lotus flower can suggest the contemplation of life taking its course, which goes hand in hand with the camera which gazes into the garden from the perspective of the temple's exteriority. The depth of field shot of the *torii* gate and the waters in motion and the boy who sits to read with his pipe on the side of the frame creates the feeling of contemplation which is an introspective absorbance of an exteriority, a way of connecting while unplugged, while dwelling in one's own thoughts. As abstract as this may seem, these scenes assembled together with the direct and high-speed means of travelling are the crack and the fissure, the shift in the very core of travelling, hence revealing an inner Japan. Allusions to a voyage take on different meanings, and yet there is an insistence in

giving us symbols and clues consistent in the film. The time twist encourages viewers to travel on their own, in between the times that alternate between a fast pace, and a contemplative stillness, a train journey and an inner journey through meditation and a walk that has no tracks.

2.6 Conclusions

Foucault's concept of heterotopias is at the core of the holes along these two films, not through a linear idea of the film journey, but aiming at the points of deviation, the spaces of transition which change the whole of film, that is, the understanding of the film as a full-length experience where meaning flows. If the idea of a nomad is a figure of thought, the filmic pathway alternates between explicit representations of moving along the pathway – both in the immaterial train in *Night Passage* and the bullet train and its lines and engines in *The Fourth Dimension* – and abstract means of a pathway of thought – contemplative routes, such as the man reading the paper by the *torii* gate in *The Fourth Dimension*.

The very existence of a character named Uncle Borges in *Night Passage* is allusive of this metalanguage of cinema, or ex-cinema (Lippit 2012, p. 57) The choice for literary names and references can be observed in Professor Woolf interrogating language and gender, something that goes hand in hand with Virginia Woolf's writing, or the allusion to Edgar Allan Poe's automata. The scene at The House of the Immortals resonates intimately with "The Immortal", a tale written by Jorge Luis Borges, where "The City of The Immortals" (Borges 2004, p. 3) is a mirage in the desert of a man nearly dying of thirst, which is crossed by a river that makes people immortal. The very idea of a screen as a mirage appears on the virtual image of screens fluctuating across the room. Not only is the desert a non-striated space, a space with few boundaries where a nomad constantly drifts, but attention is

driven to the mirage, the dream, this idyllic city that is far from being the oasis that one could dream while craving water and good health. It is but a city inhabited by cruel Troglodytes who hate each other, who build mazes only to confuse people, with large corridors that lead to yet other corridors that lead to endless corridors. These people who refuse to help him because they are possibly not in the place to even help themselves live in misery and irrational complexities. Borges claims: “I can no longer know whether any given feature is a faithful transcription of reality or one of the shapes unleashed by my nights. This City, I thought, is so horrific that its mere existence, the mere fact of its having endured — even in the middle of a secret desert— pollutes the past and the future and somehow compromises the stars.” (Borges 2004, p. 10) This dream-mirage quickly becomes a nightmare. The City of the Immortals begin to resemble a trivial city under Capitalism, inhabited by inequalities and greed. But one day, the Troglodytes decide to abandon this modern site of horror.

The founding of this city was the last symbol to which the Immortals had descended; it marks the point at which, esteeming all exertion vain, they resolved to live in thought, in pure speculation. They built that carapace, abandoned it, and went off to make their dwellings in the caves. In their self-absorption, they scarcely perceived the physical world. (Borges 2004, p. 13)

Reaching immortality with no name, with no memory, perishable existence, lacking empathy and basic needs is what drives the Troglodytes eventually back to the caves. Technology fails miserably: the invention of an immortality is deceitful. It is Uncle Borges who looks at the slides with automata, the man looking at his invention of immortality as a figuration of cinema. Yet cinema can easily be deceitful, a bewilderment that becomes a curse. Modern cinema may go on the opposite direction and explore the return to the cave, not quite as a primitive switch, but as a means of distancing from this fascination with a machine time which is evident in both films. The combination of this excess of references to the mate-

riality of film gives the journey this other mean of “transportation” – the film experienced as a whole.

Heterotopias are displayed as abstract places outside the map, places which are not open, not closed, not completely private nor completely public, spaces that can be multiple things at once, they can function as vectors of deterritorialisation in Trinh’s films, such as the multiple dark rooms in *Night Passage* where Kyra and Nabi walk past screens (suggesting and yet not fully reproducing a film theatre), white dots of light in the ceiling (suggesting a starry night), etc. Trinh’s camera is quite self-conscious of space, of the construction of space as a means of telling a story: heterotopias are spaces of the imaginary (which can be real or not) where dwelling or experimentation take place, where she creates fissures or parenthesis within the film narrative to engage with reflections, with pathways of thought. Heterotopias are places and times where the real and the imaginary collide, such as in the scene where two gigantic puppet dragons spin (and the camera spins with them in different directions). The festival is real, and yet the extraordinary blossoms from very ancient tradition in a repetition of a millennial event which is all too real.

Heterotopias solicit a temporary suspension of space, just as heterochronies or heterotopias of time condense sheets of time, stretching or accelerating the passages. In *The Fourth Dimension*, the turn to a cave in Borges’ tale could be analogous to a turn inward, toward a time outside time at the temple, where the spirit is nourished in an everlasting present that is contemplated. In traveling across Japan through this complex device of multiple wires, we find a way to go back to the cave and retrace the path, to change the pace, to switch the itinerary, to rest at a relay point and allow ourselves to experience a different layer of time. Cinema can potentially be taken to this level, that of intervals, of ventilation and reflexivity, where utterance is put into suspension and the narrative remains open to multiple possibilities.

In the following chapter, I discuss Trinh's strategies for suspending utterance in her earlier films. Rendering meaning open to interpretation can be also taken to the level of an ethics in regards to alterity, which is caught in the midst of an ethnographic crisis of representation. I stress that nomadism is key as a means to approaching Trinh's cinema. My analysis stems from the main postcolonial debates on the filmic representation of alterity, especially regarding Trinh's cinema and criticism of Visual Ethnography during the 1990s, which is still linked to an identity politics of representation. These inquiries are relevant in so far as they pose questions that concern Trinh's film subject, which leads us to question how she deterritorialises without falling into the temptation of reterritorialising her film subjects in indexical categories of alterity, that is to say, colonial or neo-colonial clichés. Nevertheless, more recent readings of Trinh's cinema tackle nomadic film strategies which I intend to address. I begin by looking at what approaches to Trinh's cinema go hand in hand with Deleuze and Guattari's definition of nomadism, not necessarily naming it this way. My main goal is to find clues as to which film strategies, and a broader sense of aesthetics, can indicate a nomadic film aesthetics.

Chapter 3

For a Nomadic Ethnography that Speaks Nearby

The suspension of utterance is at the core of Trinh's politics of "speaking nearby" (*Reassemblage* 1982), so as to refrain from making assertions about the subjects of alterity. This film involves a poetic assemblage of ethnographic footage taken in Western Senegal, mostly depicting the people in the villages performing their everyday activities, such as cooking, breastfeeding, manufacturing, dancing. Trinh's voice has a soft sensuality, and articulates her perceptions in a personal way, very careful not to exceed her standpoint, which speaks from an observer's position who refuses to speak directly about her film subjects. This film aims to criticise the directness of conventional ethnographic documentaries, that produce direct statements about their film subjects. Her intent is thus to "neither affirm nor negate—the refusal...to speak about the other" (Penley and Ross 1985, p. 97). According to Christopher Pinney, "The Orient is made to speak by Trinh Minh-ha only to voice the impossibility of speech." (Pinney 1990, p. 148) The twist relies in the interstice "from a place of symbols into a place of symbols which speak of the impossibility of symbols", that is, "symbol of the very void of symbols". (Ibid.) It is a strategy of suspension of utterance, or abdicating "the habit of imposing a meaning to every sign" (1982).

There is a certain hesitation in assigning signifieds to the signs, such as the image of women jumping, with no explanation of context provided. In the voice-off, she states her refusal, mentioning the peculiar "habit of imposing a meaning to every sign" (*Reassemblage* 1982). This is to portray a lack of precision in cultural translations. They often fail to correspond to the empirical meanings that are intrinsic to culture specific contexts. There is a semantic slippage that creates a hiatus in between cultures, under the Western gaze.

While choosing to refuse to speak about the other may address this hiatus in between cultures and meanings that are lost in translation, this absolute silence can be problematic. Pinney ponders that “this lack of closure” impedes the opening up to multiple readings across cultures, including those readings that might have a “desirable political utility” (Pinney 1990, p. 148). If no discourses can be produced about alterity, we fail to legitimise each and every cultural reading, which leaves no room to think of the transitivity of meanings across cultures: “Denying authorial origination and any priority in the continual babble of texts, Trinh Minh-ha has to concede that there are many ways of looking at my films, there is just not one reading, and I would say that my reading has no more authority than any other viewer's reading (when this viewer has also invested her/himself in the film)” (Pinney 1990, p. 150).

Nevertheless, the politics of speaking nearby makes way for the situatedness of the very gaze of the ethnographer, hence drawing attention to his or her specific point of view. After all, one only has the authority to produce discourses according to one's point of view, which is what “nearby” stands for. Nearby is a perspective, an angle, but just one amongst others. It can be useful insofar as it renounces the pretentious endeavour to speak about someone without previously acknowledging the limitations of a point of view. It introduces gaps, creating space from a direct gaze to an observing look that dwells around the subject. In an interview with Nancy Chen named “Speaking Nearby”, Trinh defines it as:

‘Speaking nearby’ is... a speaking that does not objectify, does not point to an object as if it is distant from a speaking subject or absent from a speaking place. A speaking that reflects on itself and can come very close to a subject without, however, seizing or claiming it. A speaking in brief, whose closures are only moments of transition opening up to other moments of transition - these are forms of indirectness well understood by anyone in tune with poetic language. (Trinh 1999, p. 218)

In this manner, Trinh sets the stakes for her poetics of alterity, which engenders what she understands as an “attitude in life”, that is, her “way of positioning [her]self in relation to the world”. (Ibid.) Her politics of speaking nearby is her aesthetic signature, a way of treating alterity that involves imagery, words and sound in all her film works. She uses different approaches and several techniques of experimentation to create this gap that impedes meaning to be stated about the subjects, with slight deviations and breakages that constitute a “nearby”. My aim in this chapter is to explore the deviant paths and fissures that make way for meaning to be open-ended, based on my understanding that these shifts operate like the epistemological “smooth spaces” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, pp. 18, 23, 34-35, 38, 48) where nomadic lines of flight displace utterance, making meaning unfold in multiple becomings. In “The Totalising Quest of Meaning”, Trinh refers to these fissures as “reflexive intervals”:

The ‘core’ of representation is the reflexive interval. It is the place in which the play within the textual frame is a play on this very frame, hence on the borderlines of the textual and extra-textual where a positioning within constantly incurs the risk of depositioning, and where the work, never freed from historical and socio-political contexts, nor entirely subjected to them, can only be itself by constantly risking being nothing. (Trinh 1991, p. 48)

By shifting the angle of enunciation to an indirect position, she deterritorialises the subject position attributed implicitly and explicitly over alterity. The previous assertions that viewers may have acquired about the bodies on screen are not so easily accessed and unpacked, for however subtle these angle twists may be, they cross the line that separates the self from the other, like Anzaldúa’s “crossroads” (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 195) where one is not sure where they belong in Western indexicality. This puzzling effect from not knowing is where utterance is briefly suspended.

This chapter's point of departure is to analyse to what extent Trinh succeeds in freeing meaning from fixed locations, hence producing nomadic lines of flight that unfold in multiple becomings. In other words, to what extent Trinh's reflexive techniques suspend or displace utterance over alterity so that they are not objectified by a Western gaze. Over the following section, I examine the previous literature based on Trinh's critique of ethnography, going through a debate over the representation of alterity and the production of meaning in the field, before I move to the analysis of Trinh's ethnographic films.

3.1 The Aesthetics and Politics of Speaking Nearby

The politics and aesthetics of speaking nearby have been raised or somehow implicated in the works of prominent scholars such as Laura Marks, Bill Nichols, David MacDougall, George E. Marcus, etc. I begin this section on the crisis of ethnography, where we contextualise what Trinh is up against. Before we move to Trinh's films, I want to contextualise the politics and aesthetics of speaking nearby within a crisis of ethnography that puts the truth of the enunciation into suspicion. My goal is to address how Trinh's aesthetics aim to destabilise the gaze that assigns tribal people as exotic subjects of alterity, endorsing colonialist narratives. I explore how Trinh produces a nomadic shift of angle that challenges the direct utterance produced over alterity. What alternatives does she present to address ethnography's crisis of representation?

In order to approach Trinh's criticism of how tribal subjects are represented in ethnography, I go back to the point at which ethnography was taken over by this crisis of representation, leading several filmmakers and researchers to question the ethics of how to represent non-Western subjects without the arrogance of a scientific voice of truth produced about the people, their traditions and everyday lives. I chose to go back in the gene-

alogy of this crisis to capture the moment in which the colonial narratives become unstable. In “Visualising Theory: Selected Essays from V.A.R. [Visual Anthropology Review] 1990-1994” (Taylor, 1994), prominent visual ethnographers have elaborated their reflexive views about this crisis, such as David MacDougall, George E. Marcus, Bill Nichols, Henrietta L. Moore, Christopher Pinney, Nancy N. Chen, Trinh T. Minh-ha, among others. I find these essays very helpful to highlight the stakes of the crisis that Trinh’s ethnographic film seek to address.

This crisis began roughly twenty years ago; we may take into account that these articles were written in the 1990s, so there is a large generational gap. Nevertheless, this crisis extends in a long-term history, and is the main motive of Trinh’s ethnographic films: to question the real of the representation of alterity. This critical moment in ethnographic history interrogates the authenticity of the voice of the narrator in films produced by the West about people from elsewhere, mainly tribal people. Ethical questions are raised, such as: Are we authorised to make a film about Others? If so, how should these voices be included? While these questions remain only partially answered, one of the alternatives is the idea of polyphony (multivocality) and heteroglossia (a plurality of languages that resonate), that film theory owes to Mikhail Bakhtin (1981). It solicits the inclusion of a plurality of voices, cultures and languages in the films, making way for nomadic lines of flight in which voices, languages and cultures transgress borders to create a sense of critical interconnectedness.

This goes hand in hand with the idea of multivocality in anthropological discourse about which Trinh both points to the risks and engages with, in “Speaking Nearby”: “Whether reflexivity and multivocality contribute anything to ethnography or not would have to depend on the way they are practiced” (Trinh 1999, p. 215). She argues that the “juxtaposition of voices” does not necessarily transgress the striates that separate knowledges and their hierarchical structures, in the same configuration of multiculturalism, in which numerous

cultures are set in the same “melting pot” but without challenging the relations of power and knowledge between them. She sees potential in this strategy insofar as:

Multivocality can open up to a non-identifiable ground, where boundaries are always undone, at the same time they are accordingly assumed. Working at the borderline of what is and what no longer is anthropology, one also knows that if one crosses that border, if one can depart from where one is, one can also return to it more freely, without attachment to the norms generated on one side or the other. So the work effected would constantly question both its interiority and its exteriority to the frame of anthropology (Trinh 1999, p. 215).

Trinh’s work is at the crossroads, at the border zone between anthropology and other fields, where Anzaldúa’s “*mestiza* consciousness” (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 99) operates, between cognitive universes, tracing her nomadic lines of flight that connect discourses. The plurality of voices which Trinh engages with must challenge the striates that place alterity’s representations into fixed images and discourses. Multivocality (polyphony) must challenge the borders around anthropology and ethnography so as to raise suspicions around how non-Western people are represented.

In “Whose Story Is It?” (MacDougall 1994, p. 27) the film theorist and documentary filmmaker David MacDougall tackles the moment in which the field of ethnography undergoes a crisis of paradigms, awakening a suspicion over ethnocentrism and colonial paradigms:

About twenty years ago Anthropologists and Ethnographic Filmmakers began to feel uneasy about the unchallenged dominance of the author’s voice in ethnographic descriptions. Both began to open their work more fully to the voices of their indigenous subjects. The intervening years have seen a tendency towards a

dialogic and polyphonic construction in ethnography. More recently some observers have argued that the indigenous voices in these works remained as subjugated as before, always appropriated in some discreditable way to what are, in the end, our projects. This has engendered a new round of self-criticism, sometimes resulting in fundamental doubts about the possibility of cultural description, sometimes in a paralysing and, at times, proselytising sense of guilt. If we keep writing Anthropology or making films today, we do so with a greater awareness of the politics and ethics of representation. (MacDougall 1994, p. 27)

For the American film theorist and documentary filmmaker Bill Nichols, ethnographic filmmakers are not the only ones responsible for this crisis of representation in ethnographic films. He also holds accountable “the institutional discourse that continues to surround this mode of documentary representation”. (Nichols 1994, p.60) There is more at stake, since ethnocentrism has its roots set deeply in Western conventions. The institutions and conventions that Nichols refers to are not limited to Anthropology and Ethnography. Trinh clearly states that:

Anthropology is just one site of discussion among others in my work. I know that a number of people tend to focus obsessively on this site. But such a focus on anthropology despite the fact that the arguments advanced involve more than one occupied territory, discipline, profession, and culture seems above all to tell us where the stakes are the highest... If we take the critical work in *Reassemblage*, for example, it is clear that it is not simply aimed at the anthropologist, but also the missionary, the Peace Corps volunteer, the tourist, and last but not least at myself as an onlooker. In my writing and filmmaking, it has always been important for me to carry out critical work in such a way that there is room for people to reflect on their own struggle and to use the tools offered so as to further it on their own terms (Trinh 1999, p. 213).

When we think of the institutions and conventions which Trinh is up against in her critical works, we must think beyond Anthropology and Ethnography as separate fields, but to a colonial means of framing women, native Others. A nomadic approach bridges these fields and discourses to allow multiple connections and avoids any walls that cut across fields, rendering discourses isolated in themselves. Visual Anthropology is a field that is highly impacted by Trinh's films because there is a sharp and implacable criticism towards their conventions. Nichols looks through Trinh's cinema at this crisis of representation that questions and challenges these representational conventions:

If the status of ethnographic film within anthropology signals a tension within anthropology signals a tension within the field as a whole in terms of epistemological theory and modes of representation, the status of... the films of Trinh T. Minh-ha signal a tension within visual anthropology between social science canons of evaluation and cultural theory modes of interpretation... The adoption of reflexive, text-centered strategies in many cross-cultural forms of representation has yet to be matched by a comparable adoption of cultural theory in ethnographic film criticism (Nichols 1994, p. 71).

Reflexivity is what drives these strategies of nomadically displacing conventions that I examine in the films, which according to Nichols, have the potential for a relational interpretative response from viewers, who are not given the cues that state clearly what the filmmaker actually means. Meanings result from a negotiation between the film and the viewer's response. He continues: "...it is not interpretation but theories of interpretation, not one reading of a text vs. another but questioning historically conditioned and ideologically inflected mechanisms of textual representation that is at stake." Nichols agrees with Sarah Williams, who questions in face of Trinh's works: "Is it possible 'to know' difference differently?" (Williams 1991, p. 2) Nichols answers this with another question: "And doesn't such 'knowing' require putting current practices, prevailing conventions governing the ethnograph-

er's tale, what takes place behind the scenes of anthropological discourse into suspension?" He goes back to quoting Williams: "...suspension is deferment, dispersion, cessation... To put into suspension is to support, to hang, to postpone, to interrupt" (Idem 1991, p. 9). But what exactly does it mean to put "the anthropological discourse into suspension"? Trinh's cinematic strategies which I examine over the following chapter are committed to putting anthropologic utterance into suspension.

The strategies that Trinh uses to suspend or displace utterance in her films have been implicated in debates over the 1990's by prominent critics, such as the British social anthropologist Henrietta Moore, who questions the representation of alterity in Trinh's films which set the stakes for what the main issues raised by these films are and where they fit in a broader context of critical ethnography. My aim is to investigate some useful aspects that provoke nomadic shifts in ethnography and ethnographic film.

In her article "Trinh T. Minh-ha Observed: Anthropology and Others" Henrietta Moore claims:

One of the most remarkable things about the work of Trinh Minh-ha is the continuity between her writing and her filmmaking. Her work is marked through by disruption, juxtaposition and dislocation. There is, therefore, much irony in the perception of continuity. Irony is in evident play in both the written and the cinematic texts, but irony is an unstable realm and much of the difficulty interpreting Trinh Minh-ha's work arises from this instability. (Moore 1990, p. 66)

Moore associates a difficulty of interpretation in regards to Trinh's cinema with a certain anxiety created by the refusal of a narrative structure and closure portrayed by the author. On the other hand, she notices that Trinh is engaged in a political project, which is based on a line of supposed continuity. Moore understands that in both *Reassemblage* (1982) and *Naked Spaces: Living is Round* (1985), Trinh is determined to

deconstruct Western ethnocentrism, as well as the West's common strategies of representing Otherness. According to Moore, there is a certain sensuality in the way in which Trinh selects her imagery, with a series of strong powerful figures. The narrative structure of her films is not rigid, neither is her orbit of representation. She points out that discontinuity is presented through the isolation of specific body parts in close-ups, jump-cuts, alternating modes, different forms of register, and mostly the repetition of images and phases. The process of production of meaning, therefore, remains open and transitive, that is, the employment of such techniques creates disruptions in the narrative's configuration, hence displacing the spectator's understanding of what is portrayed on the screen. The most noticeable technique Trinh uses is a breakage with the synchronicity between images and sound: what one sees is not directly connected with what one hears. This could potentially create a puzzling effect in the production of meanings, making spectators lose faith in the omnipresence of the voice of the narrator, since the images take viewers elsewhere. For Moore, the hiatus between sound and imagery does not necessarily produce meaning. For her, it takes more than reconfiguring sounds and images to solicit a critical act of film viewing.

The irony factor that Moore draws attention to rests upon another level of repetition, that is to say, a level in which repetition is used to emphasise specific points of view. Images and sounds, once put together, suggest a coherent, integral system of ideas that undermines the overall idea of discontinuity. "The lasting image is one of different cultures, and yet the repetition of certain images and phrases provides a form of linking narratives which suggests that the cultures share certain cosmological beliefs, architectural motives, and ideas about gender relations." (Moore 1990, p. 67) She draws attention to a lack of historical and geographical anchorage. For instance, in *Naked Spaces Living Is Round*, there are barely subtitles indicating where the scene takes place, what the name of the tribe is, when this footage was captured, or any information that contextualises the scene in time and space. Moore sees Trinh's decontextualisation as based on the manner in which she seeks "plurality and mul-

tivocality” (Moore 1990, p. 68). She claims that Trinh's refusal to specify her ideological standpoints can be misleading and produces distorted interpretations of Africans. Trinh has admitted that, at some points in her work, she has had to stop herself as she started to get close to mainstream anthropological concerns and aspirations (Penley and Ross, 1986, p. 93). According to Moore, she has not attempted to properly edit her films' footage or have them cut adequately, due to the filmmaker's claim to non-didacticism, leaving this as a "self critical" moment. Moore recognises this as a "brave strategy", but she also points out a risk of misinterpretation.

Another anthropologist who criticises the lack of precision and the vagueness in Trinh's work is the visual ethnographer Christopher Pinney, who wrote an inflamed critique on Trinh entitled “Other Explanations of Itself”. His critique of Trinh's first films goes hand in hand with Moore's:

Trinh Minh-ha's work is devoted to the destruction of documentary and other communicative forms which presume their own grounds, their own transparency, rather than their contingency and randomness. (...) Trinh Minh-ha's brand of anti-documentary and anti-naturalism offers a route (...) to other people not through analysis, understanding and connection, but through silence, balkiness and disjunction. Filmically, this involves jump-cuts, repetition and rupture of visual and sound synchronicity. In a sequence of stills from *India-China* (work in progress), reproduced at the beginning of *Woman, Native, Other*, this dismemberment is produced through the transformation of a continuous line of thread (held in a woman's hand) into a vorticist zig-zag of alternating lines of force (Pinney 1991, p. 145).

He accuses Trinh of substituting for a coherent explication of her imagery, in which signs have specific designations, “mythopoetic themes and visual forms”,

placed arbitrarily. He perceives them more as distorted anthropological sounds and figures than as a subversion of the idea of documentary, that is to say, “anti-documentary”. The lack of a historical contextualisation also seems to bother Pinney, for whom Trinh’s images have never passed “ground zero”, while denying all the generations that came before her time, since multiple layers of time are depicted in coexistence. She does not take the time to situate these layers in space or time; instead, they seem to be just thrown there randomly.

In *Naked Spaces* the severance of direct speech alluded to in *Reassemblage* is articulated through three distinct female voices which act upon each other throughout the film as critical differences which also display areas of overlap and sameness. (...) Surname Viet, Given Name Nam, her third film, extends this fragmentation and multiplicity through the device of transposing 'authentic' voices and 'experience' on the mouths and faces of actors who speak in the languages least familiar to them, which at time makes for near unintelligibility. All this occurs within the framework of the interrogatory literalism of interviews direct to camera. (Pinney 1991, p. 155)

Trinh’s suspicion towards the lure of authenticity, alongside the lack of geographical and historical precision in Trinh’s cinema make way for a debate that interrogates the contextualisation, meaning the researcher's position of power and privilege, as visual ethnographers who are interrogated in the films that they criticise. The feminist theorist Sarah Williams states that both Christopher Pinney and Henriette Moore speak from the hegemonic anthropological canon - which Trinh rejects by deconstructing ethnographic practices in documentary. Both are engaged with the anthropological mainstream discourse targeted by Trinh Minh-ha’s criticism. Not only do their articles attempt to defend their own discipline, but also they misinterpret Trinh by analysing her through the frame of modernity. For Williams, this frames a completely different paradigm than the one she employs. For instance, Christopher Pinney tries to place Trinh in James Clifford's category of “heteroglossic poly-

phony”, which she is not advocating. According to Williams: “Moore's observations - her academic concerns - are themselves but a cultural effect of postmodernity's legitimization of difference. (...) Where in Moore's text - where in her production of language, her engagement with Trinh's differences, her experience as an ethnographic author(ity) - does Moore share responsibility for a different kind of understanding?” (Williams 1991:8) Understanding Trinh Minh-ha's work requires a suspension of meanings, an openness to read in between lines, in between language. You must strip away from your habitual system of apprehension in order to grasp for new meanings, not in a coherent complete rational system, but in an open field that is filled with discontinuities, and interfaces that work their way around cultures (not “about” them).

It is key to think through these interrogations in the endeavour of deconstructing the clichés that are often associated with alterity, not only in deterritorialising the clichés, but in escaping the temptation of reterritorialising them in a rather fixed image. Discontinuation works as a key strategy of escaping these canonical categories and rendering the film subjects more fluid and less likely to be captured by language and indexical categorisations. Trinh's discontinuous approach can potentially produce nomadic lines of flight that move away from fixed locations, rendering meaning more fluid, open-ended, that is, more open to viewer's creative interpretation. My reading of Trinh's strategies resonates with Nichols (1994, p. 72): “Trinh T. Minh-ha has offered a symptomatic, distanciated reading of anthropological practice designed to put its underlying assumptions into critical suspension.” (Ibid.) I argue that this suspension of utterance, however temporary, can produce a myriad of interpretative lines of flight, drawing nomadic connections based on the direct relation between viewers and film, blurring the lines that set Us apart from Them. These connections articulate through fissures, or bends in the master's discourse and representation of Otherness in anthropology and beyond.

In “The Modernist Sensibility in Recent Ethnographic Writing and the Cinematic Metaphor of Montage”, the American anthropologist George E. Marcus describes a “deconstructive bend” (1994, p.38) of a descriptive, discovery-driven ethnography. Experimental ethnographers are granted full access to “the full matrix of existing representations” (Ibid. p. 44) and are able to draw historical connections between them, and work within the borders of “intertextuality”. (Ibid.) This modern ethnographer is not so attached to text, but to new sensible readings of text and connecting them in critical ways. In order to deconstruct conventions of representation, one must first access and read them critically. He understands that:

Culture is increasingly deterritorialised, and is the product of diverse and simultaneous worlds operating consciously and blindly with regard to each other. What ‘relationship’ is in the configuration becomes a matter of focal interest for ethnography, which presents itself initially as a problem of form, of representation... The ethnographic grasp of many cultural phenomena and processes can no longer be contained by the conventions that fix place as the most distinctive dimension of culture - connecting the village community to a particular historical narration - or describing the depth and richness of tradition fails to capture the side of culture that travels, its production in multiple, parallel, and simultaneous worlds of variant connection. (Marcus 1994, p. 50)

The idea of a culture that draws connections and undergoes processes of deterritorialisation goes hand in hand with the fluidity of nomadic lines of flight. Braidotti claims that nomadism involves “the fleeting co-presence of multiple time-zones” (Braidotti 2006, p. 408), which resonates with the simultaneity in Marcus. (1994, p. 38) For Braidotti, a nomadic line of flight “potentially activates and deterritorialises stable identities” (Braidotti 2006, p. 408), which image-wise may resort to multiple creative reconfigurations. She continues: “This dynamic vision of the subject enlists the creative resources of the imagination to

the task of enacting transformative relations and actions in the present.” (Ibid.) Multiplicity is key to thinking of nomadic modes of representation, as opposed to unitary fixed identities or categories.

Marcus understands culture as non-unitary, non-monolithic, but rather complex structures, which cannot be taken as isolated entities and yet not as appertaining to a universality over alterity. Trinh's politics and aesthetics of speaking nearby challenge the idea of culture as a fixed location, which is safeguarded by patrolled borders. It also implies a refusal to capture culture as a universal Other, which replicates cultural patterns in the same way. Marcus suggests that for the ethnographer to look through the complexity of cultural systems that undergo processes of deterritorialisation “requires a replacement of the old social structural imageries... with... literary techniques for the representation of simultaneity in social process and action” (Marcus 1994, p. 51). I argue that a nomadic line of flight takes on this “deconstructive bend” within the processes of deterritorialisation of representation of alterity, dismantling the fixed categories in which the film subjects are hierarchically levelled by the Master's discourse, twisting the vertical angle into a “nearby”. Nearby as simultaneous, parallel, and complex. The indirectness is fundamental in Trinh's politics and aesthetics of speaking nearby:

Truth never yields itself in anything said or shown. One cannot just point a camera at it to catch it: the very effort to do so will kill it... Truth can only be approached indirectly if one does not want to lose it and find oneself hanging on the dead empty skin. Even when the indirect has to take refuge in the very figures of the direct, it continues to defy the closure of a direct reading (Trinh 1999, p. 218).

This “deconstructive bend” works through indirectness, a subtle twist of angles that takes on a new positionality of representation: not as a direct line, but as a line that unfolds to the side. This creates a puzzle in the striates across cultures. Indirectness is a

key element of Brazilian film theorist Gustavo Soranz's "aesthetics of partiality". In his doctoral thesis "The Cinema of Trinh T. Minh-ha: Intervals Between Anthropology, Cinema and Visual Arts", he elaborates:

An indirect path proposes more complex modes of representation than the modes of addressing used in conventional documentary... Since the option for an indirect path reflects a desire to provoke displacement in conventional expectations promoting strategies that destabilise the power forces at work in these relations, in order to advocate for unsuspecting and challenging strategies that are open to discursive possibilities that are overshadowed by habitual pragmatism of direct addressing in power relations (Soranz 2016, p. 156).

An aesthetics of partiality can also operate through intervals and the in-between spaces, which constitute Trinh's strategies of reflexivity and suspension of utterance. He continues:

Partiality... is the expression of a singularity, of authorship. The aesthetics of partiality marks inventive and innovating films, that oppose the models and modes of predetermined cinematic narration and rhetorics to affirm difference as an essential value... Trinh T. Minh-ha emerges from an experimental filmic form, expressed in the interstice of essay gestures that help to promote a unique powerful cinema (Ibid.).

Filmmaking is taken as an experience of discovery, in content and form. Soranz thinks of Trinh's films as an example of this aesthetic because he sees her films as "an expression of that which we could call a thought process" (Ibid., p. 157). The idea of partiality in sync with nomadism as a figuration of thought that is traversed by "multiple differences within any subject position" (Braidotti 2011, p. 216). A nomadic line of flight,

therefore, makes its move towards “unveiling the power locations which one inevitably inhabits as the site of one’s subject-position” (Ibid.). By playing with different camera angles and modes of framing the subjects, the complexity of subjectivity and cultural assemblages of the subject position become difficult to be captured in fixed indexical categories. Intercultural assemblages are not harmonic, they are destabilised by disruptive, evasive agents who trace lines of flight opening the subject-position onto multiple becomings.

The feminist film theorist Laura H. Marks sees a strong destabilising potential of meanings across cultures in experimental cinema. She looks at Trinh as an experimental filmmaker whose “experimental forms help... to express the emergence knowledge conditions of intercultural experience”. (Marks 2000, p. 10) She sees Trinh’s interlocutors as “intercessors”, that is “real characters who make up fiction” (Ibid. , p. 68), the agents of interlocution in intercultural cinema. “These are not docile informants of documentary, but resistant characters who dispute the filmmakers’ construction of truth at every turn” (Ibid.). The universal voice of truth from the narrator is put into suspicion through different voices, a break in the synchronicity between sounds and image, and other disruptive techniques that will be examined in the following section. Just like in Soranz’s aesthetics of partiality, Mark’s intercessors of intercultural cinema present partial views that “falsify the official story”(Ibid.). She draws on Deleuze to think of how “the power of the false” (Deleuze 2013 b, p. 133) operates; that is, fiction is revealed in the truth enunciation of documentary. In Deleuze, every attempt to reveal truth should be put into suspicion. (Ibid.) As she puts it: “The makers of intercultural cinema... destroy myth from the inside. They do this not by extracting a truth from their traditional culture, but by evoking the myth of culture as a necessary fiction” (Marks 2000, p. 66).

This falsifying power of the enunciator, who raises suspicion from both the Master’s discourse and from a fixed unitary and monolithic minority discourse, is what takes Trinh’s cinema to the level of a suspension of utterance. The refusal to speak about

alterity produces bends in the positionality of the interlocutor, who takes on a partial position, leaning sideways to speak nearby. Speaking nearby is the recognition of the impossibility to extract truth in a film about alterity, setting the “power of the false” in which all discourses can be taken as fiction. To understand what drives experimental filmmakers such as Trinh to raise this suspicion over regimes of truth in ethnography, I move to *Reassemblage* and *Naked Spaces Living Is Round* to examine what nomadic lines of flight are produced, which specific strategies are employed in her politics and aesthetics of speaking nearby.

3.2 Strategies of Speaking Nearby

In the book “Experimental Ethnography”, the film theorist Catherine Russell reflects on how experimental ethnographers may produce another look at otherness. She speaks highly of Trinh, as “one of the most prominent... filmmakers to deploy a radical film practice within a specifically ethnographic milieu”. (Russell 1999, p. 4) Trinh’s strategies for deconstructing an ethnographic gaze challenge an appeal to objectivity present in anthropologic discourse and ethnographic documentaries. For Russell:

Her written critique of the conventions of ethnographic objectivity has been a catalyst in the rethinking and renovation of documentary practice. Trinh’s most cogent critique of ethnographic film is the way it implies a division of the world into those ‘out there’ (the subjects of ethnography) and those ‘in here’ (in the theatre, looking at them)(Russell 1999, p. 4).

The objectification of the subjects of ethnographic films is defied by the deterritorialisation of the look in Trinh’s films, free from the inscription marked by a scientific truth fabricated by Western lenses. Trinh’s experimentalism creates “a more fluid

conception of reality”, one that “transcend[s] this paradigm, one in which meaning is not ‘closed’, but escapes and evades representation”. (Ibid.) Over this section I reflect upon Trinh’s nomadic escape routes from the rigid indexicality of ethnographic representation. I go beyond the gaze to think of how Trinh’s ethnographic films challenge the depreciative misrepresentation of “women, native others” (1989).

In *Naked Spaces* there is a poetics that dwells on circular shapes of architecture and human disposition in space. This aesthetics produced around round-shapes is the theme of the film, as mentioned in its subtitle “Living Is Round”. This goes hand in hand with the previously mentioned circularity of gazes in *Reassemblage*. I begin by analysing the way in which the gaze is constructed in ethnographic film narratives, then I analyse the nomadic pathways of circularity dwelling on space and configuring a relationality of bodies in space, and I finally move to how the power of the false in film narrative is revealed in *Reassemblage*. My question to each technique that I approach is: to what extent do they deconstruct the representation of tribal women? I see these deconstructive techniques as nomadic lines of flight, given that they open representation to multiple pathways of transcultural signification.

3.2.1 Looking nearby: reflections on the ethnographic gaze

Reassemblage is a documentary film produced in rural Western Senegal, which challenges the way that tribal people are represented in mainstream ethnography, in ethnographic magazines, peace corps and other institutions that produce discourses on alterity. In these films, Trinh uses several aesthetic techniques of deconstruction of narratives, such as the juxtaposition of images, black screens, a breakage in the synchrony between sounds and images.

Naked Spaces Living Is Round dwells on the circular forms of the architecture of several villages between Senegal, Mauritania, Togo, Mali, Burkina Faso, and

Benin. There is a continuation in the aesthetics and politics of both films – while the first one is short for a documentary (40 minutes), the second is over two hours long (135 minutes) – and emphasis is given to a poetics of space, not just the trivial activities of the tribe's ordinary life. Although both genders appear on the screen, both films have a clear focus on women as the central film subjects, both in images and narration.

In order to look at the representation of native women in *Reassemblage* and *Naked Spaces Living Is Round*, I draw upon Laura Mulvey's idea of a gaze, that is, the cinema's pleasure in the act of looking while taking the bodies that appear on screen "as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (Mulvey 1999, p. 835) These two films are particularly suspicious of the mainstream ethnography's representation of tribal women, applying Mulvey's notion of an objectifying gaze to colonizing lenses that construct the image of underdeveloped, exotic women. In this section I explore how Trinh interrogates the gaze and how she tries to deterritorialise the objectifying look, taking ideas of an "ethnographic gaze" (Rony 1996, p. 7) as theorised by Fatimah Tobing Rony and the analogous concept of an "imperial gaze" as defined by E. Ann Kaplan (Kaplan 1997, p. 2).

Rony thinks of an "ethnographic gaze" as a tool that uses the look to "speak for" those subjects dismissed as "Primitive Other[s]" (Rony 1996, p. 13). The colonial discourses which the ethnographers often endorse reinforce the positivistic notion of these film-subjects as being underdeveloped, primitive, falling behind in an evolutionary line of progress. She attempts to "negotiate new ways of thinking about the relationship between the camera and the people filmed in ethnographic cinema" (Ibid.), which Trinh addresses filmically over these two films. These negotiations seek to readdress issues of power and knowledge between looking and speaking. As Kaplan observes:

The gaze of the colonialist thus refuses to acknowledge its own power and privilege: it consciously represses knowledge of power hierarchies and its need to dominate, to control. Like the male gaze, [the "imperial gaze"] is an objectifying

gaze, one that refuses mutual gazing, mutual subject-to-subject recognition. It refuses what I am calling a 'looking relation'. (Kaplan 1997, p.79)

These negotiations that Rony speaks of articulate the feminist and postcolonial ethnographer's quest to unravel these power relations that are codified in visual ethnographic films. Kaplan makes a claim that these imperialist codes that educate the eyes of Western White spectators include the "infantilisation", "animalisation", and "sexualisation" of minorities, as well as "debasing minorities as immoral, not knowing right from wrong, if not quite simply evil". (Ibid., p. 80) This is the structure of a discourse that needs to be deconstructed: the portrayal of a primitive nature that amounts to a status of intellectual, moral and psychic inferiority. The gaze is a condescending look that objectifies these subjects in a sexual, cultural and political way. The "ethnographic gaze" is the eye of the coloniser that establishes the conventions of a dominating look. But what happens when the object of the look dares to look back at the camera?

In a scene in *Reassemblage*, close-ups of smiling Bassari girls break the documentary convention which advises people in the pro-filmic space not to look directly at the camera unless it is an interview. These girls look straight at the camera, suggesting that they look back at those who participate in the pleasurable act of looking. Trinh's voice plays the role of intercessor, interrogating the gazes with: "What I see is life looking at me. I am looking through a circle in a circle of looks". The circularity of looks is a spatial reconfiguration of the vertical one-way look that conventional ethnography establishes about women. With Trinh's aesthetics and politics of speaking nearby, the gaze establishes a narrative that speaks *about*. A subtle shift of directions of a look renders this look circular, considering that in the circle all sides meet. The close-ups of the girls who look at the camera produce an illusion that they look back at the viewers, blurring the lines of identification between viewers and viewed.

The act of looking back is a way of looking nearby, of shifting the angle to a connection with film subjects that is not encouraged in documentary films. The film theorist Paula Amad reflects upon the act of returning the gaze as a means of referral “to evidence of the look at the camera (and by implication the camera operator and film spectator) by film subjects” (Amad 2013:53). It can be taken to a critical perspective insofar as “it connotes the non-common interpretation of the look as a refusal of the assumed monolithic, unidirectionality of the West’s technologically mediated structures of looking at cultural Others” (Ibid.). The theorist who poses the question of looking back at the lenses, hence providing viewers with the sensation that the film subject is returning the gaze, is Paul Willemen. He conceptualises his view on the “fourth look” (Willemen 2006, p. 51), borrowing from Lacan this gaze which is imaginary, and yet experienced as real:

The gaze that I encounter ...is not a seen gaze [that is, not an eye that I see looking at me] but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other...[the gaze exists] not at the level of [a particular visible] other whose gaze surprises the subject looking through the keyhole. It is that the other surprises him, the subject, as entirely hidden gaze (Lacan 1981, pp. 82-84).

This imaginary furtive look that produces a sensation of a film subject gazing back at the viewer is what Willemen designates as a “fourth look”, that is, a look which can potentially twists the view of the voyeur onto an inner look at his voyeuristic role. He defines it:

...Any articulation of images and looks which brings into play the position and activity of the viewer also destabilises that position and puts it at risk... When the sceptic drive is brought into focus, the viewer also runs the risk of becoming the object of the look, of being overlooked in the act of looking. The fourth look is the possibility of the overlooking-look, and is always present in the wings, so to speak. (Willemen 2006, p. 51)

He proceeds: "That fourth look problematises the social dimension, the field of the other of the system of looking at work in the cinematic institution as well as in the photographic and television ones". (Ibid.) The following sequence of close-ups in *Reassemblage* keeps on deterritorialising the direction of the look, which is conditioned by a colonial culture of the gaze. With the idea of looking nearby, Trinh frees spectators' eyes onto non-striated directionalities.

Trinh also engages with the strategy of a "fourth look" in *Naked Spaces Living Is Round* (1985), when a tracking shot shows the faces of Soninke women (Southern Mauritania) with black scarves looking straight at the camera. The camera stops moving, briefly highlighting the profound look on the face of a young woman who smirks subtly. The narrators-intercessors speak of colours and sensations that are disconnected from the images on the screen. The disruptive narration, however, may seek an attentive look at the images, searching for the colours of garments and sensations. This is when the spectators have the illusion that their eyes meet the eyes of the women. The last girl's look, which stays on screen the longest, seems defiant, as if she were asking: "What are you looking at?"

These are not the only scenes in which the film subjects look back. Some looks are more subtle, like that of the Soninke woman with a turban in *Naked Spaces* who looks as if she were avoiding the camera and then suddenly her eyes betray her and look at the camera. Others are more spontaneous, like the children that are grouped together and look at the camera without hesitation in *Reassemblage*. This happens on multiple occasions in both films, almost exhaustively, which also brings awareness to the film as film. The look at the camera reveals its presence, and the sense of strangeness that this device produces in the village. It breaks the flow of the apparently unmediated ethnographic registry of the people's everyday life. In "Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography", Roland Barthes points to the false perception of a photographic image as a direct reflection of the real, which he under-

stands as appertaining to the realm of “representation” (Barthes 1981, p. 4). In looking straight at the device, the subjects in the film call attention to the fact that reality is represented in front of a camera, producing a rupture in the make-believe of ethnographic film.

The reality of the images portrayed by ethnographic film narratives is indeed caught in a “chain of looks” that interpret what they see, but the camera gaze helps to establish the visual connections in the eye of the beholders. Mulvey establishes that:

There are three different looks associated with cinema: that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion. The conventions of narrative film deny the first two and subordinate them to the third, the conscious aim being always to eliminate intrusive camera presence and prevent a distancing awareness in the audience. Without these two absences (the material existence of the recording process, the critical reacting of the spectator), fictional drama cannot achieve reality, obviousness and truth (Mulvey 1999, p. 835).

While the third figure is missing in most ethnographic films, in the absence of the hero, truth is disembodied and assumes the omnipresent voice of the narrator. Conventions establish the way in which the body is framed, fragmented, the scale and timing of exposure. “...Cinematic codes create a gaze, a world, and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire” (Ibid., p. 843). In both films, Trinh breaks down these cinematic conventions that produce an ethnographic gaze that specifically frames women on screen.

The most remarkable strategies that disturb the gaze are based on the representation of tribal women with bare breasts. For instance, in a sequence in *Reassemblage*, a woman appears in a mid-close up of her torso and head with her bare breasts. She carries a baby in her left arm. She smiles and looks straight at the camera. Again, the gaze is

returned to the viewer – suggesting that she plays a part in the act of looking –while pointing to the presence of the camera that mediates the spectator’s gaze. The following shot is a detail plane of her ear with a hoop earring and the top of the baby’s head. Then there is an extreme close-up of the baby’s face and the mother’s neck with a multi-coloured necklace. This is when there is a super close up of the woman’s nipple. Beside it, we see some indiscernible baby skin, possibly the side of his head. Then it goes back to the first mid shot of the woman with the baby on the side. She smiles again and moves to the right. Over this sequence of shots, the woman’s body is fragmented, like the cinematic convention that creates a sense of eroticism by isolating different body parts, feeding into what Mulvey refers to as “an illusion of looking into a private world” (Mulvey 1999, p. 835).

This is a sharp criticism of ethnographic images that sexualise tribal women by focusing on their bare breasts. First, because the nearly haptic shots make viewers feel close to their skin. The proximity to the skin could be read as sexual if the nipple were isolated, but the presence of the baby in every shot of this sequence gives it a different meaning. It is clear that the breast is not revealed for viewers’ scopophilic pleasure - which Mulvey describes as a “pleasure in looking at another person as an erotic object” (Ibid., p. 835). Instead, it is related to breastfeeding. Nudity is associated with motherhood, which is a cue of familiarity that goes beyond borders. When the emphasis shifts from sexuality to motherhood, a nomadic line of flight deterritorialises the gaze that objectifies tribal woman’s bare breasts.

This is also done in *Reassemblage* with a mid close up of a woman’s cleavage. The camera tilts up slowly until it reaches her face. This is a conventional strategy for eroticising a woman’s body, forcing viewers to contemplate her body before they even see her face. Then, it cuts to a detail plane of her ear with big earring and the side of her chin. The flow of sensuality is interrupted by a mid close-up of the same woman breastfeeding a baby, followed by an extreme close-up of the lower side of her face on the right side of the frame. Long shots of cows pulling a cart conducted by a man with a hat interrupt this sequence of

body parts. The following image is a close-up of the woman breastfeeding the baby, who is placed at the centre of the screen. The interruption works so as to give viewers a second chance to glance at the image of the woman breastfeeding. The body that is once objectified by the camera tilting up, also by the fragmented portrayal of her body parts, is later shown as the woman nurturing a baby. This appears once before the interruption, but the space in between the scenes caused by the interruption isolates the image of the woman breastfeeding. The repetition suggests that the full puzzle of body parts is solved over the last image. The nomadic shift displaces the look from eroticism to the everyday life of a mother's routine.

This also breaks with the binary between profanity and sacredness around women: from the hyper-sexualised exotic woman, she is redeemed from the desirous gaze when she is shown in the same position as Madonna Litta, the Virgin Mary breastfeeding baby Jesus painted by Leonardo Da Vinci. The ambiguity of women's breasts connected to motherhood is constantly repeating itself with images of women and their bare breasts in both *Reassemblage* and *Naked Spaces*, making spectators self-conscious of a gaze that crosses the line between opposing categories of women.

Speaking nearby, looking nearby: for E. Ann Kaplan, there is an intimate connection between speaking and looking in ethnographic filmic discourse. If the screen is perceived as a window to the world, it is only natural to link the look as a means of acquiring knowledge. So she problematises:

I can only speak or look if I am a subject, not an object; I can only know the Other from a position of a subject able to stand outside myself, and, while still being the subject I have constructed, construct myself differently because in relation to this Other. (Kaplan 1997, p. 160)

Trinh's deconstructive tactics towards the gaze aim to reestablish tribal women's agency of a look. In constantly drifting away from fetishised signs, but repetitively revisiting and then destabilising them, Trinh takes this agency to a "chain of looks"

(Rony 1996, p. 23), shifting angles, camera positions, playing with the camera registers so as to reinforce the outside perspective of a look. In shifting the looks into multiple glances, she creates a telescopic effect, that multiplies the agents of the look, only to address the impossibility of a discourse that captures what the eyes see. Spectators see “nearby”, but the vision is so fugitive that one can only speak of it by proximity.

In *Naked Spaces* the invasive specular gaze into a tribal woman’s privacy is portrayed spatially. Instead of isolating body parts, Trinh uses a strategy of taking the camera inside a house. The camera simulates specular titillations in showing different slow-motion gazes in multiple angles of the door, getting closer, until it finally sinks into the dark. The people are inside the house. The gaze explores every corner of the house, dollying to the left, tilting all the way up following the fissure through which light penetrates. This is followed by a montage of doors, windows and fissures in the dark where the light comes into the house(s). Repetitive circular panoramic shots inside the house show first a boy sitting on the ground, then a mother breastfeeding a baby sitting on a rock under an opening in the ceiling. The same way that the male gaze invades and explores the body of a woman, the ethnographic gaze does this to the house, invading the privacy of a home. It explores every fissure of the house, like erotic zones where external light penetrates. The house is coded like a woman’s body: it is there to be explored, to fulfil the curious pleasure of looking at the exotic naked spaces. The exploring gaze inside the house takes viewers to the image of a woman breastfeeding. It is a naked woman, at last, who inhabits this dark house, only she is not fulfilling the lust of viewer’s expectations. Once again, expectations are betrayed by the ordinary, an act that is performed by practically all mothers. When attention is driven to the mother, the distance between viewers and film subjects is shortened. The striate between what is inside and what is outside is also suspended when the woman appears. She sits under an opening in the ceiling, but it looks as though the ceiling is incomplete. She is neither inside, nor outside the house. This is not a coincidence; the narration refers to the act of entering a Dogon house,

in Mali. Placed at the interstice of a spatial configuration, the image of the woman blurs the boundaries between inside and outside, light and darkness. She is precisely at the *intermezzo*, that is, caught in between the privacy of a home and the public communal space.

This gaze into a tribal home intersects the male gaze theorised by Mulvey with a Colonial gaze, or an ethnographic gaze. According to Marcus, an ethnographic gaze can be potentially deconstructed by erasing “the distance of ‘otherness’” (Marcus 2009, p. 44). He elaborates: “One assumes and demonstrates an always already connectedness of the observer to the observed, and thus works against exoticism, based on us-them distance, on which much ethnography is predicated”(Ibid.). In the scene discussed in the the last paragraph, Trinh exposes the interior of a home in the endeavour of effacing this line of differentiation between viewers and viewed. A home is represented in its uniqueness - the terracotta walls, the circular architecture, so on and so forth, but it also gives us visual cues of proximity, such as a Birifor woman preparing food in the interior of a house in Burkina Faso, or another shot in the same scene where women’s arms seem to be scrubbing a table from a side angle. We do not see their faces, while the light that appears to come from the fissures illuminates the domestic work. The experience of estrangement becomes familiar. This is an attempt to challenge the distant gaze of the ethnographer’s lenses. Nomadism is a means of displacing the nexus of familiarity and estrangement.

Over the next section, I further my reflection on how this ethnographic gaze is challenged in these two films, through the critical use of techniques of experimental cinema applied to ethnography. My aim is to think of nomadic means of destabilising the fixed representation of alterity, through the possibility of opening meaning and interpretation to multiple becomings.

3.2.2 The Poetics of Bodies in Space, and Space as Bodies

In *Naked Spaces*, a body is poetically connected to space in circularity and imaginary transpositions. Here, I start by examining how bodies connect to space in external communal circles, and move to the smaller circumference of a home, and how it poetically connects with a woman's body. In this section I look at the combination of aesthetic tactics and how they produce through the use of an indirect and relational poetic language. I use Gaston Bachelard's account of the philosophical implications of roundness in the ontology of women and space. My choice to use Bachelard's "The Poetics of Space" (1994) to read this film connects to his poetics of a home and his particular regard to roundness, that explores the intimacy of a home as analogous to the intimacy of a woman's body. Trinh takes on a more feminist perspective, but I see a poetical link between them, which I aim to explore in this section.

Bachelard says: "Images of full roundness help us to collect ourselves, permit us to confer an initial constitution on ourselves, and to confirm our being intimately, inside" (Bachelard 1994, p. 234). The primitivity of a circle requires an "image of being", that is also a collectively imagined and embodied universe, and yet it is temporary, for as long as the circle lasts. Circularity can be used as a means of challenging straight and vertical lines, bending the gaze, that goes around viewers and viewed subjects.

This is the case for the circle formed by the Moba peoples (Northwestern Togo). The circle is introduced sonically, when the camera dwells in an internal long shot of an oval door with three bowls set on the ground in a Moba home. Light comes in from the door, everything else is dark, and yet we hear chanting and hands clapping. Space is established through music, and then image, soliciting the imagination to fly away from the image. The next shot is external, with a detail plane of the shoulders of a boy and girl's shoulders,

standing side by side. We approach the circle timidly, not at once. A shift of camera angle and scale reveals the people gathered together forming one side of the circle. At the centre, there is a girl wearing a large hat with onyx horns. No emphasis is given to the exotic garment. It quickly switches to close-ups tilting up towards people's faces, in a series of close-ups that shows their uniqueness, their personal expressions. From the unusual the filmmaker shifts to highlighting the singularity of the film subjects.

The circle involves a multiplicity, as the community participates in and ritualizes space with their body dispositions and sounds that create a soundscape. The clapping becomes more intense, quicker, combined with high pitched screams. Rhythm is also produced by the camera, which quickly tracks to the left, rendering the faces blurry, losing focus. We go back to a full shot of the circle. A woman dances frenetically at the centre, following the rhythm. The circle is filled with this intense energy, with the participation of the community. Most people gathered around the circle are women and children, which is constant throughout Trinh's films – a political choice to depict women and the children that belong in their domestic universe. Their full bodies vibrate to the rhythm, through their voices, their hands clapping, their circular dance, that connects to the entire circle with intense energy. The circle is the nomadic zone of the encounters, of multiple connections of energies, of human verve. The woman at the centre jumps, stretching her arms to the side, like condor wings gliding in dense air. Her body performance seems empowered by the energy of the full circle, which is only partially visible to viewers. Yet spectators do not get a full view of the circle. Not only is it not necessary to show the full circle, but also it would produce a distance, while the side of the circle invites viewers to participate in the circle. Spectators' view is positioned in the perspective of someone who is in the other side of the circle. The circle replicates through repetition, serving a specific function in the film. The following shots repeat the pattern of someone dancing in the centre of the circle, with slight alterations of angles, with angles that show people's feet, or from the waist up. Repetition produces a line of flight in

that it plays a decentering role: it shows that it is not important who is in the centre. Repetition works to produce a sense of community, the circle's multiplicity, inhabited by many bodies, as an ever-shifting centre.

Bachelard dwells on what he calls "an intimacy of roundness" (Ibid, p. 39), based on images of "direct roundness" in artistic, literary, and poetic registers that transcend a metaphorical function. The most prominent structure of roundness, for Bachelard, is a home. "...Our house is our corner of the world... It is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the world" (Ibid, p. 4). Dwelling in a home's roundness is the task he attributes to an ethnographer or a geographer, in the pursuit of the genesis, the primitiveness of being that it encompasses. In *Naked Spaces*, Trinh explores every corner of the houses of several African tribes, dwelling on the roundness of objects and the curves of the architecture, like Bachelard's ethnographer who searches for the essence of being. This circular poetics of space is highly inspired by Bachelard (who is directly cited by a voice over). Round-shaped elements depicted in detail planes of calabashes and vases are disposed in empty spaces. These images repeat to infinity. The circularity of the panoramic shots, both internal and external, function as a dwelling eye, lost in space, drifting around, curiously. Images are fugitive, repetitive, and hard for viewers to make any sense of. Trinh does not provide viewers with any cues or explanations as to where they are, so the transitions between internal and external shots feel like the repetition of a previous scene.

For instance, the first internal shot of a Moba house shows a woman in a full frame of the room bending over to prepare food across a door on the upper right side of the frame. Everything but the door is dark. When entering a Birifor house, the first shot is an empty dark room, then it moves on to a woman walking across a lit-up door, also in the upper left of a full frame of the room. It seems like there is a connection between the women across the door, and yet they are different scenes. The blurry image of the woman entering the room is intercepted by the juxtaposition of the image of a man in the same position entering the

room. It switches back to the image of the woman continuing the same gesture of entering the room past the door, only in the third shot it becomes sharp. There is an intentional puzzling of the film subjects, suggesting that they could have been anyone entering a room, anywhere (either in a Moba house or a Birifor house, the geographic location does not matter). In both scenes, the narration matches the images, by lines that clearly refer to the act of entering a house. Entering a Moba house is referred to as “entering the womb of the earth”. This is intimately connected with the line on the Birifor house, which refers to “entering and exiting as love-making”, relating an open door to fertility. In both cases, a house is compared to the body of a woman. Entering a house is understood as an intimate act, like entering a woman’s womb. This takes us back to Bachelard’s reflexions of a home: “Transposition to the human plane takes place immediately whenever a house is considered a space for cheer and intimacy, space that is supposed to condense and defend intimacy” (Bachelard 2014, p. 48).

Following this thread, the transitions from external to internal shots in this film are symbolically transposed to an act of intimacy and fertility. It has ethical implications, since it is also making viewers question if they are authorised to gaze into a home, once it is compared to a woman’s womb. In this combination of scenes, the nomadic twist is produced by the above-mentioned techniques of displacement, such as repetitions, the juxtaposition of shots of bodies entering the door, and the camera that lingers inside the home in panoramic shots that seem intrusive, secretive. Meaning is taken away from the sensual dark and curvy figures portrayed in the pro-filmic space to the imagined sensual, dark and curvy body of a woman. Nomadism is not the result of an isolated shot, or sequence-shot, but the crossroads, the intersecting point where these techniques connect and create a mental image that is not portrayed on screen.

3.2.3 Reinscribing “the Power of the False” in Ethnography

We have seen in this chapter’s introduction the main road of Anthropology and Ethnography that Trinh wants to avoid. The disclosure of “the power of the false” (Deleuze 2013 b, p. 133, Marks 2000, p. 66) challenges the fragility of truth present in documentaries about alterity. Over this section, I look at how Trinh challenges ethnography’s ambition to represent truth, falsifying narrations that are taken for scientific facts. In this subtopic, I explore different ways in which the power of the false comes undone in *Reassemblage*.

The opening of *Reassemblage* gives away the artificiality of sound, as spectators spend the first minute looking at a black screen, and listening to the sound of drumming and shouts of excitement. It is through sound that the village is introduced. No visual aid is provided. When images finally come in, the sound does not match the image of the drumming. When we finally see an image, a mid close-up shows a boy who sits on the ground and rubs his hands in what looks like some manufacturing labor, the music goes off. All we hear is ambient sound. This rupture makes viewers aware of the artificiality of the film: what we see does not illustrate what we hear, while what we hear is not a resonance of what we see. This rupture is nomadic in that it requires viewers to think of how these sounds and images connect, opening their minds to a widerange of possibilities. Both films betray the expectations of synchronicity, and encourage questions regarding the director’s choices. There is a metacritical attitude in this disjuncture, because the film is thought of as a film process, not as a falsifying perception of an unmediated register of reality.

The power of the false is challenged in several different ways in a scene where Trinh’s narration ceases and she moves on to a series of long shots that show the people in the village having a meal under the trees. There is a significant distance between the

camera and the people, but they are alternated by closer shots, mostly of the children. This contrast of distance and proximity shifts distances in a fugitive way, in which we do not feel too connected to the film subjects. The nearby angle is produced mostly in the closer shots, which are mid shots of the side of people's bodies, seldom a full body, like the toddler that takes the centre of a frame between boys who sit around him, but mostly the camera captures the relationality between them, the way they connect. There is rarely a body positioned at the centre of the frame, and if so, it is ephemeral, such as the dog that crosses the frame in front of a toddler sitting by a basket between a girl and a boy. Only the boy's and the girl's legs and part of their torsos are in the frame. The toddler looks off frame when the dog passes. Then the film cuts to a shot that looks like a continuation of the last shot, except the dog "disappears". This is a subtle way of suggesting the unnaturalness of continuity. How does the dog disappear? The illusion of continuity is explicitly revealed in the moment that the dog is no longer in the frame.

The sound in the above scene is also disconnected from the images. While the people in the village eat, all we hear is the sound of crickets, birds, and chickens and roosters. It seems like ambient noise, especially in the long-distance shots, but when it moves to closer shots, expectations are clearly betrayed by the falsifying nature of the register. Then, the sounds of the the animals cease and we look at the images over a long silent gap. We see a quick montage of large roots of trees and then it goes back to the sounds of animals when the film shifts to the image of burning trees and smoke. Artificiality is so evident, that one can imagine someone pressing play and stop and then play again on a device. Not only this do the sound shifts reveal the editing process, but they also draw attention to the shift from the roots of trees to their death sentence by a destructive fire. The fire in this scene is also a mood shift, a fire that does not cook, but kills trees. It is a reflexive shift.

When Trinh asks in a voice-over: "What can we expect from Ethnology?", we see three different images and then the screen turns black in complete silence. The

first one is a full shot of the gap in between two houses. An elderly man sits at the door of one house, while a toddler boy runs under the roof of the other house, which does not have walls. A boy sits on a chair, and all the way in the back a woman is washing something in a red bucket. At the centre of the frame there is the sunlight between the shades of the two houses, the zone of encounter where two homes meet. The second image is fire burning in the woods, in stark contrast with the harmony of the first image. It moves to a third image: a depth of field shot of one house taken from the entrance of another house where an older man sits, suggesting that the camera takes the subjective angle in the perspective of the boy who sits on the other side in the first image. When the black screen comes in, the power of the false is radically exposed, with a complete rupture in continuity. The empty screen gives spectators a pause to make sense of how the film responds to the question. The fire is what disconnects the two images in between houses, a quick disruptive interval which poses a threat to the village, in a clear analogy to *Ethnology*: it destroys the village, it breaks the harmony of a peaceful neighbourhood. On a second level, a different answer is provided by the black screen. That is to say: expect nothing from *Ethnology*. One could go a little further, deducing that the black screen is what results from the village after the fire.

While facing the black screen, the silence is broken by the sound of a man speaking in Serer language with another man and a woman. No translation is provided. In facing a black screen, their universe becomes completely foreign to us. Nothing can be understood when we see nothing and we understand nothing of what is spoken, that is unless viewers are familiar with the Serer language. This is also a way to respond to the question “what can we expect from *Ethnology*?”. We cannot make sense of what we see or hear, leading to a complete suspension of utterance. If there are no signs on the screen, we let go of “the habit of imposing a meaning to every sign” that the narrator criticises. The *Ethnology*’s habit is broken by the empty flatness of a black screen: when you see nothing, you accept that you cannot understand what you hear, it teaches humbleness.

Trinh plays with the typical signs of a woman walking with her back to the camera at the centre of a long shot at the far end of an aisle between fences made of leaves with a bucket on her head. This image is commonplace in Visual Ethnography, as in National Geographic, NGO brochures. It is a classic sign of exoticism. Then it moves to a shot of children playing in front of the camera in front of the same aisle. The film cuts to a shot of two children running from the aisle's far end towards the camera, in the opposite direction to the woman in the first image. It cuts again to another shot of three children running down the aisle towards the camera, except they are closer to the camera. Finally it goes back to a shot of a different woman walking with a bucket on her head just like in the first shot of the still camera overlooking her walk past the aisle, but she walks towards the camera. This ironic repetition plays with conventionalities of ethnographic documentaries. The reflexive line of flight that displaces the signification is precisely what happens between the first and the last image, that look like repetitions, or mirror images of the same shot. The direction in which the woman walks switches, and it is not the same woman, but the resemblance blends perfectly. But in between these similar shots of a woman walking across an aisle with a bucket on her head children play, and repeat the gesture of walking past an aisle, sometimes running, in different numbers of people, in different distances from the camera. It feels like a mockery of the fetishised image of exotic women walking with a bucket on their heads. That which walks to and fro each side of the aisle is an everyday life, it is just a path where a multiplicity of people walk the same walk, like a sidewalk that connects two places. The children are not so different from children anywhere else in the world. Repetition displaces the flow of signification, from the unusual to the familiar, and also brings awareness of the falsifying narratives that treat these women as exotic.

Through a critical usage of film strategies that displace viewers' expectations and play with signs, the power of the false puts in evidence the metacriticism, that is, that Trinh's critique of ethnography and ethnology are not just textual, but mostly articu-

lated in form and content. It is a critical means of telling a story, by “untelling” (deconstructing) an Ethnographer’s tale. By pointing the finger at the falsifying narrative of mainstream ethnography, Trinh switches the angle that tells the story of the Sereer people to what can be understood as a nearby position, a partial angle that refuses to close the chains of signification and use a cinematic apparatus to deliver the film as “a flat anthropological fact” (*Reassemblage* 1982).

3.3 Conclusions

To sum up, this chapter shows the way in which Trinh challenges ethnographic storytelling and visual representation of alterity, first, from a theoretical perspective, as a means of resolving a debate that was at issue among ethnographers during the period when *Reassemblage* and *Naked Spaces* were filmed. I began by discussing Trinh’s contribution to this debate in the field, which poses ethical questions on whether ethnographers are authorised to speak about tribal people, and how they can escape the trap of presenting ethnographic as scientific data.

Over the second part, I show how this deconstruction is produced in the films. In a critical dismantling of a male ethnographer’s gaze, the pleasures associated with looking are nomadically displaced. The look is defetishised when viewers see that naked breasts are not so different from the Western image of a mother nurturing a baby. The play with angles and fragmented gazes puzzles and challenges the look by bringing them closer to the reality of women in different cultures. So, I question the aesthetics of circularity in space, and how bodies connect to space creating a poetic cosmicity in Trinh’s aesthetic, and again how space and architecture create a poetic body of a woman. Here, the nomadic flight is taken to the poetic imagination created by an aesthetics that evolves from a certain geometric dwell-

ling in *Naked Spaces: Living is Round*, exploring a spacial intimacy invaded by ethnography. Finally, I question how Trinh challenges the mainstream ethnographic means of storytelling by putting its narrative schemes of representation in discredit and nomadically shifting the angle towards a story told from a nearby position.

In this chapter, I argue that Trinh's radical critique of ethnography is nomadic in that it shifts the flow of signification, by connecting content and form through plot disruptions, decentering, disjuncture of sounds and images, repetitions, a poetic appeal to roundness, and, finally, to a possibility of telling a story in another way. If reflexive fissures and deviations of pathways require viewers to make sense of what they are seeing and hearing, having to pause for a second and establish their own imaginary connections about the life of tribal peoples on screen makes infinite the possibilities for interpretation. In speaking nearby, only glimpses and perceptions prevail, like partial impressions, and nothing more. The politics of speaking nearby provides us with strong foundation to approaching Trinh's conceptualisation of the border event on the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Crossing Borders of Alterity, Unravelling Veils

“Since I’ve always worked at the crossroads of several genres and categories, it’s true I’ve often been attracted to what one could call border terms, border texts, border sounds, border images” (Trinh 1999, p. 4). Border-crossing is a political act, but also an aesthetic act insofar as Trinh’s films transit across categories, taking on nomadic approaches that are not easily locatable. Through crossing borders, she challenges hegemonic positions of power – white, male, Western, bourgeois, etc. In “Women, Native, Other” (Trinh 1989), Trinh questions a canonical voice of truth and authenticity that produces discourses about women of the Third World, without giving these women the opportunity to define themselves in their own terms. In this book, she defends a means of challenging these discourses:

From jagged transitions between the analytical and the poetical to the disruptive, always shifting fluidity of a headless and bottomless storytelling, what is exposed in this text is the inscription and description of a non-unitary female subject of colour through an engagement, and therefore, also disengagement with masters’ discourses (Trinh 1989, p. 43).

Storytelling can thus be defied by the voicing of these subjects that remain unheard, which are not all the same and cannot, by any means, be represented by stereotypes that are vertically imposed through the masters’ discourses. In her theoretical book, Trinh provides us with clues as to how she is interested in the possibilities of engagements and disengagements with canonical discourses to produce narratives that shift away from as-

sections that are validated as scientific facts. Nevertheless, she uses specific strategies for de-territorialising the commonplaces of these discourses and constantly tries to resituate them in critical postcolonial perspectives. Rosi Braidotti makes an important point in affirming that:

Margins and centres are relocated so as to destabilise each other in parallel, albeit dissymmetrical ways. The main objective is, through nomadic interventions, to deterritorialise dogmatic and hegemonic exclusionary power structures at the heart of scattered hegemonic centres of the contemporary global world. (Braidotti 2011, p. 19)

In this chapter, I look at how the representation of Third World women subjects have been challenged and deterritorialised, in order to make way for the emergence of a cinema in which the avatars of representation regarding alterity are rendered nomadic, that is, the images that represent non-Western subjects cannot be reterritorialised, at least in terms of hierarchical and fixed images of Otherness. Thus, attention is driven toward the borders between Us and Them, Self and Other, the West and the rest, and how these lines are defied, blurred, or displaced in *Tale of Love* (1995).

Tale of Love (1995) is a feature film in which the protagonist, Kieu, is a Vietnamese immigrant who works as a freelance writer and as a pornographic model, and whose story is connected with the Vietnamese national poem. The film is about the woman's struggle to survive as a working Vietnamese immigrant living in the United States, her inner crisis facing a culture clash, and the connections she knits with the people around her. The story of an immigrant's everyday life is intimately connected with the protagonist of Vietnam's national poem.

The poem "Tale of Kieu" (Nguyen 2019, p. 2) tells of a woman who has to endure several turmoils and abuse coming from inside and outside the US borders. The woman recreates a motherland, a nation that resists and pays the sacrifices in the name of a

greater good: love. This love is precisely what Kieu deals with in the film, along with the issues of having a split identity: being neither fully Vietnamese, nor fully American. If love is the higher purpose, then what is this love that demands sacrifices for a nation which is always the subject of foreign gazes? What is this love for a special someone who constantly attempts to push your personal boundaries? Is love even possible? Questions of love and voyeurism are raised in parallel stories of the two Kieus, or perhaps of Kieu, the storyteller, who lends herself to yet another love story: a story within a story.

The story of the exile immigrant relates to a negotiation and a problematisation of positions regarding a Vietnamese migrant struggling to survive and interact abroad. First, I go back to an earlier engagement with territory, and the burden of (neo)colonialism which is central in the manifesto of Third Cinema (Solanas&Getino 1969). Third Cinema is a radical reconfiguration of the film process, from production to distribution, in an effort to engage film (and its screening) in the political arena, with a particular focus on the idea of national resistance to a “neocolonial oppression” (Ibid). I go back in film history to look at the unfolding of national identities that stem from Third Cinema, which are interrogated in these two films on radically political terms.

The geopolitical context of the film I examine is posterior to that of the 1960s, when the Third Cinema manifesto was written. Back then, some colonies were yet to be emancipated from colonialism and Latin America had undergone military dictatorships with the support of the CIA, in the midst of the Cold War. Nevertheless, colonialism has left its remnants and has taken on new forms. According to Trinh:

While the era of colonisation has been officially proclaimed to have practically reached an end, invasion, occupation, disruption and relocation – in other words, colonisation by other means – continue to set the stage for unending aggression and destruction. A state of urgency has become the routine (Trinh 2005, p. 5).

This “state of urgency”, produced in the aftermath of colonialism, became more drastic after 11 September, 2001, which occurred after the release of *Tale of Love* (1995). I am not concerned with the nature of (Neo)Colonialism, but with its influence in the production of national identities and how they resonate in the act of border-crossing and in the spaces of encounter, which I use in my reading of the film. Trinh ponders:

In the United States, September Eleven has dramatically changed the stakes for those caught in the deep tangle of immigration laws. As immigration reform falters, the focus obsessively returns to militarisation of the border and to advances of civil and military technologies that either have no interest in democracy or make a fool of it. Success in border battles are being measured in proportion to the gain in violence... In the quasi-neurotic state of self-inducing fear, every immigrant and voyager of colour is a potential terrorist (Trinh 2005, p. 5).

Although the plot in *Tale of Love* was prior to the experience of the above-mentioned obsessive surveillance and accentuated means of targeting immigrants from non-Western countries, the film tackles analogous issues of immigration and alterity in the United States. I am particularly interested in the complex issue of belonging to one’s land, the relation between the foreigner, the newcomer, and the local people, and the boundaries that may arise between them – in both a physical and an intercultural way. What displacements may come about between the familiar and the non-familiar, the foreigner in a strange land, and the foreignness within oneself, with identities that split infinitely. These identity conflicts are anchored in a specific geopolitical context, in which specific power relations are at stake. Borders and boundaries are politically driven, and they bring back the ghosts of the colonial conflicts represented in Third Cinema films such as *The Hour of the Furnaces* (1968), *Memoires of Underdevelopment* (1968), *Blood of the Condor* (1969). Trinh argues:

At a time when the rhetoric of blurred boundaries and of boundless access is at its most impressive flourish, the most regressive walls of separation and discrimination, of hatred and fear, of humiliation and powerlessness continue to be raised around the world to divide and conquer, exacerbating existing conflicts as one world, one nation, one community, one group continue to be dramatically raised against another (Trinh 2005, p. 5).

The contemporary apparent flexibility of borders and boundaries which produces an illusion of a free-flowing transnational mobility does not account for the exclusion and segregation of multiple marginalised people, mostly non-Whites. The act of crossing borders remains a challenge for those who do not hold the passports that allow them free-entry. As Braidotti puts it:

In a... paradoxical twist, ... the deterritorialisation induced by the hypermobility of capitalism and the forms of migration and human mobility they entail, instead of challenging the hegemony of nation-states, strengthen their hold not only over territory and social space, but also over identity and cultural memory... Reductive reterritorializations form an integral part of the resurgence of nationalism as a knee-jerk reaction against globalised mobility. Centerless, but highly controlled in its all-pervasive global surveillance system, advanced capitalism installs a political economy of fear and suspicion, not only among the new geopolitical blocks that have emerged at the end of the cold war, but also within them (Braidotti 2011, p. 18).

It takes a nomadic approach to challenge these borders/boundaries, for the border patrols are caught in politics that determine who is granted access, closing their doors to those whom are not granted mobility: the have nots, the people of colour, the marginalised. These asymmetrical power structures are centred around the idea of nationalism, the

beloved territory where not every subject is welcome. Globalisation promises "free-circulation", but the term "free" technically applies to merchandise only, not to humans. In order to challenge the borders, nomadism must also challenge the binaries that oppose those who are granted access and those who are not, and this may very well apply to all notions of Self/Other that we may arrive at, for, as we have seen in the first chapter, borders are not just physical spaces, but spaces of thought.

Borders of thought are not mere abstractions of borders that require stamped passports to allow entry. I am taking this to a socio-cultural level which is crossed by the same exclusionary politics of nationalism. Processes of differentiation and hierarchisation go beyond physical borders. Instead, they operate within borders, displacing the latter that determines the centre and the periphery, for there are peripheries that inhabit the centre. As Braidotti puts it: "In the contemporary political context, difference functions as a negative term indexed on a hierarchy of values governed by binary oppositions: it conveys power relations and structural patterns of exclusion at the national, regional, provincial, or even more local level" (Ibid., p. 17).

The boundary is an event that is inscribed in the bodies of those marked by processes of differentiation, the invisible borders that build walls between unequally power-situated bodies. They are foreigners within. These issues take on a particular form in migration:

The world one knows is the world one sees around oneself – whose limited and hierarchised access is protected with ever-higher and mightier walls. What lies beyond is often thought of as fable. And although living in two dualistic worlds – all located in the very same place as where one is – inevitably ascribes silence. Not from elsewhere, but more specifically, from an elsewhere within here. If those who stay tend to meet such an inability to speak with great disappointment – as a

loss, a lack to be filled, a deficiency in need of rehabilitation and (re)integration – those who leave and risk in multiplicity, often tend to go on cold for a while, living life as it comes, fasting verbally and linguistically, before learning how to speak again, anew (Trinh 2005, p. 2).

The silent introspection of a migrant's subjectivity is endorsed by Kieu, the Vietnamese-American woman who reflects over the multiple layers of love and acceptance. What to make of these wounds? The film articulates open possibilities of deterritorialising the burden of a wounded nation, a means of decolonising the lines they have previously crossed in the experience of exile. She traces, aesthetically, lines of flight that go to and from; so, in this chapter, I investigate borders in terms of the “elsewhere that lies within” and the memory of the wound, tracing lines of flight that take them elsewhere in space and time. Over the following subsection, I look at anti-colonialism beyond Third Cinema to create a suspicion around the transnational in the quest for a border-crossing, aimed at Gloria Anzaldúa's *la encrucijada* (crossroads) and Homi Bhabha's hybrid third spaces; that is, spaces of cultural encounter that remain open to narratives that account for the missing people.

4.1 Crossing Borders of (Neo)Colonialism: Spaces of Encounters

The transnational move, present in the manifesto in which Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino coin the term “Third Cinema” (Solanas and Getino 1997), opens up to a wide rhizome of new cinemas that take this transnational further, articulating displacement in both content and form. In this section, I begin with Third Cinema as far as it draws on anti-colonialism, revolutionary/transformative aesthetics, mainly concerning territorial issues related to notions of home, homeland, exile, and diaspora. In “The Ghostlife of

Third Cinema, Asian American Film and Video” (2009), Glen M. Mimura highlights the importance of Third Cinema in Asian American cinema practice and discourse.:

[In the] post-1970’s era... Asian American cinematic discourse becomes politically, aesthetically and institutionally self-aware as Asian American, and on the difference that Third Cinema makes in the dialectical process: Asian American media discourse, then, as Third Cinema’s latter day articulation, but also as its critique and as a departure from it. (Mimura, 2009, p. 26)

Mimura looks at Third Cinema as a touchstone that made way for a later independent, experimental scene, which is not completely disengaged with it. She notices how Trinh’s cinema’s engagements with Third Cinema, whose “formative sources are evident and explicitly engaged throughout her work, filmic and written” have not been given much attention. Trinh’s affinity with Third Cinema involves an opposition to (Neo)Colonialism as well as an aesthetic detour from mainstream cinema’s structure of power. One strategy that is present in these two cinemas is the use of metacritical discourses. Through the voice of the narrator, she explicitly questions what it means to make a film on Senegal in *Reassemblage*(1982). On top of it all, these films connect in a perspective of refusing the masters’ discourses. This refusal, however, can radically displace the latter in terms of form. I take this as a powerful asset to reflecting upon Trinh’s films because I agree with Mimura when she claims that:

The question of Third Cinema, of its existential and historical status, is vitally relevant... because so much of what we conceive as Asian American film and video, and how we understand its cultural politics was inspired and enabled by its historical development. (Mimura 2009, p. 28)

My aim is to capture the multiple processes of becoming that stem from Third Cinema to diasporic, exilic and nomadic cinemas as a means to approach Trinh T.

Minh-ha's two films with a particular attention to the political act of border-crossing. What are the spaces of intercultural hybridity and multiple encounters that blur boundaries and that constitute Trinh's nomadic film aesthetics?

I begin with a political movement stemming from Latin America, which goes transnational by using cinema – “the master's tool” – in an attempt to challenge the masters' discourses of Third World subjects. A scene in *Hora de Los Hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*), 1968, shows a barefoot boy running along a railroad track begging for money. There is a girl blowing bubbles with her chewing gum inside the train, completely oblivious to the boy's despair. The chewing gum can be an allusion to the Americanisation of Latin American culture: the imperialist interference through consumer goods that emerged in Latin America. The camera stands still, the boy runs fast, while the train slowly departs, leaving the boy behind as it gains speed. Who gets to board the train? Clearly, that boy does not. The film is about the people who are not given a seat, that is, people who do not hold this privilege. It is also about these empty seats. The missing people, those of the third world, who provide the fuel to a manifesto that is eager to decolonise cinema, serve as a touchstone for further reflections on postcolonial cinemas.

La Hora de los Hornos is a film written and directed by Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas, that embodied the manifesto ‘Towards A Third Cinema’, written a year after the film was made (1969). The manifesto defends a cinema that accounts for the anti-imperialist struggles across the Third World, engaged in a process of cultural “decolonisation” of the people who go missing in mainstream film narratives (Solanas and Getino, 1997, p. 33). It is a cinema that articulates the “deconstruction of the image that neocolonialism has created”, and the “construction of a throbbing, living reality which recaptures truth in any of its expressions” (Ibid., p.46). According to Solanas and Getino, a Second Cinema offered an alternative to the First (commercial, mainstream). Indeed, the Second Cinema en-

gages a creative avant-garde Cinema that challenges conventional standardised cinematic language – such as the French “Nouvelle Vague”, “Expression Cinema” and the Brazilian “Cinema Novo” (Ibid., pp. 40-42).

They point out that these “new cinemas” operate within the boundaries of the system. The high price of film production and distribution according to the market is quite a challenge for independent filmmakers. The system determines the film’s “standard duration, hermetic structures that are born and die on the screen” (Ibid., p. 42), obeying the ready-made formulas defined by the market. Solanas and Getino define Third Cinema as “a cinema outside and against the System...a cinema of liberation” (Ibid., p. 43). These strategies of the *Guerrilla* filmmaker are engaged in the “democratisation” of the film production process, displacing and rearticulating “the role of the producer, team-work, tools, details, etc” (Ibid., p.50). The *Guerrilla* filmmaker holds the camera and the projector like Che Guevara holds a gun in Sierra Maestra: “The camera is the inexhaustible expropriator of image-weapons; the projector, a gun that can shoot 24 frames per second” (Ibid., p.50).

The missing Third World people attempt to find a voice and take their narratives into their own hands. Multiple voices speak from different subject-positions. Several layers of exclusion complicate the picture, such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, etc. However limited these counter-narratives can be, they destabilise the voice of truth and authenticity present in the masters’ discourse over the native Others. When interviewed by Sidsel Nelund on whether her work connected to Latin America, Trinh’s response was quite vague:

Latin America (a much-contested label!) remains very special in my learning itinerary. I travelled to Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru right after I graduated from the university. It was then, literally a journey into the unfamiliar, my first contact with another Third World context, in which I encountered dire border problems with my identity papers and was made aware of the intense difficulties

of travelling as a Vietnamese. I also got to enter the culture through the notion of 'Third Cinema' and the rich body of films and filmmakers gathered around it, some of whom I'd come to meet later on in film festivals and conferences (Trinh 2013, p.85).

While Third Cinema's manifesto tackles the *who* and the *what* of film production, another manifesto from 1969, also in Argentina, signed by Julia Garcia Espinosa, aims at the *how* of filmmaking, taking form as a primary concern. "For An Imperfect Cinema" (Espinosa, 1997, pp.71-82), calls for a popularly rooted cinema that questions the means necessary for making a film possible, but does not give any answers as to what it should be. Instead, it defends that films should leave room for viewers to interpret it according to their own subjective and objective conditions. Espinosa's "imperfect cinema" is a counterpoint against a technically perfect cinema invested in "quality and technique (Espinosa 1997, p.82) served for commercial purposes, whose mastery is attributed to mainstream Western cinemas. He proposes a "new poetics for the cinema" (Ibidem, p.79) which is "committed" to and includes "the people" in the process of filmmaking. Just like Solanas and Getino, he is worried about the absence of the people in all stages of production, treating the masses as passive consumers. The poetics of a technically imperfect cinema, however, gives way to thinking Trinh's resort to errors, subtle changes of scale, the introduction of screens within a screen, such as you may find in, for example, *Fourth Dimension* (2001), when the subtitles "Machine Time" come up and the screen swipes and shrinks. The screen within the plain black screen floats, drawing attention to the artifice of the film editing. It is quite a metacritical discourse, which gives viewers the impression of an unfinished material, and, in some ways, imperfect. The imperfect cinema advocates for a less professional cinema, as opposed to the cinema that requires the ultimate high-tech apparatus and technical mastery of equipment, but one that is more inclusive: committed to Third World people and produced by them with limited resources.

This commitment to the people, present in both manifestos, seeks the missing link in mainstream cinema, whereas Deleuze later questions if “the people are missing” (Deleuze 2013 b, p.216), or *seem* to be absent, even though their oppressed presence is undeniable. This quest for a missing link is mainly referring to Third World political cinemas dated around the 1960s and 1970s. This is how Deleuze approaches these cinemas regarding the disappearance of a people:

This acknowledgement of a people who are missing is not a renunciation of political cinema, but on the contrary the new basis on which it is founded, in the third world and for minorities. Art, and especially cinematographic art, must take part in this task: not that of addressing a people, which is presupposed already there, but of contributing to the invention of a people. The moment the master, or the colonizer proclaims ‘There have never been people here’, the missing people are becoming, they invent themselves, in shanty towns and camps, or in ghettos, in the new conditions of struggle to which a necessarily political art must contribute (Deleuze 2013 b, p. 217).

For Deleuze, the people must invent themselves by all creative means. Cinema could potentially articulate the process of becoming, of filling in this subjective absence that is attributed to a people. What is missing is not a cinematographic representation of a people, but instead, the possibility of people to represent themselves. In this sense, Deleuze and Espinosa’s manifestos go hand in hand, for this imperfect cinema specifically addresses this missing link: integrating people in the process of filmmaking. This attempt to fill in the gap left by the absent element of “a people” present in both manifestos is committed to a larger project. They advocate a revolution orchestrated through this cinematic apparatus and the collective work of the cadres/filmmakers, which readdresses the role of cinema to a consciousness-raising level. It is self-reflexive not only in terms of genre and subject matter, but

throughout the entire production process, seen quite evidently in all of Trinh's films. The film process is rendered visible through the revelation of an editing table (2004), the aforementioned artificial tricks that reduce the screen of the train departure to a playful square moving around on a black screen, hence exposing the manipulation of images inherent to the film process (2001). Trinh's appeal to the "imperfect" creates fissures in the narratives by revealing that there is someone controlling the story. Nevertheless, she is reluctant to build oppositional discourses. In "Outside Inside Out", Trinh argues that:

The question is (...) not of 'correcting' the images whites have of non-whites ["Imperfect Cinema" / Espinosa], nor of reacting to the colonial territorial mind by simply reversing the situation and setting up an opposition that at best, will hold up a mirror to the Master's activities and preoccupations (...) The question, rather, is that of tracking down and exposing the Voice of Power and Censorship whenever and in whichever side it appears. Essential difference allows those who rely on it to rest reassuringly on its gamut of fixed notions. Any mutation in identity, in essence, in regularity, and even in physical place poses a problem, if not a threat, in terms of classification and control. If you can't locate the other, how are you to locate yourself? (Trinh 1991, p. 73)

Trinh does not interpret the West as a monolith, but as a as a complex, rhizomatic set of relations of Power where outside and inside intersect, making it difficult to set out a filmic battleground between two fronts: the national versus the imperialist/coloniser, the proletariat versus the bourgeois, the feminist versus the sexist male figure. To enter the realm of Trinh Minh-ha's films, we must suspend these binary formulas and start thinking in terms of how these struggles resonate intimately, within the Self. As discussed in the previous chapter, Trinh pushes the limit of the border to infinity, that is to say, the border that separates one being from another. Class struggles, anti-imperialist struggles and gender strug-

gles are quite expressive in her work, but not in such a direct and revolutionary way as in Third Cinema. On the other hand, Trinh's films question and criticise the canons of power and domination that are implicit in the ideas of the national, the social, and so on.

The cinema deeply engaged in the struggle for national liberation becomes more complicated, since First and Third worlds intermingle with fluxes of migration. Ella Shohat stresses that "there is no Third World in Trinh T. Minh-ha's pithy formulation, without its First World, and no First World without its Third." She then adds: "The First-World / Third World struggle takes place not only between nations but also within them" (Shohat 2006, p. 47) This new cinemas that may stem from and quickly detach from Third Cinema and their repercussions seal a rupture with the idea of a national emancipation, insofar as the nation is caught in the criss-crossing of multiple trajectories. Shohat tackles this shift:

While remaining anti-colonialist, these experimental films call attention to the diversity of experiences within and across nations. Since colonialism had simultaneously aggregated communities fissured by glaring cultural differences and separated communities marked by equally glaring commonalities, these films suggest, many Third-World nation-states were highly contradictory entities... With the expulsion of the colonial intruder fully completing the process of national becoming, the post-nationalist films call attention to the fault lines of gender, class, ethnicity, region, partition, migration and exile. Many of the films explore the complex identities generated by exile - from one's own geography, from one's own history, from one's own body - within innovative narrative strategies. (Shohat 2006, p. 48)

By the same token, Trinh articulates her political position not in a clear and direct filmic language, but through a subtle poetics of these conflicts that do not deliver an unequivocal message. With her lack of closure and abstraction, she produces inter-

vals for open interpretation. When I personally asked Trinh¹ about the meanings in her films, and the struggles I had to interpret them, she replied that there is no such thing as a right or a wrong interpretation of her films. She leaves room for openness, through fissures through which meaning flows and takes its course, unravelling many layers of complexity.

Homi K. Bhabha's reflection upon Third Cinema is situated in a frontier space between the national and the transnational, at the intersection between social and interpersonal relations in film. He claims that categories are more hybrid and mixed than monolithic compartments used to classify films. By analysing Trinh T. Minh-ha, I am interested in seeing how film can represent alterity and conflicts between Self and Other. Bhabha's conception of categories as being fluid enables us to approach Otherness beyond the opposite side of the border. The Other may inhabit national grounds, they may live among us, or even within us. I would like to analyse Trinh's representation of Otherness from a hybrid, non-binary and heterogenic perspective. Bhabha understands that film critics should be careful not to be so quick as to situate Third Cinema's conflicts as overly simplistic binarisms within social categories. In "The Commitment to Theory" (1989), he poses the following questions:

Are we trapped in a politics of struggle where the representation of social antagonisms and historical contradictions can take no other form than a binarism of theory versus politics? Can the aim of freedom of knowledge be the simple inversion of the relation of oppressor and oppressed, margin and periphery, negative image and positive image? Is our own way out of such dualism the espousal of an implacable oppositionality or the inversion of an originally counter-myth of radical purity? Must the project of our liberationist aesthetics be forever part of a totalising vision of Being and History that seeks to transcend the contradictions and

¹ This took place in the meetings we had at the Gender and Women's Study Department at U.C. Berkeley between 2013 and 2014.

ambivalences that constitute the very structure of human subjectivity and its systems of cultural representation? (Bhabha 1989, p. 111)

These questions are relevant once these oppositions fail to acknowledge the overture of a border space, which he calls a “space of translation”, that takes over the battle grounds of “new political objects” (Bhabha 1989, p. 111). What he questions is precisely the role of the film critic, which he accuses of being captured in terms of master-slave oppositions, oversimplifying the hybridity inherent to this border space of signification that is “neither the one nor the Other” (Bhabha 1989, p. 117). The twist from a space of negotiation of meaning to an oversimplification of the latter, falling back to the trap of binarism, casts away the high hopes for political change, or, as Bhabha puts it, “the very forms of our recognition of the ‘moment’ of politics” (Bhabha 1989, p. 17). Rather, it is a process of articulation (of meanings), in which theory is knitted together with threads that might not seem compatible at first, in a continuous exercise of finding points of proximity and allegiances that challenge borders. Bhabha understands that “‘position’ is always a process of translation and transference of meaning” (Bhabha 1989, p.119).

Bhabha's idea of hybridity resonates with Gloria Anzaldúa's *mestiza consciousness*, the clashing space of *la frontera*, the borderlands, a consciousness that emerges from a “racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination”, a malleability, a mutability with a “hybrid progenity” (Anzaldúa 1999, p. 99) where races, cultures and universes meet and cross borders, leaning towards the creation of a culture resulting from multiple encounters. These borderlands, *la encrucijada* (the crossroads) is where hybridity plays out its alchemy across and between cultures and systems of meanings:

A chicken is being sacrificed
at a crossroads, a simple mound of earth
a mud shrine for *Eshu*,

Yoruba god of indeterminacy,
 who blesses her choice of path.
 She begins her journey.
 (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 80)

Just as in Anzaldúa, moving across borders in Bhabha's scheme is a "critical act" (Bhabha 1989, p. 119). Both Bhabha and Anzaldúa advocate ambiguity, ambivalence, for a "third space" where meanings are shared between different cultures, beyond simplistic binary oppositions and fixed boundaries. Bhabha asks:

How do we construct a politics based on such a displacement of affect or strategic-elaboration (Foucault), where political positioning is ambivalently grounded in an acting out of political fantasies that require repeated passages across the differential boundaries between one symbolic bloc *and another*, and the positions available to each? (Bhabha 1989, p.122)

The non-unitary will of a people complicates the "agency of representation", in which images and symbols interpolate. The synchronicity between what we see and what we hear is broken, the very frame of the film cracks. Bhabha asks if we should "fix" this crack, deconstructing stereotypes that are immediately assumed to represent Third World people – for instance, the hyper-sexualised *mulata*, the ignorant aborigine, the submissive Asian woman, the terrorist Arab – producing a necessary crisis in order to rethink filmic representation. Stereotypes operate as mediators: they communicate differences by simplifying them, by rendering them impotent, powerless. The very power of self-representation is taken away from the people on the screen. One of the most explicit experiments of deconstruction in Trinh's cinema is in *Reassemblage* (1982), when she shows close ups of women's breasts with peculiar angles of women's body parts, and eventually demystifies the commodified or exotic native women's breasts, often seen in commercial visual ethnographic magazines, by

switching the gaze to trivial shots and other close ups that desexualise breasts and accentuate motherhood, with shots of mothers carrying children. What seemed peculiar to our Western eyes becomes our own experience of nurturing a child. This montage of shots from different angles does not allow the viewer to fixate on an image for too long, as if the point of view was constantly shifting, blurring boundaries between the West and the rest.

When the West sets the paradigm of representation of alterity, several strategies are employed to embody this difference, which is always in relation to this vast cultural umbrella known as the West. The West is a paradigm rather than a mere point on the map. This paradigm is what determines the difference, the distance, and the metric of development of the multiple shades of alterity that are portrayed in films about Third world people. On the other hand, what Bhabha demonstrates is that the paradigm of the West may also include self-criticism and may even resort to deconstructive strategies that reflect upon this “gaze” (Mulvey 1999, p.837) traversed by colonialism and imperialism.

As seen on the previous chapter, I am borrowing the notion of “gaze”, or “cinematic gaze” from Laura Mulvey, to whom cinema combines the “pleasure of looking at another person as an erotic object” with an “identification process” (Mulvey 1999, pp.837-838). The (artificially produced) powerful look attributed to spectators invades the intimacy of the female roles in the film, hence reinforcing a long-instituted power, that is to say, Patriarchy. Mulvey points out that classic Hollywood cinema produces, controls and explores this gaze by “playing on the tension between film as controlling the dimension of time”, through the unravelling of a sequence-narrative and the editing process; and “film as controlling the dimension of space” (Mulvey 1999, p.843), produced by camera angles and post-production. As a result of this manipulation of a time-space configuration, she argues that, “cinematic codes create a gaze, a world, and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire” (Ibid). Anti-Colonial film narratives that stem from Third Cinema add

another layer to this gaze: not only is it a male gaze that looks down upon female subjects on screen, but it also intersects with a colonial gaze that looks down on Third World people.

So far we have been familiarised with the concepts of an “ethnographic gaze” as employed by Fatimah Tobing Tony (2001, p. 23) and E. Ann Kaplan’s “imperial gaze”, (1997, p. 63), but let us look further into examples of how these gazes are linked to stereotypes in specific neo-colonial relations. The codes of a colonial gaze can be portrayed in multiple ways, but they often tend to highlight non-Western women in positions of fragility and available for erotic pleasure. For instance, while looking at Singaporean wedding photography, the visual sociologist Terence Hang (2015, p. 61) shows describes how the bodies of women are depicted as hyper-feminine, romanticised, and hyper-sexualised by a colonial gaze. He claims:

...The colonial gaze was not just about objectively and scientifically define a colonised individual as racially inferior (although it is a major aspect). It was also about creating a veil of romanticism and sentimentality that masks more sinister stereotyping of racism and prejudice... In contemporary society, the racialised and ethnicised colonial gaze still exists, but a gendered colonial gaze has become increasingly apparent as well. (Hang 2015, p. 62)

In “Women and the Colonial Gaze” , Tamara Hunt (2002, p. 1) observes how this colonial gaze is knit with a complex net of cultural layers, between multiple relations regarding to the specific constructions of nationalisms and processes of colonisation. She defines this gaze as “the lens through which the ‘Other’ is interpreted and subsequently depicted.” She goes on to saying that “the representations and the composition of the interpretive lens reflect multiple layers of power relations that are more nuanced than simple relations between the coloniser and the colonised.” (Ibid., p.3) The objectifying gaze that Mulvey theo-

rised in classic Hollywood cinema becomes more complex when it intersects with a Colonialist-type gaze, which reassures Eurocentrism as the metric of pleasure, as well as a Self-image projected by the hero, the protagonist, that intimately connects with the spectator, mediated by a camera, that potentially makes them see the world according to these pre-conditioned eyes. Not only is this “gaze” gendered in mainstream cinema, but it is structured in power and representation symbols decided by canonical structures, coming across major conceptions of the hero’s prototype as a male, virile, heterosexual, white, Anglo-European adventurer on a quest. This Herculean “man with a task” can be easily represented by the coloniser, or the white man marching West on a conquest, which involves men versus nature, white “civilised” men versus “wild” native peoples, and so on. The task of an independent filmmaker, for Mulvey, would be to break down this gaze. To put it in Mulvey’s words:

The first blow against the monolithic accumulation of traditional film conventions (already undertaken by radical film-makers) is to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate detachment. There is no doubt that this destroys the satisfaction, pleasure and privilege of the 'invisible guest', and highlights how film has depended on voyeuristic active/passive mechanisms. (Mulvey 1999, p.844)

For Bhabha, the challenge consists in breaking this paradigm within the process of translation, where meanings travel across languages in which the cultural and political manifest and communicate. In the midst of this process, a certain level of openness is solicited: one shall open up to an understanding of the message that is transmitted. How could one reinforce colonial authority while trying to establish communication? So, Bhabha elucidates:

The process of translation is the opening up of another contentious political and cultural site of the heart of colonial ‘representation’. Here the world of divine au-

thority is deeply flawed by the assertion of the indigenous site, and in the very practice of domination the language of the master becomes hybrid – neither the one thing nor the other. The incalculable colonised subject – half acquiescent, half oppositional, always untrustworthy – produces an unresolvable problem for the very address of colonial cultural authority (Bhabha 1989:126).

Language is hence a site of hybridity, where power can potentially be deconstructed. This sphere of translation is what Bhabha calls “the third space of enunciation” (Bhabha 1989, p.130) formed in a non-binary process, in which ambivalence is a key ingredient in the production of meaning. Ambivalence dismantles the illusion of the lore of culture represented as a broad, disclosed system. In this “third space of enunciation”, cultural identity is conceived as a hybrid sense of reference, as opposed to a fixed location or an immutable condition that determines the being in the world. Conceiving identity in a liquid stage allows us to understand the mixing of ingredients that interfere in the process. Even when these ingredients are apparently contradictory or oppositional, there is room for the emergence of new allegiances and combinations that have not been thought of before. For analytical purposes, this hybrid sensitivity is more open to ambiguity and interpellations of traditions, layers of time, and agency in film analysis. Old traditions are re-signified and brought back as residual elements of what was apparently left behind; the present is a constant negotiation between multiple agents and conceptions, which include the future. The future could be accessed in the core of this process, which inhabits the “third space of enunciation” (Bhabha 1989). As Bhabha puts it:

It is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherited originality or ‘purity’ of

cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity (Bhabha 1989, p.130).

The indeterminateness of the “space of the subject(s) of enunciation” (Bhabha 1989: 130), to borrow Bhabha’s words, is what gives way to political shifts. One cannot represent this Third Space. Bhabha describes it as the space that engenders “the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meanings and symbols of culture have no primordial meaning or fixity; that even the same sign can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricised, and read anew” (Bhabha 1989, p.130). He borrows from Frantz Fanon (Fanon 2004, p.2) the idea that, in breaking with the stability of the government and institutions, the agents of political change embody a certain hybridity (Bhabha 1989, p.131) which transit in the intermittence present in the act of translating and negotiating meanings. This space is specifically useful when applied to third world cinema, due to the fact that agency can be at work articulating revolutionary positions in the midst of the split in translation-enunciation between cultures. Hybridity inhabits this space that Deleuze calls the “*intermezzo*” (Deleuze 1986, p.5), the space in between fixed locations and determinable categories, which is also a nomadic space par excellence. According to Bhabha, it is in this Third Space that the spheres of belonging to a nation or to a national culture, or of questioning this sense of belonging, can be reflected upon, given their non-fixed trait.

Gina Marchetti later tackles Bhabha for failing to demonstrate how his theory between First and Third World discourses relates to the realm of films. As she observes, “he does not mention a single specific film text in his entire essay” (Marchetti 1991/1992, p.52). Indeed, Bhabha engages very little with specific films in his text on Third Cinema, which makes it seem disconnected, but he is the author that best captures a sense of hybridity that could be used to interpret the in-betweenness of the space where meanings are negotiated across cultures.

Just like in Bhabha's "Third Space of Enunciation", Hamid Naficy situates a notion of *accented cinema* in the in-between spaces, as a process of articulation between "local" and "global" assemblages. He explains: "Accented films are interstitial because they are created astride and in the interstices of social formations and cinematic practices" (Naficy 2001, p.4). In the hybridity of these gaps, the notions of home can seem distant and then again, rather present, as a reference to which these cinemas relate. That is to say, cinema is exilic *in relation to* the notion of a home where it has been taken away from in experiencing and/or representing the idea of exile: a home that one cannot go back to. In diasporic cinema, there is a dispersion from home. For Naficy, good accented cinemas are the ones which:

(...) Signify and signify upon the conditions both of exile and diaspora, and of cinema. They signify and signify upon exile and diaspora by expressing, allegorising, commenting upon, and critiquing the home and the lost societies and cultures, and the deterritorialised conditions of filmmakers. They signify and signify upon cinematic traditions by means of their artisanal and collective production modes, their aesthetics and politics of smallness and imperfection, and their narrative strategies that cross generic boundaries and undermine cinematic realism (Naficy 2001, pp.4-5).

As opposed to the notion of nomadic where there is a sense of detachment from home, these films are reflexive of the home, the national, regional or local traditions from their point or origin. In many cases, there is a certain nostalgia in looking back at home... Despite the global discourses of a world without borders, networks, virtual cyberspaces and the rhetoric of "travel" as a buzz word, accented cinema has a tendency to "emphasise territoriality, rootedness and geography" (Naficy 2001, p.5). The very idea of deterritorialisation inscribed in nomadic cartographies, as seen in the last chapter, presupposes awareness of notions of "territory" and "territoriality" (Ibidem) which play an impact on the

“open and closed space-time (chronotopical) representations” (Naficy 2001, p.5). It is key to keep in mind that territorialisation is a process of appropriation and detachment from given spaces, in which the very idea of territory is fundamental to the act of border crossing. The representation of acts of incorporation, assimilation, integration; or perhaps segregation, non-assimilation, refusal to participate in a culture, ghettofication are inscribed in the geography of filmic displacement in spaces of encounter between cultures, or cultural clashes.

For Trinh, when meaning has to be negotiated between different sites, borders are displaced: “between home and abroad, native culture and adopted culture, and, more creatively speaking, between a here, a there, *and* an elsewhere” (Trinh 2011, p.27). These negotiations engender language, produce new language, language as a bridge, a space of hybridity; but, most of all, language in transition, like in Naficy’s accented cinema, grasping for new translations, new significations, ways of expressing ideas across cultures. Traveling, for Trinh, is a “boundary event” (Trinh 2011, pp. 41-47) in which one comes to the realisation of oneself through the other:

The itinerary displaces the foundation; the background of my identity, and what it incessantly unfolds is the very encounter of self with the other – other than myself, and my other self. (...) Travelling allows one to see things differently from what they are, differently from how one has seen them, and differently from what one is. These three supplementary identities gained via alterity are in fact still (undeveloped and unrealised) gestures of the ‘self’ – the energy system that defines (albeit in a shifting and contingent mode) what and who each seer is. The voyage out of the (known) self and back into the (unknown) self sometimes takes the wanderer far away to a motley place where everything safe and sound seems to waiver while the essence of language is placed in doubt and profoundly destabilised. Travelling can thus turn out to be a process whereby the self loses its fixed

boundaries – a disturbing yet potentially empowering practice of difference (Ibid., p. 41).

The act of travelling solicits, therefore, a range of rituals of displacement – if we consider the act of crossing borders as a ritual – an awareness of self-expression, of communication, of meanings across languages, the journey, the encounter, the movements to, from, and between the self and the other, the self and the self, the self in displacement. For Trinh, the boundary event involves a “movement back and forth between maintaining/creating borders and undoing/passing over borders” (Trinh 2011, p. 47).

Robert Stam and Ella Shohat demonstrate how national borders do not make up for the presence of “internal *émigrés*”, and people who do not hold the same national identity as that of their country, but “share the same passport” (Shohat& Stam 1994, p. 287). The inner complexities inherent to national identities or national cinemas must also take into account fluxes of migration that diasporically spreads across a globalised world. According to Shohat and Stam: “In the postcolonial context of the constant flux of peoples, affiliation with the nation-state becomes highly partial and contingent” (Shohat& Stam 1994, p. 287). As we have seen with Trinh, the West cannot be essentialised or assumed as being unitary and fixed. The West is here and elsewhere. It is a force, it is a geopolitical paradigm of power, which makes the boundaries more complicated under the realm of imperialism.

Shohat and Stam noticed that the decline of Third World anti-imperialist cinemas (which they call by *Third Worldist Cinemas*) began a process of “rethinking of political, cultural and aesthetic possibilities” (Shohat& Stam 1994, p. 287). According to them, the new generations of filmmakers tended to grow more suspicious and critical of the notion of the national and its boundaries. These dividing lines were also challenged and defied:

While often embedded in the autobiographical, they are not always narrated in the first person, nor are they “merely” personal; rather, the boundaries between the personal and communal, like the generic boundaries between documentary and fiction, are constantly blurred. The diary form, the voice-over, the personally written text, now bear witness to a collective memory of colonial violence. While early Third Worldist films documented alternative histories through archival footage, interviews, testimonials, and historical reconstructions, generally limiting their attention to the public sphere, the films of the 1980’s and 1990’s use the camera less as a revolutionary weapon than as a monitor of gendered and sexualised realms of the personal and the domestic, seen as integral but repressed aspects of collective history (Shohat& Stam 1994, p.288).

The shift to intimist approaches in film, however, does not mean that films got “depoliticised”, but the political has entered the space of the home. An example of this domestic shift can be found in *Fire* (1996), directed by Deepa Mehta, in which the politics of gender and sexuality become explicit in the confinement of the home, by two women who found love in each other’s consolation while their husbands lived a freer life outside. Another boundary is blurred: the private and the public spheres overlap. The camera invades the politics of everyday life, raising awareness to social injustices that were kept invisible, or at least out of the spotlight, by the previous generation. The lack of engagement to a cohesive political North made their “souths” (axioms) multiply, shifting their premises to the idea of crisis: perhaps there is not a solution to the conflicts; not a common solution.

Hybridity is at the core of diasporic films, which for Jigna Desai, “exceed and transgress national cinemas and borders” (Desai 2012, p.210). She contests and refutes the notion of a transnational cinema (Ezra and Rowden 2006) because this buzz word does not account for the way in which the transnational move relates to the dimension of the

national, and the obstacles and borders that result from that displacement. She notices that the term may suggest “an easy transcendence of the national” (Desai 2012, p. 211). So, the idea of a diasporic film not only makes evident the relationship with the home that it is distancing from, but it also includes rituals of border crossing.

The diasporic can be represented as a path of discovery, like the twins in *Incendies* (2010) by Denis Villeneuve, who go back in search of their mother’s secrets. She runs away from their Middle Eastern hometown, situated in a war zone, to Canada, where they live comfortably, and leave them with a mystery and a mission: to find their father and their lost brother. As with many stories of migration, exile (by Nawal, the mother) and diaspora (by the twins) intersect, since the diaspora is a collective experience involving a larger context of heterogeneous narratives of migration.

For Naficy, “diaspora, like exile, often begins with trauma, rupture, and coercion, and it involves the scattering of populations to places outside their homeland” (Naficy 2001, p.14). While exilic traumas can be lived in singularity, the trauma of diasporic cinemas is experienced collectively. Naficy stresses the production of diasporic identities articulated through a “collective memory” (Naficy 2001, p.14). For him, the diaspora is a site of “consciousness” and “distinctiveness” as a result of the process of exclusion from the local/national culture to which one aims to integrate, from the migrant’s community/ghetto or from the homeland. The diaspora, therefore, is a political event, and diasporic film is a political film par excellence. According to the author, the filmic journey can take on different tasks, which he organises into three major groups: “outward journeys of escape, home seeking, and home founding” – describing them as: “journeys of quest, homelessness and lostness, and inward homecoming journeys”, respectively (Naficy 2001, p.33).

The diaspora relates to the home or the homeland in multiple ways. Desai claims that this relationship involves “a diversity of transnational articulations, remembering, and identifications that suggest multivalenced and contradictory connects between

diaspora and homeland” (Desai 2002:82). The diasporic move related to the home, however, is quite a turbulent journey. According to Silvia Kratzer, “home and exile, departure and arrival, imagination and nostalgia” are not mutually exclusive, and in fact they can “overlap and intersect” (Kratzer 2015, p.109). This can be seen in *Turquoise* (2009), a film directed by Kadir Balci, about three brothers who migrated from Turkey to Ghent, in Belgium, and go through an exilic identity crisis after the death of their father. In the opening scene, the camera gazes across this landscape and as it pulls back it reveals the artificiality of a painting, hanging on the wall of a museum in Belgium, seen by one of its employees, a Turkish exilic migrant. Kratzer shows us how diaspora and exile intersect when the return home is voluntary. Films of a voyage home blur boundaries between experiences of exile and the notion of a diasporic representation. In Kratzer’s words:

Unlike earlier immigrant cinemas, which tended to impute a split identity to the immigrant, for whom ‘wholeness’ can only be found in the homeland, more recent films complicate the notions of ‘home’, ‘return’ and ‘identity’. No longer bound to one national configuration or geographical anchor, these concepts are instead conceived as a composite of experiences culled and stitched together from both the country of origin and the country of exile. More importantly, these are points of departure and of arrival, these films highlight the terrains the protagonists traverse (physically, emotionally and spiritually) and the identities they construct through processes of transition (Kratzer 2015, pp.109-110).

Films are possibly the sharpest means for representing how identities are temporary and shaped along the journey. The subject is not simply split between two opposing fields (the home and the diaspora), but transits aboard a crazy train that can go forwards, backwards or on a tangent, deviating rail in a series of arrivals and departures that can stretch to infinity. In this transitive process, the “home” can acquire new meanings, such as in Trinh’s *Night Passage* (2004), when the travelling story-tellers referred to the train as going

“on and on until the end” (2004), in a series of hermetic unfoldings. Transitivity is the reproduction of a non-space, or a space that, just like Foucault’s heterotopias can be “simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (Foucault 1984, p. 2) – the inversion or deviation of pathways to, from, and across borders. That space of the train can be recreated anywhere, it is a vehicle on the move, inhabited by a multiplicity of passengers that crosses physical and imaginary borders.

How do we go from border-crossing to nomadism? This is what I want to examine in the analysis of *Tale of Love*. In Trinh’s cinema, border-crossing is taken to a multiplicity of means, to the point where one feels foreign both here and elsewhere, losing the reference of a home as the centre of determination. Narratives are decentred, opening multiple intercultural fissures, hybrid spaces where meanings are negotiated across borders. From the boundary events, a nomadic film aesthetic emerges. Just like Anzaldúa’s *la mestiza*, she takes the roots of local traditions and myths to produce new myths at the *encrucijada* (crossroads), which introduce a cultural alchemy, a twist in the old mythos, implying “a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves and the way we behave” (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 80). This borderlands consciousness is committed to shaping and telling “new stor[ies] to explain the world and our participation in [them], new value system[s] with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet” (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 81). Cultural hybridity is creatively introduced in “great alchemical work, spiritual *mestizaje*, a morphogenesis” (Ibid.), and a multiplicity of processes of becomings that stretch to infinity. These definitions are still very abstract, so allow me to introduce this notion of a nomadic film aesthetic in the perspective of women and postcolonial film subjects through my reading of *Tale of Love*.

4.2 From Exile to Loving Intransitively

A Tale of Love (1995), Trinh's first "fiction" film, is a tale which re-creates Vietnam's national poem, but from a displaced subject position: it is told from the perspective of a migrant. The plot consists of separate stories that connect. A Vietnam émigré named Kieu is a free-lance writer and models for Alikan – a women's magazine photographer – to make a living. He personifies Laura Mulvey's male "gaze" (Mulvey 1999, p. 837), as he depersonalises his female models by introducing objects and fabric to cover his model's heads. Kieu shares a house with her aunt, who is a mother of three and takes care of the house and her loved ones, sometimes in an intrusive way, but lovingly. Her editor is a woman who is fascinated with love stories and perfume, which are intimately and mutually implicated: scents and love. This story intersects with images of a child who plays in the water with her mother. She is also named Kieu. They can be read as memories of Kieu, and yet there is not a thread that links them to the protagonist's story other than her name being called from afar. In yet another parallel story, Kieu is the lover of Minh, a married man who migrates before his family's arrival. Finally, Kieu researches the Tale of Kieu: a story of a woman who must work as a prostitute in a national act of self-sacrifice to save Vietnam, like a hero's journey that lacks honour. The stories are not linear and remain inconclusive. Instead, the stories intercalate and constantly interrupt each other so as to introduce intervals and discontinuities. In *Cinema Interval*, Trinh defines:

As the image arises, it vanishes, doomed to disappear for the film to be. But if the lamp is turned around, the nature of this generative container-contained nexus will show itself unequivocally: the cinema interval, which determines the fissures through which light surreptitiously penetrates the fabric of relationships woven in the visual machine, is also what makes a film uniquely a film. The gamut of pos-

sibilities that can be explored in the interval mode is vast. Intervals allow a rupture with mere reflections and present a perception of space breaks. They constitute interruptions in a uniform series of surface. They designate a temporal hiatus, an intermission, a distance, a pause, a lapse, or gap between different states; and they are what comes up at the threshold of representation and communication – what often appears in the doorway... there where the aperture is also the spacing-out of disappearance (Trinh 1999, pp.xii-xiii).

These fissures in the narrative are taken by other stories, as successive interruptions that collapse and break the flow of continuity of one another. The story is told as a story within a story, within a story where the central figure is but a name, not quite a character. For Teshome Gabriel, nomadic film aesthetics present ruptures with the “linear structure” of the narrative, resorting to elliptical, curvy, and spiral lines, split by discontinuities, new articulations, rhizomatic lines of flight (Gabriel 1992).

In *Tale of Love* this nomadic breakage of linearity involves discontinuity through multiple intervals swarming from story to story, so that meanings become puzzled, and hence rendered more fluid and open to different interpretations. For Gabriel, nomadic cinema is one that “floats over reality” (Gabriel 1992) and over fixed categories of thought, logic and rationality. The irrational, the mysterious, the transcendental, and the spiritual are part of the cosmogony of nomadic cinema. Closure is a cinematic convention that nomadic cinema defies, opening and closing spaces for reflexivity and transitivity. Therefore, I choose to read this film as nomadic, and in my analysis, I focus in cinematic intervals as fissures in the plot which destabilise the film narrative impeding meaning to be fixed, and the possibility of closures.

Trinh defines cinema interval as a “passage from one space (visual, musical, verbal, mental, physical) to another”. (Trinh 1999, p. xi) This passage is marked by

an intermittence, a disruption in the film narrative, that makes room for a “direct relation”, which she sets as “a direct relation of infinity assumed in works that accept the risks of spacing and take in the field of free resonances - or, of indefinite substitutions within the closure of a finite work”. She borrows from Dziga Vertov the emphasis he portrays in his montages, by “stressing the gaps between images. Truth is extracted by the fragments, non narrative forms related to not another: “all is a matter of relations: temporal, spacial, rhythmic relations, ...of planes, of recording speed, of light and shade, or of movement within the frame” (Trinh 1999, p. xii). The image is not taken in isolation, but as involved in this complex fabric of relations engaged to life events in the film. She defines:

The cinema interval... determines the fissures through which light surreptitiously penetrates the fabric of relationships woven in the vision machine... Intervals allow a rupture with mere reflections and present a perception of space and breaks. They constitute interruptions in a uniform series of surface; they designate a temporal hiatus, intermission, a distance, a pause, a lapse, a gap between different states; and they are what comes up at the threshold of representation and communication - what often appears in the doorway... there where the aperture is also the spacing-out of disappearance. (Ibid., p. xiii)

These intermissions serve a role in the film: they blur borders rendering meaning open-ended, on to a wide “gamut of possibilities... [to be explored] in the interval mode” (Ibid., p. xii) What film strategies are used to produce intervals and to challenge boundaries and borders across and between stories? Thinking through the notion of border-crossing, to what extent are borders blurred, questioned, or displaced? When do we lose a sense of location of the filmic subject-positions? What structures of power are implicated in the boundary events that are ritualised in the film?

The opening scene, which reappears in occasional intervals, and is

replicated in night shots later in the film, reproduces an image of Kieu in a red dress running across a dense field with dry, high grass. The long shot does not situate the landscape, it merely shows a hill and Kieu running across the field. Deep strings produce a feeling of danger and escalating tension. The woman takes deep breaths, and eventually trips. It is not clear that this scene represents the physical act of border-crossing, but it may suggest an empty space which she must cross as if her life depends on it. She trips because she is running, because she is tense, because this space is not safe for her. And yet, whatever danger she is running from is not visible to us. The dry empty space with no trace of human intervention recreates the space of a desert. In “Asphalt Nomadism: The New Desert in Arab Independent Cinema” (2006, p. 125), Laura Marks states that nomadic rituals are tightly connected with “passage of time” (Ibid.) and within these passages meaning can be produced. These passages are rituals of memory, which I believe is the case in Kieu’s story. To put it in Marks’ words:

Blowing sand effaces markers, erasing time and memory. A landscape that pre-exists us, outlives us, and unlike other landscapes, forgets us, the desert makes us aware of the limitations of human perception and memory. The desert is not empty, but it can only be navigated by close attention to the wind, the dunes, the oases and plant life. The desert is not chaotic, but it is best understood locally; it asks for embodied presence, not abstract order (Marks 2006, p.125).

This empty space scene calls attention to a desert-like emptiness as a nomadic space. The desert is a space with no straight lines, the “smooth space” in Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadology (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, p. 32). In fact, it is one of the most accurate figurations for a nomadic thought. However, Marks sees the desert as a space that is not completely detached from reality, State troops, starvation, borders, paramilitary, walls and so forth. Let us remember that the gigantic wall that divides the United States and Mexico is located in a desert. “As much as this writer wishes to roll down dunes both physical and con-

ceptual, to embrace the smooth space of the desert” – she argues – “her thoughts are necessarily disciplined by the striating forces of settlement, industry, geopolitics – that force her to be something more than an orientalist looking to get lost in somebody else’s landscape” (Marks 2006, pp.125-126). The figuration of the desert helps us think of the paths of *Bedouins*, *Aymaras* and embodied nomads (or semi-nomads) that cross deserts, sand dunes or the Atacama desert in the Andes. A camera sliding across landscapes recreates the journey, as seen in *Incendies* (2010), when the desert is shown as a beautiful landscape. On the other hand, it does not take long for this contemplation of beauty and freedom in a smooth space to be interrupted by a van. In that film, the desert was a battleground, a site of warfare and oppression. The experience of exile meant an escape from the desert. The smooth space was not the desert. According to Marks:

In the desert, nomadic people are constantly enjoined, by means subtle and forceful, to submit themselves to the civilising forces of religion and the soporific of a daily wage. The desert is never really “smooth,” for that is death. The pitiless desert is an outsider’s fantasy; nomads themselves work to find succour in the desert. The more we examine the relationships between the smooth and the striated in desert space, and the relations of life and death that their movement describes, the more difficult it is to distinguish them. A true cinema of the desert sees the desert in relation to the outside forces that shape it (Marks 2006, p.126).

In *Tale of Love*, however, the camera does not dwell on the landscape, which is nothing but a hill covered by dense dry grass. I associate it with a desert for its aridity and emptiness, but its location remains undetermined. It hosts the exilic experience, which is central to the plot, and the feeling of loss in space. In *Incendies*, the scenery is well-established, it can be located on a map, and it is the ambience of the film to which remains consistent. In *Tale*, it is just a point of passage. It is the opening of the film, but it does not

present an introduction or a beginning to a story; it is a nomadic relay point, a pathway where Kieu walks.

The high, dry grass also appears in a night scene, just after Kieu weeps, leading to the first interval, which is a close up of her calligraphy, where the texture of the paper and the wet ink become another relay point with the word "love" is inscribed in a text. This is when she cuts to the night shot of Kieu dressed in red walking past the arid field. The light cast over the grass illuminates it, making it seem like a field of gold, but the deep experimental strings create an uncanny atmosphere. Kieu first walks past the camera, and keeps crossing the filmic space, but as the strings become more intense, she runs across the field in different directions, at a distressing pace. A tracking shot reveals the full moon on the far right of the screen. The night is pitch-black, and the anxiety created by the woman running across the field makes interpreting this space as a desert-frontier more plausible; as the danger escalates, both Kieu's anguishing performance, which is off the edge, and the sound of strings that become increasingly deeper, make it seem like she crosses a limit-zone. The thread of continuity of the woman in red walking anguished on dry grass is taken first by daylight and then in the dark. This switch of perspective is analogous to Anzaldúa's perspective of a borderland's mestiza who finds herself wandering in the darkness:

I found myself suddenly in the dark,
sliding down a smooth wet surface
down down into an even darker darkness.
Having crossed the portal, the raised hinged mouth,
having entered the serpent's belly,
now there was no looking back, no going back.
(Anzaldúa 1987, p. 34)

The night in the scene is not a danger in itself. It is only perceived this way because the woman is walking alone. The "serpent" that swallows the woman in An-

zaldúa's poem is the same kind of predator as the neighbour who beats his wife up in the scene where Kieu is woken up at night by screams coming from outside. In this scene, we do not see the neighbours or the house, but we hear the terrified screams in a dark room. When Kieu wakes up frightened, the light is not turned on. We follow Kieu in her confusion in the darkness with moving shadows in the back that suggest movement outside. It is only in the light of day, over a cup of tea, that Kieu learns that her neighbour was beaten up by her husband. The transition to the morning after is a relief because the "nightmare" is over and the facts are brought to light over a comforting cup of tea. Empathy is served from the aunt's teapot to Kieu's cup as she tells her that she interfered and helped the victim of domestic violence. The night is not only inhabited by predators after all. Solidarity finds its way through the dark. But the neighbour is reluctant to move out of the house, to escape her predator husband, whose violent behaviour is a habit. Anzaldúa speaks of this reluctance of women to cross the borders of their confinement, that is, the immobility of their homes:

It is her reluctance to cross over, to make a hole in the fence and walk across, to cross the river, to take that flying leap into the dark, that drives her to escape, that forces her into the fecund cave of her imagination... If she doesn't change her ways, she will remain a stone forever (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 71).

Drawing on solidarity across fences, the aunt helps her because her neighbour cannot and will not escape her violent husband on her own. Her frustration lies in her neighbour's reluctance to cross that door and close it at last. The neighbour does not appear in the film. Domestic violence remains invisible, only heard as screams in the dark. Yet it is the aunt who embodies solidarity with her recollection of the previous night's event.

Solidarity is key for Third World women to establish non-oppressive connections, that is, relationships of mutual cooperation. This is not the first conversation between Kieu and her aunt that takes place in the garden over warm beverages. I look at this

as signalling the warmth of an encounter, an opening for a conversation to take place, blurring boundaries between subjects. Attention is driven to their conversations, as the camera remains still for most of them, with full frames of the women in the garden, and few noises that could be distracting, mostly ambient noises. The garden is the contact zone, a space of non-threatening human interaction, of being with nature, of fresh air. The safe space is reinforced by a familiar tongue: they speak Vietnamese, however, in this film Trinh does not abandon her viewers to the sound of a language with no subtitles. We follow the conversation, which begins with the aunt's concerns regarding her niece's habits, such as getting enough sleep. The warmth of coffee and tea blends in with the warmth of home, the warmth of speaking a native language in a foreign land, and yet they own this garden, they inhabit this space, which is why it is in the garden that Kieu keeps her desk. It is her safe space.

A twist in the familiar conversation between two women takes place when the aunt hands over a letter to Kieu. The letter comes from her folks in Vietnam. It is useful in retelling the possibility of communication across borders, across oceans, and so on. It is an exilic prop in the film, a message from an original homeland and the ties that remain with a territory that has been left behind, with family and loved ones that used to be close and are now far away. Thus, it produces transcontinental anxieties, which explains the mood shift from the trivial morning breakfast to an internal emotional moment introduced by an interval with Kieu's fantasy of herself wearing bright red fabric and a conical hat (*nón lá*) in an extreme close up of the side of her face with her head covered by a white veil. The *nón lá* alludes to home, a diasporic garment that she wears on her head, perhaps representing a nostalgia; not of one memory in particular, but of a root, an identity. She pictures herself as a Vietnamese woman in bright red. It is a nostalgia outside of time, a line of flight of the imagination.

The fantasy of Kieu dressed in typical Vietnamese clothing becomes more intense with the yellow and red beams of light that shine between the red fabric and her

skin. Light appears in a way that seems "unnatural", only plausible on stage or on a dance floor. The critical use of artifices does not appertain to the story in the plot. It destabilises the plot, displacing the perception of light in the film from "natural" to "unnatural", even though most lights in the film are artificial. In this specific scene, lights are part of a composition of Kieu's fantasy, along with the colours that emerge from her stargazing, which, combined with a nostalgic flute, carries her elsewhere in the story.

This disruptive interval pushes the boundaries of the story, and yet it takes us back to Kieu sitting in the garden with the letter. This distance is emotional and it is triggered by the letter. Kieu tears the envelope, picks up and smells the letter, in a haptic attitude that solicits viewers to imagine what it smells like. Is it the smell of a long-lasting home? She folds it again. Minh comes back outside with a tray with vegetables and rice. The two characters eat and talk about sending money home, a subject that is often brought up by diasporic subjects. The camera is no longer still, but in motion, wandering across the garden, creating a wider distance between the characters and viewers. The bowl of rice and vegetables is also a way of inhabiting the liminal space of an immigrant's home: they may be far away from home, but they maintain a few of their cultural traditions.

The notion of a home is key in the process of questioning borders and boundaries: it is a safe space, a comfort zone, even if temporary. To put it in Deleuzian-Guattarian terms, it is what I called a "relay point" in the second chapter. The aunt is the gatekeeper of the family and of the Vietnamese tradition in their home. She is clearly uncomfortable in the space she inhabits, but she knows that going back to Vietnam would not be the same as it once was. Times are changing, and the new generation is becoming more individualistic and this really bothers her. She serves as a counter-balance to Kieu's daydreaming, a daily reality check. During a dinner in the garden, she voices her concern over her children's participation in American culture. She makes an effort to talk to them in Vietnamese despite them

answering in English. It is Kieu who expresses a detachment from the idea of a home (whether in Vietnam or America), since her journey is experienced through writing and through a fantasy world that floats from traditions and memories to her walks in the city at night. As an insider, she questions the patriarchal traditions of her own culture, while remaining foreign to the place she lives. Like Anzaldúa's *mestiza*, she transits in between cultures:

Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people, we perceive a version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent, but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes *un choque*, a cultural collision (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 100).

Kieu's character is more ambiguous in a way because she does not belong to just one culture. Her partial integration gives way to a split identity, to allow herself to go through this struggle of borders, two different struggles of liberation: that of women and that of Vietnam. Her experience living abroad shifts the angle by which she looks at women in Vietnam, while the way her people are looked down upon makes her critical of a (neo)colonial condescendence, that is from a position of authority and superiority. Kieu's ambiguity lies in the fact that she does not pick one side in this collision between culture value systems. This is not to say that her aunt does not, in some level, participate in the local culture by living, working and having her children attend an American school, but she chooses to maintain her language and culture in the way that she remembers it (not necessarily in contemporary Vietnamese culture). Kieu's consciousness is nomadic in the same sense as that of *la mestiza* who crosses borders back and forth multiple times:

At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the op-

posite bank, the split between the two moral combatants somehow healed so that we are at both shores at once, and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes. Or perhaps we will decide to disengage from the dominant culture, write it off altogether as a lost cause, and cross the border into a wholly new and separate territory. Or we might go another route. The possibilities are numerous... (Anzaldúa 1987, pp. 100-101)

Indeed, she is aware of her being on "both shores at once", but this feeling does not stop her from feeling anguished. Her involvement with Vietnam is experienced through the senses, in smelling and folding the envelope, with an intimate connection. Her involvement with the local culture can be represented by the language she writes in, her impeccable English, for instance. But it is her involvement with the border, the interstitial zone, that I am most interested in.

Trinh uses a specific strategy of crossing boundaries which is an appeal to tactile and haptic images with intercultural layers. In "Touch: A Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media" (2002), Laura Marks associates a haptic, tactile visuality with images that instigate a sense of touch:

Haptic visuality, a term contrasted to optical visuality, draws from other forms of sense experience, primarily touch and kinesthetics. Because haptic visuality draws on other senses, the viewer's body is more obviously involved in the process of seeing than in the case of optical visuality.... The term haptic visuality emphasises the viewer's inclination to perceive haptically, but a work in itself may offer haptic images. Haptic images do not invite identification with a figure so much as they encourage a body relationship between the viewer and the image. Thus it is less appropriate to speak of the object of a haptic look than to speak of a dynamic subjectivity between looker and image. (Marks 2002, pp. 2-3)

Whether they are haptic looks that explore affective images of touch, or pure haptic images captured by the camera, therefore rendering them indistinguishable, these images bring viewers to the realm of intimacy, drawing connections between the film and sensuous memories. Trinh's fugitive camera captures extreme close ups of Kieu's skin in contact with the tactility of the textures of silky fabric. The focus on the multiple layers such as skin, silk, and veils construct temporal border spaces that open and close, sometimes inviting you in and sometimes maintaining a distance. Transparency instigates the eyes of the *voyeur*, who watches from the other side of these translucent curtains and screens, just like viewing a film in a movie theatre. Viewers are put in the place of *voyeurs*, as we cross the multiple screens that unravel the plot.

This happens, for instance, in the first scene. Kieu wakes up in her bed, her body fully covered with sheets, and yet the mosquito net gives us another layer of fabric, another texture that distances us from the sight of her intimacy. We do not see her waking up, we see there is a body in motion under the sheets. But even when she sits on her bed, there is another layer that impedes us from having a clear view of Kieu. The mosquito net protects her personal space from viewers' vampiric gaze. The camera explores the textuality of the net, portrayed as a second skin, a delicate and sensual means of creating a relationship of proximity/distance. Laura Marks uses the concept of haptic cinema in this double-edged sense: for her, these tactile images are not direct because they require viewers to access a memory of touch (Marks 2000, p. 138). Perceptions skip boundaries insofar as the camera brings objects so close that viewers experiment a sense of touch through their eyes.

When referring to intercultural films, Marks argues: "As fetishes protect their memories, haptic images can protect the viewer from the image, or the image from the viewer" (Ibid.). When it comes down to intercultural films, she mentions *Reassemblage* as an example of an experimental ethnographic film that "uses haptic images to counter viewers'

expectations of informative or exotic visual spectacle” (Marks 2000, p. 177). Trinh’s extreme close-ups of women breast-feeding, in which the camera approaches the surface of the skin, open a space for an identification with breastfeeding, allowing women viewers to imagine themselves in that position. This particular use of haptics is an example of what Marks refers to as “works that mediate between cultures” (Ibid.). Borders are traversed, blurred, put into suspicion. “The haptic is a form of visibility that muddies intersubjective boundaries” (Marks 2002, p.17), as Marks puts it, and surpasses intercultural borders, because not only they are present in different cultural contexts, and can suggest the materiality of fabrics that come from other parts of the world. Such are the silky transparencies portrayed in *Tale*, that are so common in China and South Asia. Trinh’s haptic use of transparencies in this film works like partial sensory barriers, which produce confusion, and hence protect viewers from organising their sight according to social categories of identification.

Haptic images are erotic in that they construct an intersubjective relationship between the beholder and image. The viewer is called upon to fill in the gaps in the image, to engage with traces the image leaves. By interacting up close with an image, close enough that figure and ground commingle, the viewer relinquishes her own sense of separateness from the image – not to know it, but to give herself up to her desire for it (Marks 2000, p. 183).

In the erotic scene in which we watch Alikan’s hands touching a woman’s body through a fissure in the centre of a black screen, viewers are placed as *voyeurs* who spy on them through a hole or crack in the wall. This is a very direct way of engaging the viewers, through the lens’ perspective: viewers become spies, staring at a sexual, private act and yet we cannot help but gaze into that fissure. While hands are optical images that indicate a sense of touch, it is not the camera that touches the woman, but Alikan’s hands. As for Marks, “looking at hands would seem to evoke the sense of touch through identification, ei-

ther with the person whose hands they are or with the hands themselves". She continues: "The haptic bypasses such identification and the distance from the image it requires" (Marks 2002, p. 8). This *voyeuristic* image is not haptic insofar as there are at least two layers of distance between viewers and the body that is being touched: the skin, which is not brought close to the camera, and the visual representation of a wall with a fissure: we are not in the same room as them, therefore, we disengage with the sexual act. In fact, our gaze may be unsolicited, inappropriate for an act of intimacy, for they do not look back through the fissure. The woman is blindfolded, so she cannot look back. It is Alikan who is unaware of the spectators' gaze.

It is not the film's *mise-en-scène* strategy to hide the models' head, but Alikan's. That is, he wants it this way for a particular reason: he prefers to photograph his female models as bodies with covered heads. Alikan depicts the bodies in this way to depersonalise and thus objectify them. But, most importantly, what he hides are their eyes, that is, their agency to look back at the photographer. He expects to gaze at them without having them gaze back at him. He gazes through a device, which is analogous to the device that produces the film. He cannot avoid being gazed at. Laura Mulvey's theory of *gaze* (Mulvey 1999, p.837), which I mentioned earlier, is precise as Alikan's gaze becomes more and more "scopophilic" (pleasure to look at) precisely when Kieu walks into Alikan's studio on the wrong day only to witness another photoshoot. The scene starts with Kieu going up the stairs, in a tracking shot that is led by her sniffing around. It is smell, not sight, that drives her. She becomes aware that this is not her appointment when hearing Alikan's voice and the clicks of his camera, but she crosses one more sensorial boundary: she has to see it for herself. She plays the role of the *voyeur*, inverting the premise of their relationship. She gazes without his knowledge while he photographs another model. She hides behind the curtain, while spying on Alikan, who takes intimate photos of a naked woman on a motorcycle. She has a magazine covering her head, with a different prop, and yet the same ritual of hiding the head. Kieu is in the frame. She hides to the side, behind a curtain. The woman continues to try and take the

magazine away from her face. He insists. It is his game. Just like Kieu, the model questions why he wants to photograph headless women. He changes position, goes between her legs and asks her to spread them further. She embodies a pin-up in Mulvey's theory, the one who lends her body to "signif[y] male desire" (Mulvey 1999, p.837). The *voyeuristic* camera is invasive, as if a spectrum is held so as to make him photograph "the origin of the world". This scene is symbolically implicated when Kieu enters the studio on her regular day and opens up the magazines that Alikan photographs for. The camera zooms in to a close up of a picture in the magazine, of Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde* (Courbet 1866). It is a painting of a woman's vagina, a fragment of a body without a head. The image of the painting slowly loses focus, to create a puzzling effect and raise a suspicion. Kieu closes the magazine abruptly, as if she realises what is the matter with Alikan's gaze. Courbet's painting shows her what Alikan expects to reveal in a woman's body. He reduces women to their vaginas. He is an active male: one who controls the gaze. To put it in Mulvey's words:

(...) pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness* (Mulvey 2000, p. 837).

Kieu is suddenly aware of the gaze, of Alikan's controlling gaze. Perhaps she knows it all along, but this notion becomes clearer in her head. Her character undergoes a transformation. Alikan becomes more invasive, not just with the camera, but with his body. He barely greets her and corners her against a wall, but she quickly ducks under his arm. This subtle move represents that this is no longer his game. It is also her game. This change of attitude is represented by the hat that Kieu wears for the next shooting session: it is

not just any hat that depersonalise her by covering her head, it is a Vietnamese conical hat, the same hat with a white veil that she wears in her fantasies. He squats down as he photographs her: she is at the centre of the frame, as if she owns it. It is she who does most of the talking, mostly about headless bodies and the gaze. As Kieu arranges the veil, haptic images of the veil solicit the body to once again engage with it. When the veil is attached to the conical hat, it crosses boundaries of alterity, taking imagination to an imagined Asia. Unlike the other model, she is not a body that is objectified over a motorcycle. Her image is sold as exotic, between sensual veils and conical hats. Only this time, Kieu puts the leaf with which she covers her head down, stands up and throws the veil over Alikan's head. This simple act of throwing the veil back at him is quite symbolic of the border that Kieu crosses: she takes control of who gazes at her.

Expectations are broken when no romantic encounter results from this tension between the two characters. The title of the film can be thought of as misleading: it tells viewers that it is a tale of love. Another possible love story is that of Minh, the man that Kieu sees secretly at night. He is but a memory, a lover from her homeland who disappoints her when he tells her that his wife and children are moving to the United States. She is distressed, but he tells her that he did not think he would ever see them again. This is quite common in stories of diaspora: the men leave before the wife and children, so as to build them a safe space. There is a high chance of a mis-encounter during this period, including the possibility of starting a new relationship and family in the new land. This does not happen with Kieu and Minh. Nevertheless, this is not the kind of love that is central in the theme of the film.

I choose to interpret love on the level of the encounters. Encounters of love in this film are situated at crossroads. When we think of love and encounters, or love through encounters, the first person that comes into mind is Juliet. Juliet, the editor, is a boss,

but power relations are only made clear during one particular take, in which Kieu appears in an over-the-shoulder shot, where Juliet's silhouette marks her position as Kieu's boss. Otherwise, their relationship is defined by cooperation and an intense exchange of ideas, mostly around the topic of love, but not in the same sense that we see in chick-flicks. They begin by discussing Kieu's research on the *Tale of Kieu*.

Recapitulating what I mentioned earlier, *The Tale of Kieu* is Vietnam's national poem, which tells the story of a woman who prostituted herself as a sacrificial act of love for her nation. Kieu mentions a woman in her community who suggests she write about the real story of the woman in the poem, not in the romanticised way that it is written in the poem. They talk about the poem's impact on people of all ages in contemporary Vietnamese culture, while going up and down the stairs carrying stacks of books. The camera films them from the lower level looking up, focusing on their feet going up and down as an automatic movement they have incorporated in their work routine. Their conversation remains inconclusive, with no assertion made over how people interpret the poem, except the fact that the poem is very appreciated in the hearts of the oppressed, but even the word oppression is not used. This abstract conversation regarding a poem raises questions about love. The fact that the theme is introduced over a conversation between two women carrying stacks of books casts away expectations of superficial love, since these women carry the weight of hard-cover books and express their ideas in a sophisticated manner. We never learn what these books are, or why they are carrying them, but they play a role in the conversation, which is connected to the notion of thought. These figurations of thought are being carried by women up and down, wherever they go, and they are heavy, old, and have endured generations. Now we are not talking borders, but bridges. While I use the word bridge in terms of friendship and solidarity, in this brief excerpt from Nguyen Du's *Tale of Kieu*, it is allusive of a passage:

She travels impossibly far, across bridges

powdered with hoar-frost, past forests
 glowering with broody clouds, through fields
 of rumour reeds, whispering and wild,
 raked by the knife of a north wind
 that ruffles their reed-heads to a skittering sea.
 And still the road reels out before her.

She crosses unnamed bridges, climbs unguessed-of hills,
 through autumnal forests where red and amber
 stain the blue-green leaves. The cries of sad birds
 remind her of the family she has left behind.
 By night, the witnessing moon looks down
 and she remembers her now-broken vows.
 It waxes and it wanes till they reach Lâm-Tri.
 (Nguyen 2019, p. 3)

I have no intention of analysing the poem, but rather what it represents in the film, particularly to the character whose name is also Kieu. The poem is elucidated over the scenes in which Kieu writes. She tells the story of a woman in love as a voice-off sitting at her desk in the garden where an empty bird cage is hung with a candle, paper, and ink, but it is through the singing voice of a lyrical singer that spectators are exposed to passages of *Tale of Kieu*. According to Trinh:

For a number of writers in exile, the true home is to be found, not in houses, but in writing... And exile, despite its profound sadness, can be worked through as an experience of crossing boundaries and charting new ground in defiance of newly authorised or old canonical enclosures... Critical dissatisfaction has brought about

a stretching of frontiers; home and exile in this context become as inseparable from each other as writing is from language (Trinh 2011, p. 34).

Writing is where she feels at home, at a desk displaced from a conventional interior office space to the garden, where she creatively improvises a space for ideas to flow and turn into written work. The boundary between inside and outside is surpassed, as she makes her garden “a room of one’s own” (Woolf 2000). Since she does not have a silent, private space in a diasporic home with three children, she creates one outside – with stretched sheets and an empty bird cage – where she can imagine whichever song she wants. While she writes, it is the chant that fills in the sound ambience, as an extra-diegetic resort to access the poem: as music.

The poem is brought up at different moments: the conversation between Kieu and Juliet, in Kieu’s writing, and through the singing voice, this time in Vietnamese (with English subtitles), we become acquainted with brief passages of the poem. This is yet another means of border crossing: from one moment to another, passing through different voices, different tones, the *Tale* travels across languages. But the fact that Trinh only allows the poem to be directly reproduced through music is symptomatic, because, as Laura Marks puts it, it is through music that “the aural boundaries between body and world may feel indistinct” (Marks 2000, p. 183). In fact, music is a register that crosses boundaries in Trinh’s theory on music and intervals, she says something that goes along the same notion of aural/musical boundary crossing:

In listening to a song, a poem, a phrase, or even a single word, one listens to both their marked and non-marked beats. What retains one’s attention is the way meaning and sound come together and move apart from one another, ceaselessly closing the gaps while producing new gaps between themselves, finding thereby their beginnings and endings in creative rhythm. More than the use of pauses and inter-

ruptions, the boundary event that makes one hold one's breath is... the fragile moment when in the shift to a lower note, sound becomes sigh and word fades to breath. The musical swoon... has the potential both to free the listener from the weight of the word(s), and to interrupt the aural landscapes built with washes of captivating sounds (Trinh 2011, p. 60).

The choice of music as a means of telling the *Tale of Kieu* is crucial due to the weight of the words of a national poem of a woman's sacrifice. Rhythm is produced at the encounter between multiple registers, but it is through music that she unpacks the words, in the ever-shifting stories that go from one Kieu to the other until both Kieu's merge, to the point that it becomes a challenge to understand which Kieu is which. The viewer-listeners are forced to constantly cross boundaries from one story to another, from interval to interval.

Juliet and Kieu's conversation about the *Tale of Kieu* is interrupted by an interval, with a tracking extreme close up of the tip of a woman's *ao dai* white dress as she walks. Her hair is so long that it almost touches the floor; swinging as she walks. After the short scene of a woman walking, a woman who is not connected to any characters in the film, Juliet and Kieu proceed to talking. Only the props shift from books to perfume bottles. They are in Juliet's office. The interval cuts the story, as the story switches from Nguyen Du's *Tale of Kieu* to perfumes bottles, merchandise that you may find in duty-free shops. The partial sight of a woman walking implies a passage from East to West, from the Vietnamese tale to a Western scent of love. The woman walking represents the border, *la frontera*, as if for Trinh:

Living at the borders means that one constantly treads the fine line between positioning and depositioning. The fragile nature of the intervals in which one thrives requires that, as a mediator-creator, one always travels transculturally while engaging in the local 'habitus'... (Trinh 2011, p. 54)

This passage in Trinh's theoretical work is a brief introduction to Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of borderlands; therefore, the connection between *la frontera* and Trinh's boundary event has already been established. This is to say that the woman with very long hair is transcultural par excellence. She wears an *ao dai*, which is a typical Vietnamese garment, and yet her very long hair looks more like a Navajo hair than Vietnamese. Hybridity is portrayed as this assemblage of different cultures that inhabits a Bhabha's "third space", which is also this border of which Trinh and Anzaldúa both write. The complete disengagement with both series does not, by any means, impede this woman from excelling in her nomadic role of transitioning between worlds embodied by a postcolonial woman.

Kieu's removal of a sheet that covers a swinging shelf that hangs from the ceiling reveals a set of perfume bottles of different colours and shapes. There is an extreme close up of the two women, and then of Kieu, whose nose almost touches the bottles. Kieu's curiosity is that of a child dealing with a new toy, while the shelf swings subtly to the left and to the right. Even when Juliet is in the diegesis, she is behind Kieu, which makes it easy for her to step out of the frame. Juliet compares perfume with musical notes for their sensual implication of love memories. The scents can potentially produce a state of being in love. This is when Juliet interrupts the conversation and mentions she must go to an appointment, and Kieu finds herself walking across the aisles of a library. She is not looking for a specific book, but instead, she sniffs around, allowing herself to access her memories through the smell of those bookshelves. The tracking shot goes along, until she stops near a man. She calls out Minh's name, but she has him mistaken for someone else. She looks embarrassed, and quickly shies away. Did the smell lead her to a memory of her former lover? Not exactly. Instead, it shows how sensorial memories can be misleading. The library scene is an unfolding of the previous scene; what Kieu experiments with in the library is what Juliet evokes during their conversation, however, the connection is not clear. Trinh leaves it up to the viewers to tie the fragmented scenes together. The puzzling fragments constitute a break in the

story's linearity. This is another strategy for suspending utterance, thus making the story non-unitary, as open as possible to the viewer's interpretation. The free flow of meaning is also another cue as to how this film is nomadic: its borders suspended.

Kieu and Juliet's interrupted conversation takes a break and continues in a later scene. Juliet leads the conversation, as she goes on exploring the intimate relationship between love and scent. On Juliet's desk there are women's magazines, which directly illustrates the idea of scent and fashion. They connect with Kieu's other job, with her photographic essays for women's magazines. The scents that produce love buzzes are captured and sold in bottles with trendy colours. Both characters continue to talk about love in the following two scenes in which they appear, but it is not a mere coincidence that, once again, the scene that anticipates the two women's reflection on love is that of Kieu researching in her garden while Vietnam's love poem is sung. I read these recurrent transitions as sensuous connections. She evolves from sound to scent, two different means of evoking the act of being in love. The passage from sound to smell allows love to travel across one's body insofar as the film resorts to sensuous memories. The body is solicited in more than one way in this approach to being in love, as the stories also connect through love being at the centre of the narration. The narrative of love is an intercultural narrative, and, in this sense, we must understand how these memories of love go beyond individual love in Kieu's stories. Laura Marks puts it well:

Intercultural artists cannot simply recreate the sensory experience of their individual or cultural past. Instead, intercultural cinema bears witness to the reorganisation of the senses that takes place, and the new kinds of sense knowledges that become possible, when people move between cultures... Often the sensorium is the only place where cultural memories are preserved. For intercultural cinema, therefore, sense experience is in the heart of cultural memory. All this evidence of a

rich cultivation of sense experience is only useful for understanding cinema if we can understand the cinematic experience to be multi-sensory (Marks 2000, pp. 195-196).

While memories of a collective past are accessed by the voice of the woman singing the poem, the new world is captured by the smell of merchandise, which is linked to women's fashion, style and marketable scents that sell love in bottles. Kieu's story is not a story of love with a lover. Alikan is not her lover, and there is not one moment in their encounter in which she smells him. His touch is furtive, unwelcome, and not consented to. He may very well embody the haptics of the one who holds a camera that touches. His tactility has nothing to do with love, but with power. This is shown in a scene towards the end of the film, when Alikan can no longer see. Kieu asks him what the four-letter word is. He is reluctant to say the word love, for he fears disappointment and betrayal. He is rendered fragile, but love is everything that he avoids, what he dismisses. When she tries to take his hat off, he threatens to fire her, therefore taking back his position of power from the moment of evident fragility and retraction. He is the boss, so he wants to be in control. If she takes on the agency of telling the story, she ruins it.

Love stories are raised in a collective manner by Juliet's reading of letters addressed to a Shakespearian Juliet. In these letters, the writers are hoping to seek advice from a character in a play, whom they know does not exist. Here, Trinh makes her nomadic move, crossing borders from a Vietnamese poem to the Shakespearian 16th century Western play "Romeo and Juliet" (Shakespeare 2009) which is a symbol of universal love. While each of the letters can tell a separate love story, the myriad of letters assembled together on Juliet's desk allude to a Western search for love and affection; a search for a fairy tale that is considered as fantasy, yet they cannot help but engage with them as if fairy tales were real. This is where Trinh questions a Western construction of romantic love. What is peculiar

to this narrative is that these fantasies do not realise that Shakespeare's story is a tragedy, and that both Romeo and Juliet die. It is the story of an impossible love, yet it is a universally idealised love story.

In Kieu and Juliet's next encounter, we see another nomadic shift of stories, going back from Juliet's to Kieu's, the two characters in whose stories their names are implicated. The border between exile and home is crossed once again as Kieu learns how her community remembers their national poem, however, she expresses an expectation of hearing the story told by Vietnamese women. So, they both speak of how they experience love. While this conversation unravels, the camera tracks quickly, dynamically, and even theatrically across the room, going left and right, tilting up and down, while Juliet's excitement escalates. She recites Shakespeare, which Kieu vehemently opposes. Juliet choreographs a dance, she stretches her arm like in a Tai Chi Chuan move against a red background. The camera keeps moving, creating a tension between the narrative and the body, avoiding the centre of the frame. This is to avoid meanings from being captured in a clear condensed image that could seal the connection with her movements: attention is driven to both a body and a camera in motion. Motion is pictured as ephemeral, ever shifting, and unstable, like nomadism. The characters go on to speak of love and death, considering the end of Shakespeare's tragedy: love as leading to death. Is death the end of the line? So, Kieu makes a claim for *Tale of Kieu*, for love is taken as an intransitive route: the Kieu in the poem is not in love with one specific person. She is "in love with love". Kieu's conclusion is understood by the closing scene of her writing, when she all of a sudden sings high pitched notes, taking her discovery to the physical level. The empty bird cage hanging beside her head is finally filled with the sound of her voice singing.

Trinh's suspicion of a Shakespearian love displaces the idea of a romantic lovetowards friends, towards a love such as Juliet calls "a greater love". She effective-

ly betrays viewers' expectations of watching a conventional tale of love on screen, as the title may suggest, to think through love and affection in imaginative threads of identification, empathy, and human connections. The title implies an act of detachment from a whole spectrum of love stories in cinema, hence freeing passions from their universal and unitary construction over what it means to love. Love is rendered intransitive, it becomes planetary, an act of reaching out. Indeed, love relationships are built between Kieu and Juliet, Kieu and her aunt, and, finally, between Kieu and her own identity as someone who feels foreign in both cultures between which she feels trapped. As Braidotti mentions:

Becoming free of the *topos* that equates the struggle for identity changes with suffering results in a more adequate level of self-knowledge. It therefore clears the ground for more adequate and sustainable relations to others who are crucial to the transformative project itself. (Braidotti 2011, p. 221)

Kieu's final line of flight is that of coming to terms with her own liminal self, who is not imprisoned in a bird cage: she who can sing her own song, regardless of her lack of belonging – neither here, not there. Through her reflexions on love, she realises that it is possible to love at a crossroad, not having to commit to a culture, neither in a sense of belonging, nor in pledging loyalty in regard to all value systems of the culture she chooses as her identity. She disengages with this quest, for love is rendered nomadic. There is no betrayal possible when you are “in love with love”.

4.3 Conclusions

Third Cinema's missing people appear in *Tale of Love* as women's missing heads. Through a gender pivot, Trinh tells the story of a woman who comes from the

context of the Third World. Through displacing the subjects from a homeland, a nation, a specific location, to an exilic new nation, she complicates the understanding of what is here and what is elsewhere. Power struggles take place within national borders: sharing the same urban space, living next door. The historical detour that casts away the focus on the national liberation, so dear to this cinema shifts the emphasis to the transnational and Homi Bhabha's "cultural hybridity" (Bhabha 1992). The idea of third space of enunciation is the place of the clashing of voices, the conflict zone and also the space of the encounters, Gloria Anzaldúa's "crossroads" (Anzaldúa 1987), Trinh's "boundary event" (Trinh 2011). The film crosses transnational borders, displacing the core of the conflict. Trinh's cinema, and particularly *Tale of Love*, is inscribed in the critical moment where universes merge, where Kieu has to cope with feeling foreign to her diasporic Vietnamese home and at the same time she frees herself from the photographer's invasive, colonising gaze. *Tale of Love* is a narrative of encounters, which equate with acts of solidarity, friendship, and love. Trinh's haptic strategies allow viewers to interpret the different layers and textures of Kieu's universe to the level of a sensorial body, and to go with our memory of senses. Trinh crosses the boundaries between the eye and the nose, from the tactility of a mosquito net to the sounds of an empty bird cage. Kieu's universe speaks volumes, insofar as it is non-unitary, split into multiple stories that interrupt one another in a multiplicity of intervals. It is a means of storytelling that is nomadic, for the story is constantly on the move, crossing borders from one narrative to another, constantly avoiding meaning from being captured.

The critical exploration of a gaze raises the question of film spectatorship, soliciting a self-conscious look from viewers. Alikan's camera is not the only device that looks without being looked at, since the film is mediated by a camera and a film apparatus that allows viewers to look without being looked at. Alikan objectifies Kieu through the use of a veil to cover her head, but Kieu throws the veil back at him. He uses the hat to hide his own fragility. A hat prevents her from gazing back at him. As soon as Kieu realises his fragility,

she plays her own game, and traces her line of flight. We see this at the end of the scene in which Alikan follows her and she hides, and then switches directions, walking past a mural. The camera also switches directions, going from a tracking shot to a tilt up the mural and towards the sky. What better represents a line of flight than an open sky?

Conclusions: The Gender Pivot

The concept of nomadism that Deleuze and Guattari have provided becomes a potent war machine when it is historically and geopolitically situated, especially driven by the critical assertions made by Rosi Braidotti, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Caren Kaplan. Their contribution to nomadic philosophy puts nomadism on the map of feminism and post-colonialism, two fields that have been powerful trenches of resistance in contemporary academia. An embodied, embedded and articulated notion of nomadism can potentially situate women's subject positions within complex social structures, marked by antagonisms inside and outside of boundaries: the city centres, refugee camps, the metropolitan areas.

Transitional spaces encompass relations that surpass the conflicts and antagonisms between margins. In fact, they constitute spaces of encounter, where solidarity can be key to the everyday struggles of *mestizas*. It takes a nomadic attitude to shift the conflicts amongst women on the margins to build strong bonds of resistance against State patrol and boundary safeguards that confine women of color into submissive conditions. The “politics of solidarity” (Mohanty 2013:8) that Mohanty endorses, escape binary oppositions between centre and peripheries to think of women's identity as rather fluid and open to coalitions. Nomadism has the potential to surpass the boundaries that are conjured into nets of kinship and expanded pathways of resistance. These nomadic twists in identity politics challenge the divisions that impose multiple levels of “inappropriateness” (Trinh, 1997:418), as criticised by Trinh both in her cinema and in her theory.

I advocate for nomadism as a critical tool to analyse Trinh's cinema, insofar as she opens the signs of representation to a fluid and mobile treatment of non-

Western women. The politics of speaking nearby in *Reassemblage*, as in other films, plays with signs of colonial representation in a constant game of escaping the mental configuration of stereotypes. The fragments do not match to encompass a specific representation that falls into a universal trap where all tribal women amount to the same. Trinh's irony aims to deconstruct direct discourses about them, since their realities are multiple, all too foreign for viewers to grasp. In using several strategies of experimental film, Trinh puzzles viewers with alterity's representation, diverting from the striated path of representation.

In *Tale of Love*, the portrayal of women's missing heads may allude to a lack, but not in a Lacanian way. Not only is Kieu's (or the white model's) body treated as an object by Alikan's lenses, but, in this case, losing one's head is an expression that alludes to madness. I refer to madness as anything that escapes ordinary patterns of thought. To put this in Trinh's words:

All deviations from the dominant stream of thought, that is to say, the belief in a permanent essence of woman and in an invariant but fragile identity whose loss is considered to be a specifically human danger, can easily fit into the categories of the mentally ill or the mentally underdeveloped (Trinh 1990, p. 95).

A gender pivot shifts the angle of Alikan's camera, who ceases to look without being looked at when Kieu throws the veil back at his face. He is rendered fragile, and silent, at last. The implication of off-frame gazes also subverts his dominant gaze by connecting it to a complex game of gazes. The postcolonial gaze is also directed back at viewers, both in *Reassemblage* and in *Naked Spaces*, when women and children look straight at the camera, breaking with a convention of ethnographic documentary which commands film subjects to act natural and never to look at the camera. In revealing the "power of the false", Trinh points to the falsifying narratives of mainstream ethnography. Trinh constantly emphasizes the fictional quality of both fictional and ethnographic films. Her lines of flight often

stem from a metanarrative that inspires reflexivity, but she uses other creative sources to raise suspicion around issues of representation. The infinite repetition of fragments of topless women, through multiple angles in Trinh's ethnographic films, provides associative cues that these exposed breasts are not meant for colonial titillations but, instead, relate to nurturing and breastfeeding. The colonial gaze is carefully deconstructed in different ways of exploring the representation of women's bodies. Trinh's usage of haptic visualities, such as the unravelling of the multiple layers of sheets and transparencies that come between the camera lenses and the spectator's view of Kieu's bed, suggests that she is protected from external gazes in *Tale of Love*. Visual boundaries are crossed to access a memory of tactility, while the camera comes near the mosquito net. This game of closeness / distance with regards to a woman's body is poetically explored with the textual and visual connection of a woman's body to the houses of tribal people in *Naked Spaces*. The camera's invasive gaze explores every corner of a home, alternating interior and exterior shots, which are sensually compared to the act of love-making.

There is critical portrayal of space and time that stimulates fertile imaginations to go beyond the images projected on screen. Space is taken to abstraction as the bullet train gains speed in *The Fourth Dimension*, cutting across the multi-layered landscape of Japan, splitting time into at least two Japans. The first one is related to stillness and contemplation, while the second one draws on high-speed, an excess of overwhelming urban lights. Between these two Japans, there is the ritual, a time outside time, which celebrates an everlasting culture; one that moves from parade to parade. The powerful image of two dragons spins at different speeds, under different filters that take viewers back to a machine time, and thus off the plot, tricked by the distractions of the artifice.

"Machine time" are the words that float over the screen of a train's platform. The train is the traveling device that moves in and out of the story in *Night Passage*,

except this train does not move in space, but in between multiple intervals. The train stops are like loopholes in the story, fugitive, transitory, taking space to the level of vibrations, dancing lights and rituals that perform, rather than enact, the cinematic experience. This train suggests a spiritual journey, an experience between life and death. Nevertheless, death takes us back to the cinema, back to the void. Black holes swallow meaning in time images where they become indiscernible, like the doubled image of a dancer that “swallows” one another and becomes a dot on a flat screen in *Night Passage*. Spectators temporarily feel lost in the story. The man reappears, briefly connecting to the story as the two girls walk in the dark night before they get back on the train. The very existence of the train is questionable, since it does not need fuel or electricity to operate. It is a nomadic device of storytelling, conducted, not by an engine driver, but by two peculiar storytellers, the intercessors of multiple fabulations that are not enclosed in a fully-knitted film story. Like a nomadic path, it is not unitary, open-ended, and it crosses boundaries between cinema and performing art. These intervals, that are meant to be breathing pauses that intercept the story, become the core of the story, with no centre, no dramatic arc.

I read nomadism as a potent figure of cinema, of a cinema that traces creative pathways of thought. Trinh’s intervals are passages across dark rooms trying to reach the theatre, trying to trace their lines of flight that connect film to thought, vision to tactility, to smells and vibrations. Most of Trinh’s intercessors and protagonists are women, and it is not by accident that they are not white. These are political choices, for Trinh’s nomadic film aesthetic is Feminist, Postcolonial, and critical of the multiple boundaries that limit a non-Western woman’s journey. I conclude that Trinh’s films are stimulating vectors of Feminist thought, a thought that reflects upon itself, and is daring enough so as to challenge every boundary that comes across a feminist struggle. She subscribes to a culturally hybrid, geopolitically challenging and artistically revolutionary way of doing feminism.

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