Sound Moves: Displacement and Modernity in French and Senegalese Cinemas

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Introduction

The Modernity Question

This project explores the relation between film, film sound, modernity, and the cultural politics of gender. Through a close analysis of specific works by French and Senegalese directors, I question the categorization of Third Cinema, and demonstrate that Senegalese cinema constitutes a discrete artistic movement unto itself, similar to a more established aesthetics such as the French New Wave. I find that both cinemas challenge the primacy of the visual by juxtaposing the various aural planes emerging from the plurality and plasticity of sound with the more rigid two-dimensional visual planes. As a result, I determine that new (aural) narrative planes surface from the displacement of sound and its clash with the image in the films analyzed in each chapter. Furthermore, I expose how sound displacement also generates gender displacement, as the French and Senegalese film subjects (diegetic characters as well as ideal audience) constantly shift their identities because of their unique position as both products and counterpoints of modernity, which, briefly and broadly defined, I see as a matrix of social relations generated by the rise of capitalism.[1] I show that women filmmakers re-formulate the discourse of female identity through voice and sounds, disrupting the gendered relation that classical cinema established primarily through the scopic regime. The dislocation of

[1] The cinematic subjects are shaped by modernity and everything that it entails, literally (technology) or intrinsically (alienation for example), but in the process of formation, these subjects also counter and challenge the effects of modernity.

masculine identity in mainstream cinema is made possible also through the wandering ability of the cinematic apparatus in the city, what I call the *caméra-flâneur*, which often takes on a female perspective in the two cinemas, as I will explain later. Thus, while sound as technology, and the city as an interactive and (still) growing place are construed as products of modernity, gender subversion allows for a critique of this modernity. As elements of film, sound, the city and the female cinematic subject double as both symptoms and critiques of modernity. Rather than accepting the idea of an all encompassing modernity, I propose to analyze customized modernities according to the particular interplay of sound, the city and its female subjects. This analysis takes place in two different cinematic traditions, and according to specific directors because it is from the filmmakers' unique perspectives on cinema that customized modernities emerge.

The impossibility of giving modernity a singular meaning becomes obvious when we look at how it has been theorized. As a phenomenon in the world and in history, modernity is a constantly evolving hybrid affected and shaped by the connections between three distinctive historical and aesthetic moments: the baroque movement of the seventeenth century, Baudelaire's writing and description of the nineteenth century city of Paris as understood by Walter Benjamin, and the avant-garde movement in the twentieth century. These three components are at the base of Christine Buci-Glucksmann's representation of modernity in her book *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity*. Her concern is with finding the means to represent modernity and its

aesthetics[2] in the context of a violent and war-shattered twentieth century that polemicizes the concept of beauty. My purpose, though, takes me away from her findings, and the theories of the Frankfurt School altogether, as I am interested in the manifestation of the three "crucial turning points" (Buci-Glucksmann 10) in the context of the New Wave and Senegalese cinemas. I align these three moments in aesthetic history with the works of three French and three Senegalese directors, respectively, while exploring the interplay between sound, the city and gender subversion in each case. Even though for the most part the French films studied chronologically precede those of the Senegalese counterpart, I do not wish to present the African films as being causally linked with the work and innovations created by the French; the aim here is not to understand the work of the Senegalese directors as an aftereffect of the French New Wave, but rather as an autonomous creation, an independent transposition onto a different time and culture.[3] In addition, keeping the two cinemas separated allows for a more encompassing view of modernity.

These two particular cinemas illustrate how modernity can be shaped by a multitude of events, people, and divergent contexts. This is obviously the case with the two cinemas in question, which come from different continents, and certainly follow extremely dissimilar cinematic traditions. The two countries, France and Senegal, share

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[2] The aesthetics of modernity refer to modernism. In my analysis of the films, I am interested in both the chronological aspect of modernity (the progression from the Baroque to the avant-garde), but also the qualitative category (this is Theodor Adorno's observation in *Minima Moralia*, 208), which is in fact modernism (for example, the aesthetic philosophy of Walter Benjamin as it takes shapes in the context of Charles Baudelaire's writings).

[3] I would like to reiterate here that a substantial part of my work on West African film, as well as discussions on Fanon, Shohat, Trinh-ha, Godard and others, had their starting point in Charles Sugnet's course on African film that I took at the University of Minnesota, fall 2003.

much colonial history, but they do so from antagonistic positions. As I researched the historical events and cultural movements that have influenced and affected the phenomenon of modernity, I realized that an adequate definition of modernity has to come from multiple sources. By looking at two differing types of cinema, one representative of Second cinema[4], the stylistic cinema of the *auteur*, and the other representing the confrontational Third Cinema, this work aims at reaching the needed breadth in order to demonstrate the hybridity mentioned above. Therefore, with Buci-Glucksmann, I place modernity at the intersection of three historical moments, the Baroque, nineteenth century Paris and the avant-garde, which I understand through three components present in every culture of modernity: sound, the city and gender displacement. Modernity is then the *whole*, the end result of a combination of all these elements, which further suggests hybridity; or it can be the *part*, each individual component. The result of the dichotomous quality of modernity brings me to the idea of multiple modernities.

Charles Taylor's notion of multiple modernities is exposed in his book, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, and I analyze his theories in detail in Chapter IV. In brief, though, he defines modernity as an "amalgam" of new domains: practices, ways of living, and forms of malaise. The manifestations of these domains may include science, technology, industrial production, urbanization, individualism, secularization, alienation, and meaninglessness (Taylor 1). The three subcategories I mentioned above are all found

[4] I will return to fuller definitions of the Second and Third cinemas later; for now it suffices to say that the categories are born out of contrasts with, and reactions against First Cinema—the cinema of Hollywood.

amid Taylor's new domains: sound as an example of technology, the city as urbanization, and the problematic identity of female characters as an illustration of alienation. The many variations of interactions between these elements contribute to the formation of original components within the aesthetics of modernity. Furthermore, the use of the word "amalgam" works well with Christine Buci-Glucksmann's hypothesis that modernity is born at the intersection of the Baroque, the Benjaminian Paris, and the avant-garde. Furthermore, the idea of multiple modernities supports my argument that modernity has to be defined according to each specific context, or according to any combination of the elements listed by Taylor. In line with Taylor's suggestion, each individual then creates his or her own modernity through a particular interplay of the elements mentioned above: the forms of malaise, for example, cannot have the exact same effect on everyone. So, we have here yet another dichotomous relationship: each human subject alters modernity, as much as modernity itself (as a mass event) affects the formation of the human subjects who could be a filmmaker, a protagonist in a film, or an anonymous part of the mass.

Throughout this project a number of films from the six directors will be mentioned, but the bulk of my studies will rely on the following pairing and subsequent film choices. For the Baroque movement, the movies of both Jean-Luc Godard and Djibril-Diop Mambety are particularly relevant. Close readings of *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*, on the French side, and of *Touki-Bouki* on the Senegalese, will reveal how the question of modernity plays out when sound generates narrative planes of its own, thus subverting mainstream codes. Both directors take a frontal approach to attacking the effects of modernity on contemporary society, because of their chosen subject matter and

in the way they deliver their films technically. The images of Paris as seen in François Truffaut's *400 coups* and *Jules et Jim* will be juxtaposed to images of Dakar through the vision of Ousmane Sembene, and his film, *Xala*. These two directors have an alternate way of attacking modernity, a subtler method than that of the previous two filmmakers. This process is two-fold: first, there is a removal of characters from what could be deemed the canonical center of society, and second, a persistent observation process of the endeavors of these marginalized characters is required. The constantly moving eye of the camera in the ever-changing space of the two capital cities will serve then as a reason to introduce the term *caméra-flâneur/flâneuse* which I find apt to describe the film work of both directors. Moreover, the concern with the position of women in society that both Truffaut and Sembene reveal will allow us to transition into the third pairing of directors, Agnès Varda and Safi Faye. Readings of the female body and voice in *Sans toit ni loi* and *Cléo de 5 à 7* on the one hand, and *Mossane* on the other, will showcase woman as subject and her positioning as Other. The female film protagonists can even be seen as a double-folded Other, which mirrors one of the essential issues of modernity: much like the films themselves, the woman-subject establishes herself as both a result and a critique of modernity. Consequently, a series of modernities is created through the multi-dimension and specificity of each character, male or female, and their physical junction with the city, which occurs differently in each particular case.

In my exploration of the modernity phenomenon I also draw inspiration from the work and definitions of modernity by Jean-François Lyotard and Ben Singer. I am intrigued by the way Lyotard understands modernity because his two-fold division

supports the dichotomous relationship between film and modernity. According to Lyotard, there are two kinds of modernity. The first one is a sort of palpable modernity, which is an intrinsic part of our society, and usually takes the form of technology. The second type is ethereal, and it is a direct result of the insertion of technology in our everyday lives, which creates a sense of loss within the human subject. As a result, the human subject loses touch with his/her own body and identity, or the rest of humanity. Moreover, Lyotard considers that modernity "does not ground its legitimacy in the past, but in the future" (1988, 68), which places modernity in opposition with the past, and establishes a belief in progress. Modernity is then about progress, which to me is a fluid concept, so in the future, modernity will still function like a hybrid, constantly evolving. Lyotard's categories allow for further investigation into the realm of film. As far as the first one is concerned, both cinemas in discussion here strive to instill a sense of awareness: cinema, although in itself a result of technological advancement, tries to resuscitate the human subject. Questioning one's body, or one's identity is a direct result of that attempt: the modern subject's challenge is not the transition (which could, maybe, lead to the postmodern, but I will return to this point later), but rather the acclimation to modernity, becoming aware of its ill effects, and then re-appropriating it in a positive manner. My understanding of the French New Wave is somewhat similar to this process of re-acclimation to modernity: this is a moment in the history of cinema that first opposes and then attempts to reunite theory and practice.

Ben Singer's chapter on the modernity thesis from his book "Melodrama and Modernity," juxtaposes film and modernity because "cinema is the quintessential product

of fin-de-siècle society. It stands out as an emblem of modernity" (102). He explains the modernity thesis according to three components: a relationship of resemblance between the two (cinema is *like* modernity), a connection that positions cinema within relationships of contextual contiguity and interaction (in other words, a *part* of modernity), and a relation of causality, meaning that cinema is a *consequence* of modernity (Singer 103). Singer calls the last type of relationship "controversial," and he gives several examples of new phenomena that accompany film in the second category; the examples are reminiscent of Taylor's new domains because Singer, too, refers to all these phenomena as "new": technologies, entertainments, architectural forms, social spaces, or social practices. Within the latter category, he includes *flânerie*, which will be the focal point of Chapter III. However, since it is Baudelaire's vision of Paris that is key to the birth of the *flâneur*, it is worth noting the poet's own description of modernity from "The Painter of Modern Life," and as quoted by Singer, "by modernity I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art, whose other half is the eternal and the immutable" (Singer 34). In this instance we have yet again an image of a fleeing entity, as well as a suggestion of its perpetual presence: "Baudelaire associated modernity with the experience of a constant present tense that is always changing and always new" (Singer 34). These descriptions could easily evoke the city, which brings us back to the common denominator of Singer's and Taylor's lists: the role of the city in the unveiling of modernity. The city and its dynamics constantly change, and Singer draws the following conclusion from the writings of Siegfried Kracauer and Benjamin: "the urban environment of modern capitalism brought about some kind of fundamental change in the

human ‘sensorium,’ creating a pervasive new ‘mode of perception’ which ultimately had a significant impact on the development of cinema, encouraging cinema to take shape in ways that mirrored the fragmentation and abruptness of urban experience” (Singer 7). In addition to this, Singer later quotes Ludwig Weber, saying: “Noise is a problem, particularly to the metropolis, because sounds constantly vary so that there is no chance to adapt to them….the difference with urban noise is the constant change, the sudden and unpredictable startling effect of always-different sounds” (Singer 117). These two citations reinforce my idea that modernity is always morphing, along with the constant tumult of the city, making it impossible for the subject to appropriate all the changes and sounds inherent in the modern, urban life. As sound shifts, the individual and the modernity he or she represents changes along the way. As cinema progresses, so does modernity, because the three categories outlined by Singer remain in place: cinema is like, a part of or a consequence of modernity.

New Wave and Third Cinema Notions

Even though I will expand on the background of both cinemas throughout this project, I would like to establish their theoretical matrix now. Both the New Wave, and Senegalese cinemas present themselves as counter-movements to mainstream, classical Hollywood cinema. The latter, also known as First cinema, essentially relies on the triad, ‘order/disorder/order-restored:’ something disrupts the normal order of things and at the end, the disruptive element disappears, order is restored, and the audience gets closure.

The films in this category do not draw attention to the act of filming: the plot is character-driven, and editing gives the feeling of seamless continuity. Finally, the characters fulfill their Oedipal trajectories, meaning that men settle down, and women "come to their senses" and marry. Representative of the Second and Third Cinemas, the New Wave and West African cinemas challenge the mainstream rule and establish new ways of looking at film, both at the level of form and of content.

The New Wave is a movement that was born out of a cinephilic reflection on the work of Jean Renoir, Alfred Hitchcock and Ingmar Bergman, film noir, and the aesthetic of Italian Neo-realism. The New Wave ideology comes from three simultaneous theoretical stands: the writings of André Bazin on the importance of mise-en-scène and the use of depth of field, François Truffaut's article "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema," and Alexandre Astruc's notion of the caméra-stylo, which will help me transition into the idea of the *caméra-flanêur*. The three elements suggest that film becomes an aesthetic code of its own. The New Wave then, as Gilles Deleuze puts it in *Cinéma 1*, "by a reflexive or intellectual detour" (215) breaks away from the traditional framework, and sets itself up to tackle modernity, first as a whole aesthetic movement, and secondly, in individual ways according to each director.

To fully understand the historical positioning and influence of the New Wave, one has to look also at the impact that structuralism and post-structuralism had on cinema following the New Wave movement. Structuralists thought that the "politique des auteurs" focused too much on the importance of the creator, the auteur, who was the central figure in the process of creation, but in doing so, it side-stepped the spectator and

ideology. The structuralism of the sixties, paying tribute to Saussure's and Barthes' linguistic theories, brought more organization to the idea of film, by suggesting that meaning was not solely produced by the auteur, but also through the understanding of the relationship between the auteur and the linguistic, social and institutional structures surrounding him; however, writings on film still lacked the presence of the spectator or any trace of ideology. The big proponent of structuralism was Christian Metz, who perceived cinema as a language, and consequently believed in the idea that cinema had a total linguistic structure. Thus, film's components are like words; the syntactic relations between the shots make up the "grammar" of the movie. The post-structuralism of the seventies would prove that more than one theory was needed to explain cinema, and that ultimately there was a need for cross-fertilization, a process which might be considered to parallel the subversion of genres that was so predominant in the New Wave productions. Post-structuralism gave the text ideological prowess, and separated auteur and spectator by putting between them four fields: semiotics, psychoanalysis, feminism and deconstruction, which became vehicles for the understanding of the cinematic act. Semiotics places the subject within the textual process, which is made up of a series of signs producing meaning; using notions of difference and loss as the main index, psychoanalysis and feminism add sexuality to the subject, and ask in fact who is the subject: the spectator, the (male) star, the director etc.; finally, deconstruction (by doing what its name implies) reveals the codes and conventions of dominant cinema as a means to counter and reject common filmmaking practices.

West African cinema presents itself as an alternative to the First Cinema as well. At first glance, West African cinema would seem to pay its due to French cinema, the cinema of the colonizer, but I think that, partly due to the economic hardships and therefore the lack of funding, West African cinema takes Bazin's view of cinema and gives it a new perspective. The specificity of this cinema lies in the slowness of its pace; what was a slice of life for Truffaut, for Sembene simply becomes life, or the whole pie, so to speak. Mambety, however, will often use editing techniques that are very Godardian in their approach, like the jump-cut and persistent asynchronous sound. What is interesting, though, is that it is exactly this unusual (by comparison to other African directors) filmmaking process that links Mambety to the Second Cinema, the auteur cinema, and which puts him in the same category with Godard or Bergman. Finally, there is Safi Faye, widely recognized the pioneer African female director, and who in my opinion fits perfectly within this triangle, functioning as a bridge between the iconic figure of Sembene and the dejected, almost martyr-like Mambety. Departing from examples of French cinema, and using sound and voice as crucial indices, my study concentrates on these three filmmakers from Senegal, trying to elucidate what is specific to their cinema, and how male and female directors portray women within the socio-cultural context of the country. Mainstream cinema establishes the position of women at the site of sight; Second Cinema adds the dimension of voice to the equation. The cinema of the three directors mentioned above provides us with an opportunity to revisit the effect of film on representations of women via two mediums, image and voice. Women

characters are both seen and heard as they are analyzed here against the backdrop of colonial and postcolonial identities.[5]

Postcolonial studies are concerned with the studying of European colonies since their independence, from a historical point of view, in which, chronologically, the *post* actually means after colonialism. This study could be extended to the period since colonization, if we consider postcolonialism a new form of colonialism.[6] So the post-colonial could be understood as a continuation of colonialism. The idea behind the postcolonial could be thus located at various stages throughout the history of mankind. In talking about colonialism, one word that comes to mind immediately is Eurocentrism, which, in Ella Shohat's definition, "sanitizes Western history while patronizing and even demonizing the non-West; it thinks of itself in terms of its noblest achievements—science, progress, humanism—but of the non-West in terms of its deficiencies, real or imagined" (1994, 3). When looking at the two cinemas, we will always encounter such dichotomies, and Paul Willemen demarcates two categories by which we can follow these binaries: ours and theirs; *our* nations, religions, culture or art, as opposed to *their* tribes, superstitions, folklore and artifacts, respectively. These differences constitute the breadth of most African films, because the dichotomy "ours and theirs" in fact differentiates once again the West from the non-West, the latter being construed as the

[5] I am "marginalizing" these women myself, as I place them in a separate chapter, the last one, but I believe that such positioning only emphasizes the differences with the males and the male directors established in the firs four chapters.

[6] Drawing on studies by Ella Shohat and Anne McClintock, Stuart Hall argues just that in "When Was the 'Post-colonial'? Thinking at the Limit," and he also points to the fact that there is always a slippage in the term's usage, so that it covers much more than just history since formal independence (242-253).

negative component. The dichotomous categorization continues with the term "Third Cinema," which opposes, at least at first glance, the representatives of the West, First and Second Cinemas.

"Third Cinema" not only categorizes films made in Third World countries, but it is also mainly understood as an opposition to both Western and Eastern cultures. It is an oppositional type of cinema that stresses non-linearity. Susan Hayward distinguishes between Third Cinema, which is a more political cinema geared toward countering the ideology of the other two cinemas, and Third World Cinema, which would be wider and covering more thematic elements (2001, 389-96). Much like Hayward, in *Questions of Third Cinema*, Willemen thinks of Third Cinema as an ideological project, meaning it is a body of films adhering to certain political and aesthetic programs, regardless of whether or not they are produced by Third World peoples themselves (105). So then, most films in Third cinema constitute political statements in relation to their respective countries. For both Hayward and Willemen, African cinema is seen as being iconoclast and thus, much like the French New Wave, it steps outside of the traditional, and it, too, has different ways of attacking modernity, similar to Truffaut's or Godard's approaches mentioned above. I agree with Hayward and Willemen's assessments only partially, because Senegalese cinema also remains within the realm of tradition, which is evident from the reccurence of several themes. All the recurrent themes in African cinema—conflicts between cultures (whether African, European or Arab), challenges posed by post-colonial life, disillusionment with political independence, declining quality of life, political instability and corruption, rethinking gender and gender roles and expectations,

and the need to rewrite African history from an African point of view—are usually dealt with through either allegory or direct satire.[7]

No less important is another point that African filmmakers maintain, that African cinema needs to be examined outside of the European theoretical framework. In "The Theoretical Construction of African cinema," V.Y. Mudimbe is quoted by Stephen Zacks on the following movements (and not all of them are non-European) that have influenced the creation and development of African discourse: Negritude, Sartrean existentialism, missionary writings, ethnophilosophy, anthropological structuralism, and Fanonian neo-Marxist nationalism. In Zacks' opinion, three main theoretical positions emerge when interpreting African cinematic texts. First, Neo-Marxism emphasizes opposition and/or resistance, and tries to subvert "dominant forms, methods, genres, and institutions" (5). Second is neo-structuralism, whose aim is to "describe or translate cultural products for different audiences rather than to prescribe or proscribe cinematic practices" (Zacks 5). This theory is different from the neo-Marxist one, mainly in its less aggressive approach. Where neo-Marxism wants to put the difference between African and European film into evidence, "to valorize and heighten" through opposition, neo-structuralism is satisfied with merely exposing those differences. Finally, Zacks refers back to modernism, which also does not have a clear polemical inclination, but "emphasizes its own subjectivity in ascribing value to a text, attempting to relativize descriptions, level categorical differences, and move toward universalistic interpretation and critique by means of a more detailed, particular, contextualized discussion" (Zacks 6). Following this reading,

[7] Chapters II and IV, on Mambety and Sembene, respectively, will address these issues.

the text and author are then closely linked together, with the product of the auteur being regarded as an "aesthetic event," which brings us back to the aesthetic of the French New Wave, and generates more connections between the two cinemas.

Chapter Summaries

The first chapter focuses on the films of Jean-Luc Godard, and it explores the director's use of sound in *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*, which reveals the relationship of the film with the Baroque. The connections are made through the theories of Gilles Deleuze on the fold, and the notion of alienation, tributary to Berthold Brecht. I transpose the qualities of the Deleuzian fold and Baroque to the realm of sound. What follows is the notion of an aural fold, which I use in order to shrink the distance between the audience and what happens on screen. I find that the ever elusive third dimension in cinema is filled by noises, sounds, or silences; unlike in the theater, the gap between audience and the actors on screen cannot be shrunk, unless we are talking about the elasticity of sound: sound can propel itself, like the Baroque fold, to infinity, and it can come from both sides, the screen and the audience.

According to the German theorist Henrich Wölfflin, and as quoted by Gilles Deleuze in *The Fold*, the Baroque is characterized by strong contrasts between exterior, and the interior. This contrast is easily recognizable in architecture, but it can be applicable to film: the audience is caught between the outside images that they see on screen, and the subliminal message that is formed on the inside. The conflicting dichotomy inside/outside generates an "exacerbated contrast" (1992, Deleuze 28) on

which the Baroque relies in order to generate an overwhelming aesthetic effect; the same effect is created by Godard's film, as he juggles between images and sounds, and within the latter category, between noises and silences. The alternation between moments of silence and moments of loud, sometimes exaggerated noise, leads me to coin another new technical term—the sonic jump-cut. This technique emerges from the editing practice of switching between unrelated lines of action which made Godard so famous; however, in the case of sound, the sonic jump-cut parallels the constant Baroque contrast between outside and inside. We jump from silences to noises, and back, and in the meantime, the missing third dimension[8] in cinema is occasionally filled because the audience "jumps" along with those silences and noises. Usually, the audience meets silence with silence, while during the loud scenes, people allow themselves to be loud in the theater, a point I will expand on later.

Godard's *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* is a great example of Baroque aesthetics in film, as its narration and sounds fold onto themselves like Deleuze's *pli*, and generate an overload of stimuli through an overbearing soundtrack. Godard, unlike Truffaut, likes to excessively point out to the obvious, which is a Brechtian technique. The figure of Berthold Brecht plays an important part in Godard's oeuvre, and the name "Brecht" is even mentioned at the very beginning of this film by the main character, Juliette. The film *2 ou 3…* draws attention to the "artifice" of cinema, and it assails ideology by revealing its structure, particularly that of capitalism. The same can be said about *Une*

[8] The recent wave of Hollywood 3-D productions fills the space between audience and screen visually; however, in the context of these two cinemas, I take that space to be empty, so I look at cinema as 2-D—a series of moving photographs.

femme est une femme and *Week-End*, which I will use only in part in order to support my argument. The latter film also provides me with the most Artaudian example of Godard's films, reminiscent of the theater of cruelty through its persistent and violent displays.

Chapter II of the project continues to analyze innovative uses of sound, and it moves from Godard to Djibril-Diop Mambety. Much like Godard, Mambety's editing is often disruptive and discontinuous, but there are moments when his cinema is quite seamless and does not draw attention to itself, thus allowing the spectator to be stitched into the narrative. Therefore, Mambety poses an interesting problem, as he meshes two styles together, and his films oscillate between being in and out of the counter-cinema mode, and in and out of the Third Cinema mode much like the sonic rack-focus[9] that defines his films and to which I will return later. This chapter proposes an incursion into the world of Mambety's films, with an emphasis on *Touki-Bouki* (1973), as I try to show that Mambety's originality comes from taking counter-cinema to new extremes, going not only against the mainstream, but against trends of his own national cinema, and of Third Cinema. I look at his films, and *Touki-Bouki* in particular, as perfect examples of bridging the French New Wave and Senegalese cinema at the level of the cinematic subject, especially the female subject, who has to constantly rediscover her identity. I will analyze the way Mambety makes use of sound, issues of locomotion, alienation and marginality in order to subvert mainstream cinema codes and conventions, as well as the primacy of the cinematic male subject. Finally, I will explore the ubiquitous ambivalence

[9] A (visual) rack-focus effect occurs when, within the same shot, the camera switches focus from/between the foreground and the background. My term "sonic rack-focus" extends the same technique to the realm of sound: within the same shot, various sounds come in and out of focus, and/or alternate between being the dominant sound or a secondary type of noise/sound.

that marks his entire body of work in order to reveal the originality of his personal style. Ambivalence is apparent in the way Mambety delivers a story, in his cinematic methodology, in his political views, and most relevantly in his characters. It is here that I find his work can be seen as a crossing point between the direct Godardian approach, and the more veiled treatment of marginality displayed by Truffaut. The first two chapters introduce two new technical terms, the sonic jump-cut and the sonic rack-focus, respectively, which expand the vocabulary we use when it comes to describing the soundtrack. I believe that new terminology that deals with the aural is warranted because film analysis, such as shot by shot exercises, stresses (only) the visual maybe too often. And while I do not intend to set up the aural and the visual in direct competition, I do hope to present the aural as a viable narrative enhancer or as a completely novel alternative.

The next chapter transposes the theories behind the notion of *flâneur* to Truffaut's films and characters, while adding the dimension that the camera itself is a wandering, independent entity, all within the context of urban space. The camera takes on a life of its own as it wanders the city, observing life *next to* the life of the characters; from rooftops, or in amusement parks, or down in the street, the eye of the camera documents the evolution of the city. In these instances the camera does not follow any particular point-of-view; instead, it generates its own, neutral point-of-view. On other occasions, the camera combines its neutral point-of-view with the point-of-view of a character, which leads to a strong emphasis on the act of observing as we suddenly have a double gazing effect. Walter Benjamin's article "The Flâneur" introduces the character of the wanderer,

which the author considers to be a product of the city of Paris, and both the *flâneur* and the city of Paris become subsequent epitomes of modernity. The wanderer is a male pedestrian who finds pleasure in walking aimlessly and leisurely through the city, but can never associate with or be assimilated by the crowd, and thus he stands alone and unique. One of the problems with the *flâneur* theory is the lack of a female counterpart, and Susan Buck-Morss alludes to the prostitute as the only possible female *flâneur* in her article, "The Flâneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering" (48-53). I will briefly deal with this variation of the *flâneur* in the last chapter, on female filmmakers. The *flâneur*'s foremost trait is his detachment, and all his endeavors are undertaken without ever being aware of his actions: the aloofness is definitely a common trend in the New Wave characters, as they move through the city and through life propelled by unclear motives. The *flâneur* is in fact trapped in the city—a labyrinth that one cannot escape, and in which one dwells continuously in solitude. Therefore, in a world of commodity, and as a creation of modernity, of luxury and consumption, of marginality, the *flâneur* becomes the archetypal expression of alienation and modernity.

François Truffaut is probably the most poetic director of the French New Wave, and he captures marginality and the quotidian better than anyone else. It is from the banality of his stories, the fact that he shows the mundane, that his great marginalized characters are born; these people are not concerned with the effects that society and modernity have on them; for the most part they are immune to being desensitized by technology; they are, as the director himself puts it, "on the edge of society." This director's concern with marginality is also what separates his work from Godard's films,

whose characters are interested more in revolution than life itself. It is with Truffaut that the modern subject can really have a chance to come to terms with his or her own, new identity. By picking a child as his first important character in *400 coups*, Truffaut allows himself to showcase an innovative look at the streets of Paris, a new vision of the modern world of the city. The city develops alongside the young protagonist. The fact that Antoine Doinel is a teenager reinforces the metamorphosis that occurs within the city itself—both entities, the city and the teenager, go through fundamental changes in Truffaut's oeuvre.

From the films of Truffaut, and especially *Jules et Jim*, which brings in a powerful female character, I move to the films of Ousmane Sembene, in chapter IV. My analysis relies heavily on the film *Xala*, which connects the presence of female characters to the evolving dynamics of the city. I think that the *caméra-flâneur* also works when transposed to Dakar, and Sembene tries to show as much of the city as possible as he tries to build his characters. He also exhibits an obvious concern about the position of women in contemporary Senegal, and this segues to the last chapter to the vision of the women filmmakers. Sembene's understanding of the politics of gender seem to push for an acceptance, a recognition of the capital role that women have in modern society and the notion that they are mainly responsible for pushing it forward. They are the catalysts needed in order to continue the revival of African societies. However, this action requires sacrifice, and creates a great divide within the women themselves: the conflict between family and tradition, and between career and modernity. Here, again, one needs to re-

appropriate modernity; both filmmakers and characters have to acclimate themselves to the demands of modernity and come to terms with their, individual, new identity.

This particular chapter returns to the work of Charles Taylor, and his idea of multiple modernities, which in the context of *Xala* involves all of the themes of my project: the ever-changing city, sounds and music, and female characters. The hybrid quality of the city of Dakar comes from the variety of shots but also, maybe more importantly, from the specificity of each character involved in the plot of the film and the physical interchange with the city. What I am interested in for this particular chapter is the way in which Sembene draws upon these interactions and the idea of community, both amplified through the use of sound, in order to generate multiple modernities: each individual faces a personal modernity, and as a group, the community has to acclimate to an entirely different version of modernity as well.

The last chapter combines the films of Agnès Varda and Safi Faye to provide a female perspective on the cinematic female subject. Even though Varda's characters are placed in an urban setting, and Faye's in a rural setting, the connection between the two filmmakers is still made at the level of the classical constraints on the female body and voice. After a brief overview of the restrictions and limitations imposed by classical narrative cinema on the female body, through canonical readings by Laura Mulvey, Mary-Ann Doane, Linda Williams, and Ann Kaplan, this chapter will focus on the issue of voice, and the reversal (from the traditional male voice-over domination) to a feminine voice and voice-over. I will attempt to show that the female voice, or the singing voices of the soundtrack allow for a subversion of the male primacy in cinema. This final

chapter proposes an alternative to the chapters focusing on the male subject, because both directors celebrate the female protagonist who even supplants the male in the role of *flâneur*. The *flâneuse* that ensues readjusts our understanding of the *caméra-flâneuse*. The two women directors realize the importance of establishing a visual female point of view, but they also go further than that, and create an aural point of view. The latter is generated not only by the individual protagonists, but also from multiple perspectives—multiple faces and voices, all female. In the end, these two filmmakers provide us with alternatives to the gender challenged *flânerie*, which is yet another manifestation and/or result of multiple modernities: there is a certain type of modernity associated with the male *flâneur*, and that type is being challenged and subsequently changed by a modernity associated with the female *flâneuse*.

Kaja Silverman's theories will prove most useful for the evolution of the female primacy in film, as she pushes the argument of male dominance in cinema from image to sound and voice, stating that the male voice also acts as a significant authority in film. Mainly using the theories of Guy Rosolato and Michel Chion, Silverman reworks the mother-daughter relationship through the use of voice. She claims that the voice of the mother functions like an acoustic mirror according to which the child models her/his own subject, in a similar fashion to the visual recognition that occurs in Lacan's mirror stage. According to Silverman, after discovering his identity and voice in that initial reverberation, the male child will later hear all "the repudiated elements of his infantile blabber" (1988, 101). This aural refraction leads to the desire that the female voice, in classic narrative cinema, should operate for the benefit of the male subject and emit

sounds that do not make sense, or "involuntary sound." In the films chosen for these chapters, *Cléo de 5 à 7*, *Sans toit ni loi*, and *Mossane*, the maternal voice, which the child perceives as disembodied, is supplanted by the voice-over, which is the quintessential cinematic disembodied voice, but also by singing voices. In the chosen cases there are several close approximations of the acoustic mirror concept, but the disembodied voice belongs to the (female) filmmakers, and not to the figure of the Mother. The women directors use those voices to showcase clearly the power of voluntary sound, as well as offer a counterpoint to the aural male dominance in classical cinema.

There are obviously many themes running through my project, and they may at first glance appear unrelated. I hope to prove the contrary, as the three main elements of the argument for a personalized modernity, the sound, the city and the female subject all play a role in the three main historical moments discussed: the Baroque, nineteenth century Paris, and the avant-garde. As mentioned before, Chapter II includes a discussion on the sonic rack-focus effect. This entire project is a good example of such rack-focus effect: sound is the main focus of the first two chapters, then for the next two the city becomes the main interest with sound regressing to a lesser role, and I end with a chapter of the female subjectivity, a topic that runs through the first four chapters as well, but I continue to discuss the presence of the city and sound even there. To summarize succinctly, my final aim can be reduced to the following: to explore the morphing nexus of all these themes, sound, the city, female identity, and to explain how they alter our understanding of modernity.

Chapter I: The Aural Fold and the Sonic Jump-cut: Godard's (Baroque) Sound

Even though he has been associated with the other four main directors representing the New Wave movement, I would suggest that Jean-Luc Godard has set himself apart from all categorization. Godard's aesthetic always took him away from the typical and the classical, and he constantly tried to subvert traditional ideas. This style is associated with the aesthetic of counter-cinema, as Godard's films seek to call as much attention to the editing process as possible. He circumvented eye-line matching[10] and the necessity of a counter-shot; he did not use three-point lighting in order to maximize the clarity of the images, and favored instead natural lighting. He did not follow the progression rules of going from general to specific, nor those of synchronous sound. David Sterritt summarizes those habits in the following way: "Godard refuses to separate areas of experience that are normally confined to distinct categories in both film and life. His sounds and images oscillate between documentary and fiction, linear narrative and free association, crisp iconography and dense collage, the symbolic power of language and the pure presence of music, the contingency of spontaneous events and the calculations of creative labor" (Sterritt 27). Furthermore, his pioneer work in post-production and his many diverse socio-political interests that found their way to the screen are unmatched by any of the core New Wave filmmakers. Much has been written about him and his films, probably significantly more than about Truffaut, Rohmer,

[10] In mainstream cinema, which strives on continuity, the camera adapts the eyeline trajectory of a character to reveal what she or he sees, because the spectator expects to be able to see what the characters are seeing. The eyeline match finds its most use in the shot/reverse angle shot used in dialogue scenes and which I will discuss in more detail later.

Chabrol, and Rivette combined, but I believe that there are yet more discoveries to be made concerning his work. My intent, as declared in the introduction, is to move away from the visual and to focus on Godard's original use of sound, already present in his early films. My findings will allow for innovative connections with the Baroque, Gilles Deleuze's notion of the fold, and Berthold Brecht's concept of distanciation/alienation. While various references will be made to several films, this chapter will focus mainly on *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*. The connection between the Baroque's fold and Godard's use of sound, and in particular what I call his "sonic jump-cut," allows for an application of Brecht's theories to the context of cinema. In other words, the aural fold created by Godard's particular use of sound breaks down the typical boundaries between the auditorium and the screen, and in doing so it challenges the paradigm of the relationship between the modern subject and cinema. What happens is that sound basically takes on a spatial quality. The aural (Baroque) fold fills up the third dimension of cinema, and creates a space continuum in which the audience becomes intimately involved with the projection on screen.

The first component of my argument emerges from the idea that Godard's films display Baroque tendencies. The Baroque poses an interesting problem because, much like the New Wave, this movement is comprised of various nuances. Furthermore, an association between Godard and the Baroque, much like with any other twentieth-century artist, appears at first to be a difficult sell. The gap between the two is bridged, I think, by

the work of Gilles Deleuze[11] on Leibniz's Baroque, and the concept of the fold, which I apply to the context of film. In the films of Godard, Deleuze's fold takes on an alternate shape, the aural fold. This fold is born from the conflicting relationship between sound and image that Godard exploits so well, and which mirrors a quintessential Baroque contrast. According to the German theorist Heinrich Wölfflin, as quoted by Gilles Deleuze in *The Fold*, the Baroque is characterized by a strong contrast between the façade and the interior.[12] Wölfflin further notes that even though there is an obvious separation between the outside and the inside, there is also an interaction at play. In the context of film, the audience constantly oscillates and is conflicted between what it sees on the "outside," on the actual screen, and the individual unconscious translation and deciphering of those images on the "inside." While this dichotomy is present in all films, within the New Wave aesthetic it relies heavily on the "inside" component, on the reactions of the audience. New Wave films, and in particular those of Godard, also blur the lines between the outside and the inside, confusing them frequently and deliberately. It is mainly from this type of contrast that both (Godard's) film and the Baroque create their visual effects.

The aesthetic of the Baroque requires a heavy involvement of one's senses and feelings, which is a quality that makes it very easily applicable to the genre of film. According to Ben Singer, "the intensity of modern experience generated in individuals a

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[11] Even though there will be references to Deleuze's *Cinema* books in this chapter, the bulk of his work on the Baroque comes from *The Fold*.

[12] "In the upper parts of the building, surface and decoration coexist more peacefully; but any impression of complete calm was kept for the interior, and the contrast between the agitated idiom of the façade and the relaxed peace of the interior is one of the most compelling effects in the baroque repertory" (Wölfflin 60).

psychological predisposition toward strong sensations" (103). The Baroque is an intrinsic part of the modern experience, and it extracts sensory reactions through a spectacle of images that emerge from exuberant decoration, expansive curves, and overbearing spatial intricacy. Jean-Luc Godard's approach to cinema is very particular, and he will not shy away from pointing out the obvious and then repeatedly, obnoxiously even, making it clear that he is aware of his actions. In a manner of speaking he continuously hits you over the head with meaning, a technique influenced by Brechtian distanciation that I will discuss at a later point. He produces meaning on multiple narrative levels, making his point visually, but also aurally (which uses several elements, like music, noises, voice-over, etc.), which leads to a sensory overload. What allows him to come back over and over again to the same spot is the nature of his narrative strategy, which is one of discontinuity: both the visual and the aural narrations are broken down, stopped, or suspended, with no concern for a later rekindling of the narrative flow. In Robert Stam's words, "interruption pre-empts spectacle; in fact, it *becomes* the spectacle" (7). These interruptions occur at the level of the image, as well as that of the sound. Godard overwhelms the viewers with spectacles of images and sounds, which, in my opinion, is the same effect sought by the Baroque aesthetic. Godard's vision of the modern world, a world dominated by consumerism, and a spectacle[13] in itself, is as kaleidoscopic as the Baroque. The Baroque aesthetic, whether in music, architecture, or fashion, exudes a multidirectional quality that is meant to "trap" the viewer's attention, as if he or she were

[13] Guy Debord claims that "the spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images (7);" this system of social relations leads to alienation, but I will return to this concept later.

in a labyrinth. Furthermore, optical tricks, like the anamorphosis or the trompe l'oeil, were meant to generate the illusion of a wider and deeper openness of the church dome, for example, which suggested to the visitor below an extension to infinity. Godard's films are excellent examples of such trickery and also elaborate labyrinths.[14]

Gilles Deleuze's theory of the Baroque sustains the connection between infinity and the Baroque aesthetic. Deleuze describes the Baroque as endlessly producing folds, which are ultimately particles of a larger entity, and these folds continue to fold and unfold to infinity. The result is that one cannot think of architecture for example as being static and inert; instead, through the fold, the Baroque and its objects become dynamic and should be understood as being in constant flux. As the fold of the Baroque always morphs and expands, so does the Godardian Baroque spectacle. It is a continuous movement in which "clarity endlessly plunges into obscurity," (1992, Deleuze 32) which I take to mean that the clarity of the outside meshes constantly with the obscurity of the inside. In an attempt to shed more light on his findings, Deleuze uses Leibniz's metaphor of a house with two levels: on the first one there are pleats of matter and on the second one pleats of soul. The first room has windows, the second one is closed, but there is a continuous interaction between the two levels, as folds develop from the first floor and into the second floor. This movement parallels the infinite unfolding and folding of the Universe; the initial beginning of the unfolding comes from one ultimate source, which in the Leibniz realm can only be God. God contains everything, and thus unfolding occurs

[14] Godard follows here in the footsteps of Jean Renoir. For example, Godard, like his predecessor, experiments with depth of field, but in my opinion the former's overall narratives are much more convoluted.

from the One and it spreads to infinity, only to eventually fold back upon itself and return to the original source. Within the Leibniz house model, the infinite folds evolve from (simple) matter to (ethereal) substance: on the upper floor the monad comes to life, the monad being the fundamentally indivisible unit, like the soul. So, the Baroque aesthetic can be reduced to the notion of the fold, which can be folded to infinity, so then the Baroque aesthetic reflects an infinite process as well; they are both in constant flux. Within the confines of the house, which by definition has spatial limitations, "the problem is not how to finish a fold, but how to continue it, to have it go through the ceiling, how to bring it to infinity" (1992, Deleuze 34). This is where the fold becomes crucial to our understanding of the Baroque: the infinite fold moves between two floors, which represent the outside and the inside, and the fold combines the two separate entities. Both have a life of their own, and could also substitute for one another: "such is the Baroque trait: an exterior always on the outside, an interior always on the inside" (1992, Deleuze 35).

Moreover, not only do the two interact and substitute for one another, but they each contribute to the other's progress and development: "Baroque architecture can be defined by this severing of the façade from the inside, of the interior from the exterior, and the autonomy of the interior from the independence of the exterior, but in such conditions that each of the two terms thrusts the other forward" (1992, Deleuze 28). On a literal level then, we have physical evidence of the Baroque and of its folds on the first floor, and on the second floor we have a mental landscape, an abstraction of the Baroque. The infinite fold moves continuously between the two levels, but, crucially, it is also

divided between the two, and it consequently expands on each floor. The constant movement within each floor, and between the two floors, completely fills up the space of the house. There is no void in the Leibniz Baroque, because “folds are always full” (1992, Deleuze 36).

This lack of void poses a problem in the context of Godard’s films and his preference for silences. What are those silences filled with, and how does the aural fold continue to expand? I think the silences represent a temporary pause, a moment when the fold actually stops, and then it continues its development at a later moment; the sonic jump-cut interrupts the continuous flow of the aural fold, only to recapture it later, when it has already evolved. In the context of film, the Baroque house can be aligned with Godard’s version of a new type of cinema, in which audience and screen occupy the two separate levels. The infinite interaction between the two finds its best form through the aural, not the visual. Among the various strategies of sound manipulation used by Godard, the sonic jump-cut is the essential element that makes this new type of cinema possible.

An early attempt to manipulate sound(s) is well exemplified in *A bout de souffle* (1960), one of the most commented on films in cinema. This film is Godard’s most Truffautian work, probably because it was written by the latter. Godard did however make some alterations to the script, including an alternate ending, and he allowed for a great deal of improvisation. Very early on in the film, we see the main character, Michel, driving and talking to himself and then to the audience. The shift happens when he looks into the camera, and therefore at the audience. Michel engages the audience directly, and

we are unexpectedly right there, next to him. It suddenly seems that even his earlier words were not necessarily spoken to himself, but still to the audience who finds itself in the car with Michel—we are accomplices. It is not clear yet to what, but when Michel eventually picks up a handgun from the glove compartment, we are warned that something bad will happen. When he points the gun toward the sun, a very loud gunshot is heard on the soundtrack at that moment, and it is an obvious extra-diegetic addition because the gun does not actually go off. The loud noise of the gun, though, momentarily takes over the entire diegesis, because it creates a separate narrative level: why would he shoot at the sun?[15] The spectator is immediately preoccupied with finding an answer to that question. Michel shoots at the sun metaphorically, and therefore, at visuality as a whole; if the sun dies, then obscurity will reign, so hearing will become more important than seeing. Therefore, the visual takes a back seat to the aural, which in this instance materalizes through the noise produced by the gun. This specific noise briefly dominates both the soundtrack and the visual diegesis. Similar noises completely take over other parts of the film as well.

These noises are part of the city, which is a very big part of the film itself, almost becoming a character in its own right. In Godard's debut, one can sense the poetic sensibility of which he is capable through the lyrical presence of the city. Even though the characteristic Godardian jarring editing technique is a challenge to the flow of the film, the *caméra-flâneur* (this is a concept I will discuss at length in Chapter III) is as alive in *A bout de souffle* as it is in Truffaut's *400 coups*. As a matter of fact, this film is

[15] The blinding sun in a direct shot is reminiscent of Akira Kurosawa's debut shots from *Rashomon* (1950).

predominantly shot with a hand-held camera, and it is so 'careless' in its shooting that the audience is given the impression that indeed they are literally following Patricia and Michel as they move about the city. The famous tracking shot of the two on the Champs-Élysées is a very good example of a *caméra-flâneur*[16] instance, and also of an alternation between outside and inside: it first starts at eye-level, and after that, once Michel is ready to leave, it moves up to give an overview of the street and of Patricia running back to kiss Michel on the cheek. As the action unfolds, the camera follows Michel, revealing him coming up from subway stations, going into cafés, looking for his friend Tolmachof, always moving, and at the same time letting the audience see the city—different parts of the city, the tourist locations as well as the lesser known parts, and also at different times, from morning to dusk. Michel continuously moves between inside and outside spaces, and his famous walk with Patricia on the Champs is countered with long episodes when the two are inside an apartment.

When Michel and Patricia are in her apartment, the audience experiences the first instances in which the characters' words are covered up by the noises of the city that come in through the open window. At one point, a very loud siren is heard passing by and completely muffles Michel's voice as he tells Patricia that Americans admire the worst about French culture. Even though the focal point of the dialogue should be on Michel's hostility, it is the loud noise coming from outside that takes over the soundtrack. The

[16] I will discuss this concept at length in the Truffaut chapter, but it is worth mentioning here that the passers-by look into the camera (this is not done on purpose; because the film is shot on location, these are actual people, who exhibit some curiosity). The fact of looking into the camera, and thus into the point-of-view of the *caméra-flâneur*, validates the existence of the camera as a quasi-person (because the point-of-view actually belongs to Michel in this instance, but the *caméra-flâneur* may also have a neutral point-of-view).

same siren, or maybe a different one, goes by their room again within a few minutes, covering Michel's tirade about people being liars. At the same time, Patricia has her record player on and classical piano music becomes intermingled with the powerful siren: the fancy world of high art is trumped by the reality happening on the street, as a siren, whether police, fire department or ambulance, does not carry a positive message: this is a warning that an accident, or something outside the law has taken place.[17] The privacy of an intimate space, the inside, is permeated by the force of the sounds coming from outside. A very similar situation repeats itself during the interview with the writer Barbulescu, played by Jean-Pierre Melville, whose answers are often cut off or covered up by loud plane engine noises, since the interview takes place at the airport. The inside/outside dichotomy and the sounds covering other sounds are reflected in the relationship and love between the two main characters. The meaning of Michel's life lies with Patricia and a love that is never understood by the object of his affection.[18]

The last scene of the movie reinforces the futility of their endeavors, whether trying to be a couple, or trying to make sense out of life. Shot, Michel stumbles down the street, holding his back, still smoking; he has no place to go, and yet he continues to run in a more or less straight line, the camera following him. Interposed, we get a medium-shot of Patricia running after him, gesticulating exaggeratedly; so the actual camera is

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[17] When analyzing the role of voice in cinema, Michel Chion discusses the myth of the siren—the mythical creature, not the flashing object—which can be supplanted by any female voice. Such a (singing) voice "frequently turns against the image, seduces it, and unmoors it" (1999, 115). Going beyond the obvious homonymic quality, it is interesting to note, however, that Godard's siren only turns against another kind of sound, the dialogue between Michel and Patricia.

[18] There is some room for debate about whether Patricia is simply not in love with Michel, or makes a conscientious effort to succumb to a relationship that would define her eventually. By not reciprocating fully Michel's feelings, Patricia remains an independent (strong) subject.

positioned between the two, further suggesting the impossibility of their relationship. In a way, Michel could be, in fact, finally running away from her. His death, in the middle of an intersection, just like a random accident he had witnessed earlier in the movie, points to the breakdown of communication between the two. Often, a breakdown in communication is suggested in cinema through a destroyed bridge, or a lifted bridge like the one in the beginning of *Citizen Kane*. Intersections are equally symbolic. Michel's death in the middle of an intersection will impede traffic, so it will block the communication between streets. Ultimately, the place of his death suggests that in this fast-paced age, love is no longer feasible—in Michel's repeated words, "c'est dégueulasse." It is unclear, though, if these are his exact words; the mumbling of the words further suggests a breakdown in communication. The cop standing next to Michel translates for Patricia, "you are…dégueulasse." So, Michel's words could be referring to Patricia (t'es), could be a general comment on the situation (c'est), or even maybe a self-reference (ch'suis). Furthermore, Michel does communicate with Patricia prior to his unintelligible words, but he does so in a non-verbal manner, through a series of three (visual) grimaces.[19] The result is that while the traditional mode of communication (speaking to one another) is abandoned, and another mode of communication emerges. The latter relies solely on the visual aspect (seeing each other's faces), but it also fails as an effective mode of communication. Patricia does not understand what Michel says in the end, which points to the fact that people are out of touch with themselves, with their

[19] Back in the long scene in the hotel room, Michel actually looks into the mirror at one point and makes the same three grimaces, later repeated by Patricia. The meaning of the grimaces are quite vague: Michel's mouth opens up as if trying to articulate letters, or mimics the sound of certain letters, but we cannot be certain which ones.

feelings for one another, and they do not have an effective mode of communication. The two characters appear to refashion modes of communication through their gestures and mimicry, but they still fail. At the same time, the filmmaker attempts to refashion the modes of meaning of film, and he is more successful.

The relationship between interior and exterior is often indicated in Godard's work through self-reference, which breaks the suspension of disbelief. Godard creates a series of diegeses that function and interact within (inside) the larger story. For example, Alfred in *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*, played by Jean-Paul Belmondo, does not want to miss a showing of *A bout de souffle*, a film in which the same actor plays the main role. There is a meshing of the actor, the real person, and the fictional characters he plays. The same Alfred at one point talks to Jeanne Moreau who plays Catherine in *Jules et Jim*, and asks her how the movie is doing (moderato, she answers). Also, a woman gesticulates when asked what book she is reading. She pantomimes playing the piano (and we hear a piano on the soundtrack), and then shooting (and we hear real gunshots), and Angela guesses it is *Tirez sur le pianiste*, and says that she preferred the movie. At a later moment, Alfred and Angela listen to an entire Charles Aznavour song, which is quite uncommon for a soundtrack that usually plays a part of a song. One last connection is, of course, the fact that Aznavour plays the title character in *Tirez sur le pianiste*.

However, I think that navigating between interior and exterior takes on a completely different meaning when talking about Godard's jump-cut, because this is a technique that allows for very quick and transition-less associations between two shots or scenes. The use of the jump-cut has made Godard famous, and my concept of the sonic

jump-cut is based on its visual counterpart. The jump-cut is the abrupt cut within roughly the same axis, and consequently jagged transition, between two shots. It is the opposite of a match-cut, meaning that it actually seeks to create discontinuity, as it attempts to connect two moments that are not a match in terms of space or time. This transition in time and space disorients the spectator, who has to struggle to suture back the momentarily lost narrative. Jean-Luc Godard makes heavy use of this alienating technique, and to this day, his name is heavily associated with the jump-cut. The director uses two types of jump-cut. The first one, which he favors, happens between sequences,[20] and a good example is the scene in *A bout de souffle* when Michel shoots a police officer. The camera "jumps" from a close-up of the pistol to a long shot of Michel running in the fields. So the narrative is transposed to a new time and space without an explanation, which in classical cinema would normally be filled by another transition shot or by voice-over. Such transition shots could be maybe a shot of him throwing the gun away, maybe a shot of the policeman falling, maybe a shot of Michel beginning to run away from his car, etc., but the lack of these fillers generate the jump effect in the diegesis.

The second type of jump-cut involves breaking the 30-degree rule, which states that a cut is warranted only in the case where the camera has to move more than 30-degrees from the previous angle. When Michel and Patricia drive around Paris, the camera remains on the latter as the two carry on a dialogue. There are a number of cuts that take us to another moment and place, because the car continues to make its way through the city. Every time the camera cuts, we come back to the exact same angle,

[20] This technique is employed to generate elliptical editing.

Patricia shot in profile from the back, no Michel in the frame, and each time they are on a different topic; the background changes, and there is an obvious time lapse. Another good example occurs in the same film: when Patricia talks to her editor in a café, there are five "unwarranted" cuts as he answers her questions. Godard comes back to this shot, and in the next sequence the editor's speech is again "unnecessarily" cut, this time in eleven cuts. These shots are edited together without a change in the camera angle, but we, as spectators, experience each jerky movement of the camera, and we are given the impression of a "jump." The effect of this type of jump-cut is that it makes the audience aware of the cinematic act; by repeatedly breaking the 30-degree rule, the audience suddenly sees the cuts, which in classical Hollywood cinema should be inconspicuous. The result is that the film does not flow seamlessly anymore, but it draws attention to its artifice.

But I am particularly interested here in sound. The film *Une femme est une femme* (1962)[21] provides us with great examples of such jumps at the level of sound. Therefore, sound does not flow seamlessly either, and the interrupted sonic stream leads to the creation of the Godardian aural fold. When one of the main characters, Albert, talks to a random old man in the street, their dialogue is interrupted by brief moments of silence. The difference is that the shot does not change, as it does in all other alternating sequences between sound and no sound. We remain within the same shot, which breaks

[21] The film was shot in five weeks without using one word of scripted material. Godard thought about each individual sequence and situation the morning of the shoot, and then told the actors what they were supposed to say. One of the results of this practice was the lack of a real plot: Angela and Emile argue about trivial matters throughout the film, which is complicated only by the insertion of Emile's best friend, Alfred, who claims that he is in love with Angela.

the 30 degree rule. A similarly jarring effect is created during the very quick silences that occur when Albert talks. These interjections are what I call sonic jump-cuts. The scene begins with a short exchange between Alfred and his love interest, Angela, but the music is on so loud that we can hardly make out what they are saying. Similarly, when Alfred talks to the man in the street, initially we cannot understand anything. As the sounds of the street quiet down, we begin to hear their dialogue, but then we get two sonic gaps in the soundtrack, with no change in the image. In addition, two bikes pass by, and each time, the bike bells go off, and the volume of the noise they make is greatly enhanced.

In the beginning of the film, Angela is in a coffee shop. When she exits the store, the soundtrack goes silent. She is framed in a long, following shot from across the street. She crosses the street, and the only sound we hear is the sound of heels on a pavement, presumably hers. Next, we cut to another following shot of Angela, and now the city comes to life, and we hear all of its noises, and the crowd takes over the soundtrack. A third shot moves high up, and it follows Angela from above, and the sound goes out one more time. Initially it is quiet, then music comes in majestically. Finally, the fourth shot shows Angela going back inside a store, as the music continues.[22] Her excursion outside

[22] Here, I am sidestepping a longer discussion on the role of music. However, I would note that Godard also relies heavily on discontinuity when it comes to the use of music. Michel Chion points to the element of surprise that Godard's music brings forth, which echoes Brecht's lessons on alienation; Chion maintains that Godard chooses to insert music at "unexpected moments" in order to create a particular emotion—one of discontinuity—and not so that the music enhances a certain emotion already established by the story (1999, 130). So, like the sounds and noises on the soundtrack, Godard's choice of music also seeks to generate contrast with the image. Further support for this practice comes from Andrei Tarkovskii, who says that "strictly speaking the world as transformed by cinema and the world as transformed by music are parallel, and in conflict with each other" (159). The two worlds do come together, in Tarkovskii's opinion, when the screen is filled with "extraneous sounds that don't exist literally...then the film acquires

provides us with the opportunity to establish the power of sound, but also with a notable alternation between sound film and silent film; this sequence represents in a way the actual transition from silent to sound film. It seems to me that Godard attempts to puncture the talking picture with a speck of silent film.[23] François Truffaut and Alfred Hitchcock had some remarkable conversations on the same subject when they talked about the transition from silent movies to talkies. Hitchcock claims that "the silent pictures were the purest form of cinema," (1983, Truffaut 61) and Truffaut continues by adding that the introduction of sound put that perfection in danger and concludes very harshly with "...one might say that mediocrity came back into its own with the advent of sound" (61). Hitchcock's claims continue as he compares actual cinema to theater:

> When we tell a story in cinema, we should resort to dialogue only when it's impossible to do otherwise...It seems unfortunate that with the arrival of sound the motion picture, overnight, assumed a theatrical form...One result of this is the loss of cinematic style, and another is the loss of fantasy...whenever possible to rely more on the visual rather than on the dialogue. Whichever way you choose to stage the action, your main

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resonance" (162). This technique of saturating the soundtrack with extra-diegetic sounds is of course congruent with Godard's practices.

Another music theorist, Jacques Attali, thinks that music is "a play of mirrors" that yields rich visions, and sometimes "nothing but the swirl of the void" (4-5). The "swirl" of the void mentioned above brings forth a fold that emerges from nothingness. This echoes the formation of the original fold that begins to unfold from the One; nothingness and infinity both find their origins in the same primary source—God. The complexity of Attali's definition also reminds me of the interplay between the aural fold and the sounds in the audience, especially in the last part of the quote where void reflects void; I have shown that in a very similar way silence on screen is met with another type of silence from the audience.

[23] Of course this technique is done on a larger scale by Agnès Varda in *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962), which includes an actual short silent film, acted by Jean-Luc Godard and Anna Karina.

> concern is to hold the audience's fullest attention. Summing it up, one might say that the screen rectangle must be charged with emotion. (Truffaut 61)

It seems to me that Godard attempts to combine the best of the two worlds, and stage simultaneously a silent film and a talkie. For this to be possible, the director first separates the two in order to generate an even stronger effect. In other cases, though, as in the famous ten-minute tracking shot doubled by the piercing sound of uninterrupted honking of the highway jam in *Week-End* (1967), sound takes over completely.

Throughout his work Godard is very adamant about attacking modern society and its dependence on consumerism, and one of his favorite targets is in fact the automobile, as a quintessential symbol of the modern age. The most obvious example that comes to mind is the tracking shot I just mentioned from *Week-End*. As the camera tracks over the highway, there is a slight change in the camera angle (not very steep, but enough to draw attention to the obliqueness of the shot) from which the shot is taken: there are six changes, one of them very sudden, another very subtle, the others just at normal speed. This slight alteration may be meant to make the scene a little more bearable from a cinematic point of view; nonetheless the effect is that it completely alienates the audience. According to John Kriedl, "keeping distance from what we see, creating a proscenium to reduce our involvement and sharpen our detachment….the jam is set up to justify the camera movement, rather than the other way around" (170). Once again, the visual component of the sequence would normally manage to keep the audience at a distance, but it is the annoying honking that brings everything closer together.

The honking begins the moment the couple leaves the city, as the camera follows their attempt to pass a couple of cars on the road. The first three cars we see are blue, white and red in sequence, a choice that cannot be random. We are witnessing a quintessentially French situation. There are people on the side, the main character argues with almost everyone he passes, and there are quite a few distracting elements. At one point, the camera moves past two open trucks, one carrying two lionesses, the next carrying monkeys, and a lama. On the opposite side of the road, a group of children begin walking parallel to the camera movement, and they are singing, and sometimes just talking. The whole set-up of the scene is meant to create the effect of a circus:[24] there are children and animals on either side of the street. The passage of time is suggested by interposed shots of red titles telling us what time it is. First we see it at 13h40, and then at 14h10. Other contributors to the amalgam of sounds and colors include: a yellow and red big Shell truck, a white car *facing* this truck and thus going against the natural movement of the scene, a couple of people playing chess on the street in front of their stationed car and not on the lawn on the side, a boat pulled by a car. As we approach the crucial accident scene, we begin to hear the whistle of an officer, who is the only policeman at the scene. We see five dead bodies, including one that looks like a child, and four crashed cars. When we finally see the bodies, the soundtrack is flooded with menacing music that accompanies the honking and the whistle of the officer. The camera follows the black car moving away and turning right onto a country road, as the music becomes stronger and takes over the soundtrack, with an occasional whistle sound piercing its way through.

[24] The circus is a key symbol in Federico Fellini's films, but in this context there could also be a reference to Jacques Tati's *Trafic* (1971) that showcases numerous traffic jams.

The passing over the dead bodies, at the core of the traffic jam, is quite subtle, almost as if the camera wanted to avoid them. The suggestion is that death has become a secondary worry in contemporary society; no one cares about questions of life and death anymore. What is important, though, is the material properties that people own, like the car. The car is omnipresent[25] throughout Godard's films; in *Pierrot le fou*, Marianne blows up their Peugeot 404, and Pierrot eventually drives his American car into the sea. Michel from *A bout de souffle* steals several different cars. There is an insistence on the use of cars in *Le petit soldat*, too—for the first six minutes of the movie Bruno is only seen in the car, driving around Geneva. Much subtler in its attack on modernity is *Le Mépris*, which is a movie about the process of filmmaking, as an adaptation of *The Odyssey* is attempted. The complicated plotline the film we are watching has to be compared inevitably to the great work of Homer, and to the impending film from the diegetic character played by Fritz Lang. What initially could be construed as an opposition to great classic works (and therefore a self-deprecating comment on his own art), I believe actually becomes an equation in Godard's mind: he is like Homer, and he is like Lang, which eliminates the notion of progress. Godard appears to be more concerned with the classics, and with the past in this particular instance.

A quick return to our discussion on interiority/exteriority is warranted here because of an important shift in the cinema of Godard that comes about with *Vivre sa vie*.

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[25] Kristin Ross describes the automobile as "the central vehicle of all twentieth-century modernization" (19), and asserts that this centrality showcased in French films, novels, and media in fact "*precedes* the car's becoming commonplace in French life" (27). So, Godard's ubiquitous treatment of the motorized vehicle takes on a visionary quality, anticipating its immense expansion.

In this film, the director appears to focus more on the way women are portrayed, and he does so by setting up the female body (rather than the car) as a commodity, and in this particular case as self-commodity since Nana turns to prostitution. While this film is not a great example of sound use, it does provide us with a provocative commentary from the director, noted by Deleuze in *Cinema 2* in an endnote: "How do we do the inside? Well, precisely by staying prudently on the outside" (283). Godard refers here to illuminating the audience on how or what a character feels at a particular moment. Deleuze's reaction to this quote is to suggest that "'the external side of things' must allow 'the feeling of inside' to be given" (1986, 283). Thus, the director meshes interiority and exteriority, and this is a process that can happen at many different levels, not just with sound. In the beginning of the movie, we see Nana's character from behind, shot *inside*, in a café talking to her ex-husband; from here she is revealed and becomes a moving object, as she gives in to economic hardship and decides to prostitute herself. Then we are shown numerous tracking shots of Nana walking *outside*, down the street, and these shots exude such a level of peacefulness and quietness that they actually become ominous. Godard abandons his usual disruptive editing style in favor of overwhelming fade-outs, which infuse the movie with the usual feeling of uneasiness generated by the former. At the very end, as Nana is gratuitously killed in the street, the camera tilts down, as if someone were lowering his or her eyes. Also toward the end, as the kidnappers are driving Nana away, they go by a theater with a huge line outside, and the movie playing is Truffaut's *Jules et Jim*. The camera insists for a few seconds on the poster and the reference cannot be missed. From being outside in the film (but still inside the diegesis), along with the

characters, the audience in the theater is moved farther outside, and this time out of the main diegesis. Even if this happens for only a few seconds, the film's intertextual reference[26] takes us outside of what is currently happening, and the inside/outside motif dominates the movement of the diegesis once again.

But sound is capable of controling narrative levels, too. Godard himself discusses the capacity of sound to dominate when he states, "we don't know if film is image or not, and we're going to start by saying film is just as much image as it is sound and to do that and to make it perceptible we are going to start from the soundtrack, we are going to overcrowd the soundtrack and we're going to skip the image" (Loshitzky 47). In the later film *Tout va bien* (1972), he continues to play with the question of sound versus image by giving the main characters opposing jobs: she is a radio broadcaster, and he is a filmmaker. The female character, Susan, tells the audience at one point about her job. Her interview is fragmented, and we only hear parts of her description, but then we also hear her own voice translating her English into French. The translating part is never precise because the two languages never match perfectly.[27] What results is that the actress interrupts herself, as she is trying to convey a message. The act of translating, and in this case, mistranslating, implies explanation, or an attempt to make this character's life more obvious to the audience. Sound prohibits the image from accomplishing that feat, and the

[26] Throughout the project, I will point to several such instances, which are quite common with the New Wave directors (*A bout de souffle*, *Le mépris*, or *400 coups*—they all have shots of posters).
[27] Mistranslations happen throughout Godard's oeuvre, in *Le mépris* for example, and more prominently in *A bout de souffle* in which Patricia often has a hard time understanding Michel's French and she constantly asks for the meaning of words.

audience remains uninformed about Susan. Sound thus establishes itself as more powerful than the image.

The overall strength of sound comes from the constant activity of the aural fold, though, and not the sonic jump-cut, which materializes only sporadically. So, let us come back to the discussion of the fold through a (critical) jump-cut of my own. Throughout his book on the Baroque, Deleuze provides us with multiple definitions of the fold, but none seems to be perfectly clear. One of the problems with Deleuze's definition of the fold is that it is not laid out in simple terms until page 121 of the book, which I will quote at length here:

> If the Baroque is defined by the fold that goes to infinity, how can it be recognized in its most simple form? The fold can be recognized first of all in the textile model of the kind implied by garments: fabric or clothing has to free its own folds from its usual subordination to the finite body if covers. If there is an inherently Baroque costume, it is broad, in distending waves, billowing and flaring, surrounding the body with its independent folds, ever-multiplying […] Yet the Baroque is not only projected in its own style of dress. It radiates everywhere, at all times, in the thousand folds of garments that tend to become one with their respective wearers, to exceed their attitudes, to overcome their bodily contradictions, and to make their heads look like those of swimmers bobbing in the waves. We find it in painting […] and when the folds of clothing spill out of painting, it is Bernini who endows them with sublime form in sculpture, when marble seizes and bears to infinity folds that cannot be explained

> by the body, but by a spiritual adventure that can set the body ablaze. (1992, Deleuze 121-122)

If we start from this simplified premise of what the fold is, then I think that the fold can be applied to many other forms of art. In the case of cinema, for example, the connection with the fold, and the Baroque in general, recalls art historian Elie Faure's ideas: "The cinema is first of all plastic. It represents, in some way, an architecture in movement that should be in constant accord, in dynamically pursued equilibrium, with the setting and the landscapes within which it rises and falls" (Faure 268). Faure's words and his notion of *cineplastics*, which brings together two separate dimensions, echo another alignment—that between cinema (through Godard in particular) and Baroque architecture.[28]

However, I believe that the similarities between cinema and the Baroque are even more obvious within a particular aspect of cinema—the soundtrack. It is on the soundtrack of a film that the fold occurs most naturally because of the multitude of sound layers that can be present in any given visual shot. Radio waves propagate through space in a similar fold-like manner. The fold can also be seen in the form of ogives, or in cornices and cupolas (1992, Deleuze 15-16): there is a shift here that takes place, a shift from perpendicular lines to curved lines, which contributes to the meshing of interior and exterior. The outside structures of Baroque buildings are decorated with folds that give the exterior a life of its own, which challenges the life existing within the structure. If we

[28] A longer discussion on plastic movement would be required here; however, this is not the aim of my project. I will mention, though, that one of the main scholars on the theory of plastic movement, André Malraux, makes a direct connection between cinema and Baroque art. To him, cinema represents the most advanced evolution (to date) of plastic realism, which began during the Renaissance and then found its most complete form in Baroque painting.

consider sound to be an element floating on the outside of the screen, and the visual to be the existing inside structure on screen, then we have a comparable Baroque dynamic between the two, as sound also challenges the primacy of the image. Thus, we return to the ongoing conflict between interior and exterior. What I like in particular about this explanation of the fold is the metaphor of the waves, because sound also works in waves, and then it moves to infinity. Obviously the movement to infinity of the literal fold, the fold of the dress, or the fold of a stone corner, is a projected movement, and I think that sound propels itself through space in a very similar pattern. The projected movement of the sonic fold unfolds in the visual space, and it leads to the creation of an aural dimension. Inanimate objects such as a building, or a dress, are no longer regarded as inert matter; instead we can see them as creating a dynamic relation of space. In other words, space can be expanded infinitely, and these objects double as signs that we are in a continuous state of becoming.

An important observation about the Baroque lies with its multiplicity, an idea that brings me closer to what I will define in Chapter IV as multiple modernities. It is the definition of the fold that leads us to this idea of multiplicity: "the multiple is not only what has many parts but also what is folded in many ways" (1992, Deleuze 3). Deleuze uses these words as a springboard for his findings on the fold, as he departs from the canonical philosophies of Leibniz. In Leibniz's theories, the interplay between the multiple and the one leads to the idea of the monad. The monad eliminates the relationship between the two and *reduces* the multiple to the one. In opposition, Deleuze's findings continue the ambivalent relationship between the multiple and the

one, which takes shape in the creation of the fold. A fold is always "folded within a fold" (1992, Deleuze 6), which means that an element within a series of other elements contains another series within itself, but is also a part of a series; otherwise said, a fold can be the one element, and the multiple elements at the same time. This theory mirrors the connections between outside and inside, between the first and second floors of the Baroque house; they can be taken separately, but also together as a whole. What we arrive at is the notion that the universe itself can be reduced to, or understood as a fold within a fold; this is a dynamic model that makes continuous motion possible, and consequently the evolution of the universe, of the world, and at a smaller level, of modernity, of the Baroque, and then even at a smaller scale, the Baroque building or a piece of garment.

The clear separation between the outside and the inside of the Baroque space generates the constant reinvention of the Baroque aesthetics, and by extension that of the individual, because the latter can also be deconstructed according to the Baroque house model. On the first floor there is the body, and on the second floor, the soul; the folds of the individual continue to multiply their creases in the same pattern that we have seen before leading to a reinvention of the self. The Baroque house metaphor becomes relevant again when that self is placed within the confines of a theater (and by extension, a cinema), and he or she has to renegotiate the relationship between the space on stage (screen) and the space of the viewing room. I think that once more, the Baroque floors can be used to describe this separation: the first floor is where the audience sits, and the second floor is where "matter becomes manner" (1992, Deleuze 36), where the thoughts

and dreams of the audience are projected. The separation between stage and audience is one of Berthold Brecht's main concerns. To him, both theater and cinema are processes of alienation, thus they have to achieve and maintain a certain distance from the audience. Although the bulk of Brecht's work concentrated on theater and what he called "epic theater" which he opposed to dramatic theater, his theories can easily be extrapolated to the world of film. The goal of this epic theater is to "shock the audience into an awareness that both social life and art are human creations and therefore can be changed, that the laws of a predatory society are not divinely inscribed but subject to human intervention" (Stam 211). As part of an audience, one always has to remain aware of the fact that one is in front of a fictional work. In order to make sure that no one drifted away, shocking associations of stylistic devices were employed in Brecht's theater, for example, flooding the stage with very bright light, for no apparent reason except "waking" the audience back to reality.

To achieve the common goals of his theater ("laying bare the causal network of events, active spectatorship, defamiliarization," 201) Brecht suggested specific techniques that should be used: creating a narration that is fractured, not using stars, or maintaining a double distanciation between the actor and the role he is playing and between the character portrayed and the spectator. There are others, but what is relevant for this chapter is the concept of a "radical separation of elements" (Brecht 37). Brecht wonders whether music is a pretext for what happens on stage or the other way around, and he would rather completely separate these elements altogether:

> So long as the expression 'Gesamtkunstwerk' (integrated work of art) means that the integration is a muddle...the various elements will all equally be degraded, and each will act as a mere 'feed' to the rest. The process of fusion extends to the spectator, who gets thrown into the melting pot too and becomes a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art. Witchcraft of this sort must of course be fought against. Whatever is intended to produce hypnosis, is likely to induce sordid intoxication, or creates fog, has got to be given up. Words, music and setting must become independent of each other. (Brecht 38)

He also advocated that every scene should be independent of the others ("each scene for itself") and each track, music, lyric or dialogue has to be "in a certain tension with other tracks" (Stam 213). We see here, again, that sound is meant to be an independent part of the artistic process. Separating sound from image would create a certain discontinuity, which would help fuel the feeling of alienation. But the most important separation is that between the audience and the action on stage, or on screen: distanciation should make the identification of the audience with the characters on stage or screen impossible. There is also separation at the level of individual scenes as I have already mentioned, which makes the structure of the epic theater an interruptive and fractured one, just like a typical Godard narrative. According to Brecht, an epic work could be cut up in pieces, but those bits would still mean something; they would be able to exist on their own. According to John Kreidl, this is the case with Godard, "each Godard film has a key sequence or segment, which *is* the film. In *A bout de souffle*, it is the three-minute first conversation between Patricia and Michel on the Champs. In *Week-End*, it is the ten-minute tracking

sequence-shot past the stalled cars" (130). I think that the argument can be expanded to scenes that are not necessarily key elements in the plotline; given the characteristic fragmentation of the films, most Godardian sequences or segments could be taken as individual pieces, and they function as contractions (or unfoldings) of the entire film. So it would appear that the two-floor Baroque house metaphor only works partially in the context of Brecht's and Godard's work: the movement of the folds within the realms of each individual floor (stage and audience) is indeed continuous, but there is no interchange between the two; unless there is another way to look at distanciation.

Kaja Silverman's work in *The Threshold of the Visible World* challenges the schematic way of looking at distanciation, and complicates the issue to the extent that it makes it possible to align the Baroque model with Brecht's identification theory. Silverman first clarifies that the German name of Brecht's aesthetic model, "Verfremdungseffekt," is somewhat of a mistranslation into English as "distanciation," and that it should rather be "alienation-effect." Indeed then:

> A quintessentially Brechtian theater or cinema would be one where the representational scene is in all respects more "removed" from the spectator than is customary. In fact, Brecht's aesthetic turns upon distance in many respects. It promotes in the spectator a critical detachment from or irony toward the spectacle and its ideological values. It also isolates textual elements from one another so that each can comment on the others, rather than seeming to be part of an ostensibly harmonious whole. (Silverman 86)

This quotation supports the separation of elements mentioned above that goes against the harmony of the Baroque aesthetic. However, Silverman, drawing on theory from Walter Benjamin, states that Brechtian theater (and cinema by extension) attempts to place the theatrical or cinematic event on a "continuum with the auditorium," and consequently it strives to equalize spectator and spectacle (1996, 86). Silverman maintains the notion that Brecht's desire was for his audience to feel right at home in the auditorium, as if they were in their own living room, and thus instead of what was generally understood as alienation, rendering the familiar strange, it is in fact an attempt to do quite the opposite: making the strange familiar (1996, Silverman 87). Brechtian theater, consequently, searches for a certain closeness, instead of creating distance. If one follows Silverman's convincing argument, then in terms of space the auditorium and stage are brought closer together, as the communication window between the two (just like the two Baroque floors) is opened. Both Silverman's opinion that the strange should become familiar, and the more traditional contrary opinion, hold true in some way. It comes down to the individual spectator and his or her own negotiation with the stage or the screen. In fact, this contrasting view on Brecht's distanciation/alienation is not as easily transferred to film because of Brecht's fundamental issue with the cinematic text: the spectator cannot intervene or alter the cinematic text while it is being projected on screen; the spectator and the cinematic subject always remain physically separated. However, because of the presence of sound in the auditorium during a film screening I think that the distance between spectator and the cinematic text is considerably shrunk. Noises and silences

especially create a bridge between the two spaces, in the same way that the Baroque house functions.

Whenever the Godard soundtrack goes quiet the first thought one has is that the director is using another alienation technique in order to make the audience aware of the cinematic act. Or at least, that has been the general tendency. Following the untangling of Deleuze's concept of the fold in the Baroque, and Kaja Silverman's reading of Brecht's alienation effect as an attempt in fact to bridge the gap between auditorium and stage/screen, I would argue that the alternation of sounds/noises and silences in Godard's films allows the spectator to become more involved with the cinematic subject and the screen in general. As a courtesy rule, an audience is to remain quiet during a screening. An absolute silence, however, is impossible; people shift their weight in the seats, eat, cough, etc. These (natural) noises are covered by the noise coming from the speakers of the auditorium. The sound and noises of the film converge with the noises generated by the audience. Two different types of aural folds mix, a process that is very similar to the interplay between the Baroque floors. Moreover, when Godard inserts moments of complete silence on the screen, the audience becomes immediately aware of the noises it produces, and is suddenly self-conscious. The result is that the silence on screen is met with a very similar silence on the part of the audience. These silences function like the the visual cuts during editing, so they actually join the infinite flow of the aural fold coming from the screen. When the sound comes back to the film and as a result to the

auditorium, the aural folds are further sutured[29] together, and continue their ascent to infinity.

Paul Hegarty's recent book, *Noise/Music: A History*, explores this exact relationship between the sounds of the audience and the sounds coming from an orchestra. Even though his examples are not based in film, I think that they complement my argument. Drawing on theory from Jean Baudrillard, Georges Bataille and Theodor Adorno, Hegarty arrives at a definition of noise music by going through history and selecting examples of alternative pieces of music that have challenged the classical understanding of what music should be or sound like. An early example is Yves Klein's *Monotone Symphony*, which is a forty-minute piece that consists of a single twenty-minute sustained chord, and then it is followed by a 20-minute silence. But the perfect example is John Cage's piece *4'33''*, created only four years later in 1952; this is a piece that requires that the performer be on stage and be absolutely quiet for the duration (Hegarty 25-26). Hegarty's conclusion is that noise music begins with the Cage piece and that music itself is created by incidental sounds, in this case the sounds heard in/from the audience. This theory can be extrapolated to the soundtrack of a film, regardless of the presence of noise, music, sounds or dialogue. The space continuum between screen and the audience—what really brings together image on screen, and the spectator—is generated by a meshing of the sounds or silences coming from both sides: screen and audience.

[29] I will return to a discussion on suture and its relationship with sound in Chapter V.

I think that a distinction has to be made here between two types of sound used by Godard. On the one hand there is the synchronous sound that amplifies the impression of reality projected by the image. However, the type of sound that can clearly bridge the gap between audience and the film subjects is a second type of sound. This type of sound can be asynchronous, or randomly added to the soundtrack, or purely extra-diegetic, which means that it has no apparent relation to what is happening visually on screen. The break that happens between sound and image in Godard's films is referred to by the filmmaker himself when his character, Ferdinand from *Pierrot le Fou* (1965), talks about having senses for seeing, hearing, and speaking, but that they are all disconnected. This is exactly what happens to the film parts: "image, dialogue, noise, music, writing go in a different direction. The film is dissociated into its separate matters of expression. The image tells one story, the dialogue another; the noise another; and the music still another. Godard uses all the elements in a concerted attack on the sensibility of the spectator and the conventions of illusionism" (Stam 262).[30] In *Cinéma 2*, Deleuze even thinks that these elements "can enter into a rivalry, fight each other, supplement each other, overlap, transform each other" (234). The overarching argument emerging from the last two quotes is that sound and its components can be separate elements in the process of filmmaking.

A further observation can be made from Stam's remark: three of the five film tracks he mentions, image, dialogue, noise, music and writing, come from the soundtrack,

[30] Michel Chion also points to the separation of all audio elements, because they are received by the audience individually and not as a "sort of bloc or coalition." This observation prompts Chion to daringly declare that "there is no soundtrack" (1999, 3).

and thus they focalize the senses and attention of the audience. It is the character of Ferdinand again who delivers an important quote, in the beginning of the film: "After he reached the age of fifty, Velasquez no longer painted objects; he painted the spaces in between objects." This could well be Godard talking about off-screen space, about the space between auditorium and the screen. Critics like John Kriedl seem to agree with that, but remain skeptical about whether Godard's images manage to accomplish *painting* that space (Kriedl 165). Once again, the focus of these arguments is misplaced: it is not about the images, but about the sound and the soundtrack that fill the theater, and consequently the space in between: it is not visual but aural.

But how does sound become completely independent of the image? According to Deleuze's argument in *Cinéma 2,* sound initially emerges from the image, but then splits and becomes its own entity, and thus produces the sound-image. Deleuze builds his theory on silent cinema, and he looks at the progression of sound in film from a historical perspective: "In contrast to the intertitle, which was an image other than the visual image, the talkie, the sound films are heard, but as *a new dimension of the visual image, a new component*" (1986, 226). The progression he analyzes has its basis in the fact that the intertitle functions as another type of image since it is seen. Following silent films, in which everything was in front of the audience and sound[31] did not come from the screen literally, the talkies bring on a new modification of the visual image, or rather of our perception of the visual image: we suddenly see something that was not there, available for us through the simple act of seeing; the sound, as a component of the image we are

[31] Sounds such as music, foley noises, or running comments.

seeing, makes something else visible in that same image. In Deleuze's words, "when speech makes itself heard, it is as if it makes something new visible, and the visible image, de-naturalized, begins to become readable in turn, *as* something visible or visual" (1986, 229). This is the same type of dichotomous relationship that we have seen function between the Baroque floors, and the same progression that we witness from the first to the second floor happens with the transition from a silent film to a talkie. And then we arrive at the following conclusion: "instead of a seen image and a read speech, the speech-act becomes visible at the same time as it makes itself heard, but also the visual image becomes legible as such, as visual image in which the speech-act is inserted as a component" (1986, Deleuze 234). The two elements can be taken separately, can be taken as a whole, but can also be substituted for one another, just as we have seen before with the Baroque.

The distinction between a seen image and a speech act is important, but Deleuze's argument goes further and discusses the filling of that missing dimension in cinema, the out-of-field space. To him, sound in whatever form was meant to fill the out-of-field of the image, which I take it to mean whatever the image could not project onto the space between the audience and the theater. He also contends that interruptions and cuts actually contribute to the sustaining of a continuous, coherent space:

> When cinema became talkie, the out-of-field seems to have initially found a confirmation of its two aspects: first, noises and voices could have a source external to the visual image; secondly, a voice or a piece of music

> could show the changing whole, behind or beyond the visual image. Hence the notion of 'voice-off' as sound expression of the out-of-field. But if we ask in what condition cinema draws out the consequences of the talkie, and so becomes truly talking, everything is inverted; this is when the sound itself becomes the object of a specific framing which *imposes an interstice* with the visual framing. The notion of voice-off tends to disappear in favor of a difference between what is seen and what is heard. […] Interstices proliferate everywhere, in the visual image, in the sound image, between the sound image and the visual image. That is not to say that the discontinuous prevails over the continuous. On the contrary, the cuts or breaks in cinema have always formed the power of the continuous. (186, Deleuze 180-181)

Even though those breaks emphasize the existence of a continuum, they can also generate the sound-image. This is the natural progression: that sound eventually garners independence from the image, "the sound-image is born, in its very break, from its break with the visual image" (1986, Deleuze 251). The end result is that there is always a relationship between sound and image, but that does not mean that this association has to be smooth. As a matter of fact Deleuze calls attention to the break between the two, suggesting that "an irrational cut" takes place. However, more recent critics think that the irrational cut can create an artistic effect based on that exact opposition. Michel Chion declares that, "le contrepoint audiovisuel...fonctionne...quand se produit un déclic de sens, il y a moins collision

poétique qu'effet rhétorique: le son et l'image deviennent porteur d'une idée d'opposition qui leur préexiste et qu'ils servent à signifier" (1985, 87). I will return to the idea of the counterpoint in the next chapter where I discuss Eisenstein's theories of sound.

Things become a lot clearer when Deleuze finally talks about sound in modern cinema: "the speech-act is no longer inserted in the linkage of actions and reactions, and does not reveal a web of interactions any more. It turns in on itself; it is no longer a dependant or something which is part of the visual image; it becomes a completely separate sound image" (1986, 243). The sound turning in on itself reminds us of the folding and unfolding of the fold; permutations of sound generate multiple sounds, just like the fold, split and developed to infinity. Sound and the aural fold that results function like the Baroque fold within the two levels; they fill out the space through a continuous developing motion, and in doing so, they establish a space of unending interaction between the audience and the projection on screen. It is this interaction that fuels Godard's new (Baroque) type of cinema.

We now arrive at the quintessential film that makes heavy use of the interplay between sound and image, and perfectly exemplifies Godard's innovative cinema, *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (1967). The plot is very simple, and utterly unimportant to the film: Juliette lives in a giant apartment complex, and she becomes a prostitute in order to improve her economic status. While the story never really develops, the importance of sound becomes apparent from the very beginning. As the title flashes on the screen, the audience gets moments of silence, interposed with moments filled with loud noises.

When the film begins, the voice of the narrator is heard, and unlike the traditional voice-over, in this instance, everything said is whispered. The result is that a relation of collusion is established with the audience: the narrator is whispering to us. What further complicates the issue is the fact that the voice belongs to Godard himself, and it challenges the direction of the film. Godard thus posits himself also as a viewer and critic. Another possibility is that he becomes a God: we have seen how in the Leibniz traditional line of thought the unfolding begins from the original source, from God. Similarly, here, the sound of the film starts to unfold and expand to infinity from the original source, the all-controlling *auteur*. Hence Godard meshes interiority with the exterior: the project belongs to him, he is intimately connected to it; but then he positions himself outside of it in order to question his own artistic choices. By bringing together outside and inside, the director opens up the text of his film. He unfolds the diegesis of the film in order to share it with the audience, thus yielding an unending interaction with the spectators.

The result is, as Robert Stam suggests, that a certain degree of complicity is shared between director and audience (150). The audience suddenly becomes a contributing element to the process of the film, as the director and the viewers appear to forge a private relationship, one that challenges the normal separation in which the audience is not aware of the presence of the filmmaker. This new relationship is even more conspicuous considering that no one within the space of the film appears to be in agreement about anything. Thus the space between the auditorium and the screen is once again contested, but this is done via dialogue, via sound waves, as opposed to a palpable

inclusion of the viewers in the cinematic text. According to Colin MacCabe, who compares the role of voice-over and sound in classic documentaries with Godard's use of sound, the soundtrack does not have the same type of domination over the image in this instance (39). He goes on to observe correctly that Godard (or his voice rather) cannot identify the color of his character's hair, or describe her actions accurately. But this is exactly how sound takes over image in a film that is not meant to be a documentary, because had the identity been possible, the voice-over would have been in fact closely linked to the image, albeit in a dominating fashion. Godard's persona stemming from the voice-over is unsure of what he sees and he conveys his uncertainty to the viewer through his speech—an act that breaks the sound away from the image completely and gives it a different type of dominance over the diegesis. The relationship between what happens on screen, or what is heard from the sound system of the theater, and the viewing and listening subject sitting in the theater has been a point of interest for the New Wave directors, especially in the case of Godard. The filmmaker decided that a more active involvement from the audience was needed, and he follows the footsteps of Berthold Brecht's distanciation theater, which I have already discussed. The references to Brecht are made clear by the director in the beginning of the film, when the main character refers to Brecht as "père Brecht," and adds that actors should quote him. The appellative "father" next to Brecht's name emphasizes the importance of his theories; Godard, in a way, admits to being a child of Brecht, someone who will uphold the tradition behind the name.

The main character's name is Juliette, a family woman who sometime prostitutes herself for extra money. In two separate sequences she first presents herself as Marina Vlady, which is the actress' *real* name. The voice-over follows her every move: "turning her head to the right, but that's not important." This exact same sentence is repeated when Juliette moves her head to the right as well. Both the real actress and her character talk to the camera as if carrying on a dialogue. They answer questions that we never hear on the soundtrack: these are *our* questions, those of the audience, put forth through the voice of the director, which once again unites filmmakers and the audience. I maintain, as I have suggested above, that narrative planes are often created through sound that does not match the image, or even by random sounds added to the soundtrack. Similarly, the lack of sound in these instances leads to the creation of other narrative planes: what are those original questions? The audience becomes aware of what those unasked questions are when they hear the answers, and thus are able to deduce what the original question may have been. But why repeat "that's not important"? It would appear that the obvious thought is the question, "what is important then?" Godard redirects our attention away from what is on camera. A jump-cut that breaks the 30 degree rule continues the trend of making us aware that we are watching a film; the constant shifts between sound and silence, the sonic jump-cuts, also contribute to the distanciation process, as we are drawn into the life of the character/real person talking to us, and yet we are constantly aware that this is not a *real* person, that this is a film. So what is important? Again, both Juliette and Marina finish their thoughts with "I don't know exactly." Their ramblings end in indecision: they do not know what is important. This, in my opinion, is the point of the

entire film, this is the purpose of the entire eighty-four minutes of what initially appear to be rambling thoughts, images, and sounds: to find the meaning of it all, to find out what is important.

The most obvious answer is that what is important to Godard is to heal the contemporary society of its need for, and obsession with, consuming. This film is a deconstruction of the consumerist society we (still) live in on the one hand, but on the other hand, it is also filled with political remarks. For the purpose of this chapter, I do not pursue the political statements made by Godard, although I make a note of them. Instead, I will focus on how sound helps Godard undermine the visual, and the visual culture that thrives so much on possessions. From the beginning of the film, image and sound are separated, and different levels of sound enter the space of the theater. As Marina/Juliette is speaking, we hear voices of children, and the sounds of the city,[32] all muffled in the background. While we have images with absolutely no sound, there are no instances of the reverse. The sound takes over the image and becomes more important because it provides the audience with multiple layers of sound. The plasticity of sound allows for multiple levels of sound to be in play at the same time, similar to the relation between visual foreground, middle ground, and background. However, visually, the planes always remain separated, while the sounds can mesh together. Mixing is not possible with the image, in spite of experimentation with depth of field, and a few counterexamples of

[32] Every city has its particular sound(s). In his study of music and drumming, John Mowitt, analyzes the specific sounds of New Orleans and Memphis, which lead to the creation of a "character of the city" (131). But we are warned that an overemphasis on such sounds could lead to the actual loss of the most significant sound, that of the city as a whole (Mowitt 117). I believe that Godard is selective enough with his use of city sounds, and he avoids such loss—Godard's city definitely displays a character of its own.

superimposition, the latter being used more by Truffaut among the New Wave directors.[33] The superimposition is only possible for short spurts of time because two images cannot survive on screen simultaneously; on the other hand, sounds can, because of the sonic rack-focus technique I will discuss in the Mambety chapter. A particular sound can be heard more clearly as the noise level is heightened, dwarfing the other sounds, sending them into an aural background.

Throughout the film, and from the initial sequences, there are several images of construction sites interposed with images telling the story of Juliette. Often times, the shots of the construction sites have the sound muted, and occasionally the sound is on, and when it is, the volume seems to be exaggerated; the level of noise is higher than normal. It is never clear what is being constructed, although it may be a bridge of some sort, which would make sense in the context of the film: the subject of the movie is communication (within the society, between characters, or between audience and director), and the symbol of a bridge under construction is an excellent metaphor. It is interesting to note that by cutting the sound off during those shots Godard further suggests a breakdown in communication, while hoping at the same time for communication to be reestablished. This is one of the many paradoxes of the film, and of the director's work in general. The other paradoxical connection between form and content is the transitional sound bridge used to link shots together. As a new scene or shot begins, the sound from the previous sequence carries over, whether it is the sound of construction or the voices of characters. This is a common editing technique that

[33] *Jules et Jim* (1962), and *La Chambre verte* (1978) are good such examples.

smoothes the transitions between visual shots, but in this case it goes beyond that, as it recalls not only the actual physical bridge possibly being constructed in the film, but also the bridges that the director is trying to build with his audience, and among his viewers. However, the sound-bridge transition is in fact missing from the film whose editing relies on rough sound transitions, sonic jump-cuts instead. A repeated shot within the shots covering construction sites is that of a crane, usually sot from a lower angle, or from underneath. The low angle shots emphasize the imposing stature of the crane, and underline its importance in the mise-en-scène. The explanation for the repeated presence of the crane in the shots lies in the operative use of a crane: this is another symbol that implies connection, or allows for connections between high points. Furthermore, the crane provides us with a reference to filmmaking: a crane is often used for shots towering from above, but since it is a rather expensive piece of equipment, Godard does not make extensive use of it.

The idea that communication is the focal point of the film is further made clear in the next sequence, when we are in Juliette and her husband's apartment, and two men work at fixing a transistor radio, and also broadcasting through it. Beyond the obvious symbol of the radio, right in between the two men we can see a poster on the wall. It is an image of a woman's face, but we can only see her mouth; the eyes, nose, and chin are covered. Placed right in the middle of the frame, the woman's mouth becomes the mouth *of* the frame, and it reminds the audience of the troubling communication issues. The rest of the film continues to go over the same points in an attempt to inculcate its ideas onto the audience. As the scene proceeds, one can hear the voices of the two children in the

background. Interestingly, Juliette's daughter, who speaks no words in the film, unlike her older brother, is constantly crying. They remain off-screen for most of the scene, and yet they are very present through their voices and cries. A different, aural narrative plane is added to the current image that the audience is seeing. And both planes are equally important.

The constant crying of the little girl is so penetrating that we cannot escape it. Its sound penetrates the soundtrack and takes over most of the action and dialogue of the scene; in this way, Godard exposes the power of sound, which can completely dominate a scene. The girl is seen crying at a later moment in the film while an older man reads her a story. As the crying continues, his voice overlaps it. The camera moves away from them, and it stops at the window. We witness the happenings in the street—we see the passerby, and we continue to hear the crying and the story read by the old man. A noticeable discrepancy between sound and image is on display again. Back at the apartment scene, the children eventually come into the shot (the camera does not move at all in this very long take), and then they exit to the right of the frame, but their voices carry through. Their short appearance materializes the voices we had been hearing, and the off-screen voice and sound briefly become on-screen voice and sound. The director shows off the range of sound in this scene, and its ability to function at different levels of volume. The scene ends in a close-up of the transistor radio that the two men were working on, and the machine goes up in smoke. This is another obstacle, another setback in the attempt to fix communication. The more interesting artistic choice is that extra-diegetic sound is added to the shot. The audience hears sounds of bombs going off, as the shot shows smoke

coming out of the radio. The extra noise is an exaggeration, and another reference to the comments made about war in this scene, but what it also means is that Godard has used all the possible sound types in one scene: diegetic sound that occurs naturally in the screen space, non-diegetic sound which is outside of the screen space (voice-over, or music), intra-diegetic sound (we know the source of it, but we cannot see it), and extra-diegetic sound, meaning sound coming completely from the outside of the frame that has no logical connection with what is shown on screen at the time. Given its nature, the extra-diegetic sound also functions as another type of sonic jump-cut: we suddenly leap from the screen space to an outside, virtual location.

The amalgam of sounds employed by the director mirrors his many political references. There is almost always something to be said about the political subtext of any Godard film. Even though this is not the focus of the chapter, and I do not think it is explicitly relevant to my argument, there are too many such references to ignore this aspect completely. Throughout this particular film, there are references to Algeria, Hanoi, and to the Vietnam war. If there is a connection between the use of sound and the political message sought by Godard it is in the simple fact that the director likes to "make noise," to raise controversial issues in his films, and to have his voice tower over all consumerist messages. Much like the sound itself, these issues come back in waves, until the audience cannot ignore them anymore. For example: the little boy in the film talks about having a dream about twins, and how eventually he realized that they were North and South Vietnam. The man who tries to hire both Juliette and her friend Marianne used to be a reporter/photographer in Vietnam. Another young boy is asked, off-screen, about

his family in Algeria. At the end of the film, when the two protagonists are in bed, Robert lights up a cigarette, and the director cuts to a close-up of its burning head. Vietnam and Hiroshima are mentioned again, punctuated by the proximity of the camera to this source of fire. Immediately juxtaposed is a poster that bears the word "Hollywood;" the camera then tracks backward, and it reveals a lawn adorned with all kinds of consumer articles. A very negative association takes shape at this particular juncture, as war, Hollywood, and consumerism are all mixed in together. The director condemns and blames these last three elements, but none of the characters seem to assume any responsibility, in spite of the direct relationship they have with the camera, and indirectly with the war, Hollywood, and consumerism. Godard breaks through the imperviousness of the audience, which forces people to listen to what they do not want to hear and to understand it (il leur fait *entendre*—in its double meaning).

A direct type of interaction between the characters (and because of the point-of-view shot, the audience) and the camera is present throughout the film. Juliette washes dishes and looks over her shoulder and speaks into the camera trying to explain that she is not easy to define. In fact there are other occasions when she does try to define herself, usually through one word. The first one she uses is "indifference," which projects the attitude of an entire generation. At a later point, she tries another definition: not yet dead (pas encore morte), which interestingly is not a one-word definition, although the essential word in the phrase is "dead." When her son asks her about her dreams, she tells him that when she wakes up she is afraid that pieces are missing. Her child is actually a large presence in the film, and he asks questions that no normal little boy would. Godard

continues his deconstruction of society by breaking the boundaries of age. The boy asks his mother what language is, to which she replies "language is the house in which man resides," which recalls, almost verbatim Heidegger's "Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells" (193). Her answer and the connection to Heidegger suggest an intimate relationship between subject and language, and it points to the importance of private space. Yet, soon after, when Juliette is taking a bath, a random man who collects the electric bill comes into the bathroom without knocking, and asks for money. She is initially startled, but then carries on a normal conversation with him; the idea is that there is no personal space anymore, and that we are naked in front of the system—a system that strips us of all privacy. Because of his job, the man who enters and abuses Juliette's private space is a representative of the contemporary government system; furthermore, Juliette accepts the man's presence as something usual, which means that the system has infiltrated into our lives inconspicuously. If we combine Juliette's answer about language with the loss of privacy in the bathroom scene, then the implication would be that language itself no longer offers any intimate comfort; language escapes us. Juliette's son shares another scene with his mother toward the end of the film, when they both talk while sitting in the stairway. He points his toy gun at the camera and he shoots. Extra-diegetic sounds of an actual machine gun are added to the soundtrack. And just in case we missed it, he "reloads" and shoots again, while the same real noise of a gun fills the soundtrack. There is no need for language anymore; just noise. A few minutes later, his father, while sitting at his desk, picks up the same gun, and shoots it off one more time, with the same results. The little boy turns to his mother and asks, "savoir quelque chose,

c'est quoi?" but, as for many of the questions asked in this film, we never hear an answer. What we hear, though, is the crying of his sister, which comes back one more time to the film's soundtrack. It is as if we all revert to that stage of our lives, where language is eradicated, and all one can do is cry.

The cries and noises of the people in the city are also heard when outside, not only in the confines of an apartment. This is the case when an interesting pan over the entire city takes place, with the camera moving all the way to the right, breaking the 180 degree rule, and then all the way back to the left where it started. As the camera moves, we hear the constant ruckus of the city, and a lot of voices, maybe of children, muffled in the background. The city becomes a character in its own right in this sequence. But this is a completely unnecessary shot, in the vein of counter-cinema that seeks to break away from the seamlessness and continuity of classical Hollywood cinema. The shot accomplishes nothing; it begins and ends on the exact frame, and it does not advance the plot in any way. This superfluous shot continues the tradition of jarring the audience. More importantly, though, the superfluous shots here remind us that the visual fails or is in the process of failing as a means of storytelling. The alternative is to turn toward the aural. We go back to Juliette's thoughts, and she utters, "eyes are the body, and the noise is…" She never finishes that thought, but the audience is left suspended, waiting for an answer. It has become very clear that this film is about sound as much as anything else. But Juliette does not give us a definition of noise, and thus, noise just *is*. It is the same case for the pan shot from above: it just is. At a later moment in the film, we come back to this particular shot, but this time the camera makes a complete 360 degree turn, again

breaking the 180 degree narrative plane. We move from a medium shot of Juliette to revealing the city and back to Juliette, as she says that a landscape is like a face. So there is no difference between when we see her in the frame, or when we see the city; the city becomes Juliette, and vice-versa. As the camera turns (to infinity), the same noises we have grown accustomed to by this point are in the background: children's laughter, voices, different people, cars—the noise of the city, as the city asserts itself as a veritable, lively character who sometimes speaks and other times is quiet.

The alternation between sound and silence continues throughout the film. We jump from a city in silence to the harbor that is extremely noisy, and then to the quiet city again, to the voice over, and eventually it all goes quiet again. These alternations are also accompanied by pieces of dialogue on occasion, or the dialogue begins right at the end of such a sequence; for example, the film moves into a bar, but as the characters speak, we can still hear the noises of the city in the background. One cannot escape the urban influence, and sound penetrates to all corners. Juliette repeats the word "peut-être" following one of those silent/loud alternations. The use of the word adds more uncertainty to an already ambiguous plot and events. Amid those uncertainties, the characters sometimes refer to the objects around them, and state quite the obvious: "in this room, there is blue, red, green," or "my sweater is blue." It is quite a difficult film to follow because of this constant movement in all directions—reality is fake, and the fake can be real, up is down, and vice-versa, the character is fictional, and then she is real, etc. All of this contributes to creating a typical Godardian world, a kaleidoscope of images and sounds meant to supersaturate our senses. In my opinion, this type of visual and aural

oversaturation is meant to echo the living style of the contemporary consumerist society that bombards us, the consumers, with constant commercials and offers via all possible media outlets (and this has obviously only increased since the 60s).

The perfect example of the Godardian kaleidoscope is the first full scene in the bar. Inside the bar, Juliette talks to another woman about her husband, Jean-Paul. At the same time, someone is heard in the background playing a pinball machine. It is a constant noise that seems to punctuate every word being said in the bar. The camera moves to someone sitting at the bar in a close-up, and she begins to tell her story, as the pinball machine keeps going—its clinking noises matching the jump-cuts in the diegesis. Among the things this unknown woman does is tell a passerby that he has nice shoes. We go back to Juliette who is smoking, and then the camera moves to a random character who is talking about shoes with a woman, and it turns out that he is the one wearing the shoes referred to earlier by the woman at the bar. Then the camera moves back to Juliette, sipping a soda. As she drinks, the sound of the pinball machine continues. The voice-over comes in at this point, and the sound of the pinball is pushed to the back, but it remains an important part of the soundtrack. The sound of the pinball machine mirrors the erratic movement of the camera, the choppy dialogue, and because of its constant presence, it becomes the most memorable aspect of the scene.

We remain in the coffee shop, and we hear again the voice-over, this time superimposed to a close-up shot of a coffee cup. The spoon goes into the cup, stirs, and it makes an exaggerated noise. Back to the bar we go, and there are many new noises: tables being moved, customers talking, coffee being poured, and again, the pinball

machine. We alternate back to the voice-over, and the coffee is now spinning on its own, as a result of the spoon having just been in it, and once again we get the image of a fold. The voice-over mentions "tomber dans le néant" and meaning becomes even more unclear to us. The blackness of the coffee suggests nebulousness, and the carousel of the sequence continues with alternations between a man smoking and his coffee which begins to resemble a constellation of planets and stars because of the cream that is slowly mixing in with the rest of the drink. The camera loses its focus at one point, but comes back into focus through a quick rack-focus effect, and the voice over mentions the words "if things become clear again." And they do, but we cannot trust the image, the visual anymore. The focus appears to stay on the sound, and we keep coming back to the one, unique sound/noise of the sequence—the pinball machine. The sound of the pinball machine is a very nice touch: the movement of the little ball emphasizes the way our thoughts are formed, and the randomness of what the characters of the film say, and it also underlines the structure of the scene itself. It is a cultural reference that French people will understand right away because of the popularity of those machines at the time; in Truffaut's *400 coups*, Antoine and René also briefly play pinball during one of their escapades. In the end, though, the scene here manages to create chaos, like a ball moving about frantically inside a pinball machine.

Like almost everything else said, seen or heard in this film, we return to the same place at a later moment in the film. The entire film has a way of twisting and turning, and it goes back to the initial shot, or to the initial piece of dialogue that started a scene. In this way, the film is very representative of Deleuze's Baroque fold, because it bends upon

itself, and it multiplies, and even though it appears to return to a previous state, it changes (so it is never quite the same), and it expands. In a long shot, Robert is waiting for Juliette at the bar, and next to him there is another young woman. Behind them there is an older lady who is smoking and playing the pinball machine. We finally close the cycle begun much earlier in the film, when we only heard the machine, but we never saw who was playing it. The source of the intra-diegetic sound of the machine becomes "visible," and therefore diegetic. The camera then jumps to another couple who is talking about communism. We are in the same space, and at the level of sound we still hear the pinball machine. And the camera keeps jumping, like a pinball, back to the young woman, and then to Robert again. Next to Robert, as the camera moves in closer, there is a mirror and in the reflection we can still see the older lady playing pinball, which marks the end of the cycle and of the narrative arc.

Mirrors[34] too play a significant role in this film, as we can see in a separate sequence that takes place in one of the episodes following Juliette at her "work." The presence of the mirror complements the constant aural echo resounding throughout the film; the repetition of certain sounds is now doubled by visual reflections, as the process of expanding (unfolding) continues. After Juliette walks into a room with a future client, she proceeds to look at herself in a mirror. The room has an additional mirror, placed directly behind her, and thus we can see both her front and back reflections. She is literally caught between reflections, and that suggests an entrapment, whether that means in a certain situation, or in front of the camera: she is trapped inside this film.

[34] We will see in Chapter V that mirrors can also have an acoustical quality.

Furthermore, the client picks up a mobile mirror, and places it next to the bed; the man is in obvious control in this scene, as he can even choose the angle of Juliette's reflection. Not only that, but he provides her with a "subjectivity tool," the mirror, so then he even controls her formation as a (Lacanian) subject. As a reaction, she looks into the camera and asks "why should I be ashamed of being a woman"? As she utters those words, she moves about the room and stops in front of a large poster of a geisha. The image on the wall projects onto our mind Juliette's job, and puts into question what possible answers she might have to her own question.

The image of the geisha transitions the film into the part that discusses prostitution, which is a somewhat frequent topic in Godard's films. Prostitution allows for another notable scene, this time with another woman, and another client. The client wears a tee-shirt that bears the American flag, and the other woman's name is Marianne; the suggestion is somewhat amusing, as if the United States is about to possess France (Marianne). In addition, though, there is a transparent anti-American subtext that goes back to Godard's political comments: the man wearing the American flag tee-shirt says that "they (the Americans) invented the jeep….and napalm." Most of this film is a commentary against commercialism, so putting the jeep in the same sentence with napalm reinforces the negative connotation of brands and branding. More clearly though, the creation of napalm brings us back to the Vietnam war. In a sequence that follows this scene shortly, the director interposes six pictures from the war in Vietnam, as Juliette speaks. The pictures are gruesome, mostly of burnt people, which is the direct result of the American aerial assault and napalm bombing. While Juliette is talking to the camera,

extra-diegetic sounds of bullets from a machine gun are heard; then the city noises re-emerge, and at the very end, things get smoothed out by violins. These different sounds do not overlap but they stage a clear conflict.

Further noteworthy uses of sound in this scene draw our attention. After the two women walk into the room, we get another shot of the crane, and we also begin hearing violins, and then sexual noises. The two women start a dialogue while the camera is still focusing on the crane outside, and then we transition back into the room through the sound bridge created by their communication. Back inside the room, Juliette turns on the faucet, and the noise generated by the water has a higher volume than anything else we hear on the track. When the water is turned off, Marianne, Juliette's friend, says that the city is a "construction dans l'espace," and suddenly we are talking about the city of Paris, and we are once again outside of the room. Juliette refers to Paris as being "a mysterious city….asphyxiating….natural." This is a series of words that do not necessarily match the images that we have seen. The voice-over's assessment of it is that the city generates a spectacle, and it adds that even if this spectacle is banal, it remains interesting. The male voice on the soundtrack declares that he feels "un plaisir spécial," when looking at the city. There is a constant interchange between city and the individual, and even in its most prosaic moments (like the ones shown by Godard), the city still generates a raw type of energy. It is a similar type of energy that emanates from Baudelaire's view and vision of Paris, a century earlier. The pleasure mentioned by the voice-over could be sex-related, which is another link to Baudelaire's thematic interests along with prostitution, and/in the

city. I will return to the connections between Baudelaire and the New Wave in chapter III, on Truffaut.

Presiding over it all, though, it is still Godard's voice that dominates the city, the characters of the film, and the diegesis. His voice-over comes back into the soundtrack constantly. At one point the voice begins wondering about the choices made during the film. It first states that there is an "interference between language and image," which is a very obvious declaration; this interference had been happening during the entire film. As Juliette and her friend go to find the former's husband at a car wash, we get another sequence that exhibits plenty of alternation between sound and no sound. In the scenes with sound, the voice-over asks a few rhetorical questions about the film process: how to tell that two women are going to see Juliette's husband, how to tell that exactly, are there other images one could use, am I speaking too loudly, am I too far away? These questions cast doubt on the cinematic process and the choices made by the director, who second-guesses himself. The constant questioning is an essential part of the filmmaking process, to which we are thus exposed, and as a result we deepen our understanding of it. As we hear these questions, we witness the two women driving into an auto-repair shop, getting out of the car, and finding Robert; this mundane activity becomes the perfect opportunity for an exercise in filmmaking. The little red car that Juliette drives is then shot four different times, honking, and each time going in the opposite direction. Shots one and three are to the left and are identical, as are shots two and four, but going right. The director and the audience get caught in these repetitive movements, much as Juliette was trapped in between her own reflections. The audience has to wonder if this is the best

way to show that scene? Since there is no clear answer, in the end it does not matter, it is one possible way, and it will have to do. The honking is piercing and it reminds us of the long tracking shot in *Week-End*, which I discussed earlier, but here it provides for some more interference with the image, because it continues to jostle our senses. The voice-over continues to lament, rhetorically, about how it cannot talk about Juliette leaving and focus on the leaves at the same time.[35] The impossibility of doing two things simultaneously speaks directly to the current (in the context of this particular film) inability of the image that cannot split to tell more than one story at a time, unlike the sound.

Godard's lamentation about the restrictions of language and image are once again placed on a wall, as a sign, at the denouement of the film, where Robert and Juliette are lying in bed. Above their matrimonial bed is another poster; it is a distorted figure of what appears to be a neck, and a hand comes from behind it as if to strangle it. No face is shown, just the deformed neck, with a hand squeezing it. This image calls to mind Paul Verlaine and his famous desire to break the neck of eloquence[36] (125), which is exactly what the director has been trying to accomplish in this film. Godard breaks down all boundaries, and eliminates the traditional way in which we understand the eloquence of language. The film projects images, and more importantly, sounds that tell a completely separate story from what is being said. All forms, spoken language, image, and sounds and noises create their own narrative plane. Godard's sound can sometimes be a simple disruption of the filmic act, or it can provide it with a counterpoint to the image we are

[35] I am aware of the play on words on English, but it does not produce the same results in French.
[36] "Prends l'éloquence et tords-lui son cou."

seeing on screen. However, in the examples above, sound (which I understand to include silences) generates its own story. The cry of a baby girl, the noise made by a machine gun going off, or the persistent murmur of the city, all of these instances produce narrative starts that sometimes are left unfinished, and that sometimes go well beyond what the image tells us. Godard's aural fold expands to infinity in the purest Baroque aesthetic style.

This type of ever-expanding sound contributes to the breakdown of the fourth wall in cinema,[37] and the end result of this action affects the way one understands the relationship between the viewers and the film projected on screen. Throughout the thesis a recurrent idea has been and will be that of multiplicity, which eventually leads to multiple modernities, as I will elaborate in chapter IV. Sound is definitely capable of multiplicity, as it splits across various aural planes. Sound is also extremely malleable, because each spectator hears something different, and each audience has a unique reaction. The aural space between the screen and the audience is therefore filled in a personalized manner, and according to each particular situation. Presiding over both the visual and the aural spaces, Godard customizes filmmaking (through a unique type of sound technique), which leads to the creation of a customized modernity for the cinematic (modern) subject. As modern subjects, we are all in a perpetual state of change, and we have to constantly expand, much like the Baroque fold. Amid all these complicated relationships, it is the sound and its waves and aural folds that allow for a new, much closer interaction between audience and film. The visual does not always

[37] I am extrapolating the "fourth wall" expression from theater to cinema in a metaphorical way meant to jumpstart my discussion of an actual interaction between screen and audience.

accomplish this result, especially in the case of Godard who does not favor a seamless narrative, but sound is a more consistent venue to explore the changing relationship between spectators and screen.

Chapter II: Mambety's Journey In and Out of Third and Counter-Cinemas

Djibril Diop Mambety is one West African filmmaker whose style bridges Third Cinema and auteur cinema. Mambety's body of work can be artistically associated with a recognized movement such as the French New Wave, although it remains difficult to categorize his films. As we have already seen, Godard's metaphoric voice is a very distinctive feature of the New Wave school; similarly, Mambety's films prove to be unique among his Senegalese peers, and within the larger West African context. His work is heavily stylized and characterized by pastiche and a collage of genres. As an oppositional cinema it turns to parody, favoring the particular, smaller-scale stories, not the universal, which is what separates him from the work of Ousmane Sembene for example. Emerging from the particular and also from marginality, these films reveal other thematic trends, such as issues of locomotion, comings and goings, or extra-diegetic sounds and voices. Mambety's particular cinematic manifestation is not, though, surrounded by many other distinctive voices within Senegalese cinema as is the case with Godard and the rest of New Wavers. This lack poses a problem for critics who try to build a certain consistency among Senegalese directors, so as to unify them in an artistic movement; ultimately, much of the autonomy and uniqueness of Senegalese cinema appears to come from and emulate the autonomy and uniqueness exuded by each individual director. Mambety's sharp sense of satire, combined with an inventive editing style at the level of both image and sound, create films that challenge the categorization of Third Cinema, or any categorization for that matter. He crafted his own style, his own

language, and his own delivery: "…Mambety se construisit un projet de langage cinématographique dès *Contras'City*. … D'abord il y eut l'exploration de l'espace cinématographique, des possibilités de combinaisons, de juxtaposition, de narration et de description par l'entremise de l'image et du son" (Niang 197). Given his experimentation with sound and image, his avant-garde *Touki-Bouki*, and his persistent subversion of the existing conventions of cinema, maybe the most obvious category would be counter-cinema, but Mambety never seems to fit within one category, he is never constant. There are moments when his cinema is pastoral, or contemplative; at other times it is political and satirical. His editing is often disruptive and discontinuous, but there are moments when his films are quite seamless and do not draw attention to their apparatus, which allows the spectator to be stitched onto the narrative. Therefore, Mambety poses an interesting problem, as he meshes two styles together, and his films oscillate between being in and out of the counter-cinema mode, and in and out of the Third Cinema mode. I also find that Djibril Diop Mambety challenges the primacy of visual space by juxtaposing the various aural planes emerging from the plurality and plasticity of sound with the existing, more rigid two-dimensional visual planes. New (aural) narrative planes are then created.

This chapter proposes a close analysis of the world of Mambety's films, with an emphasis on *Touki-Bouki* (1973), as I try to show that Mambety's originality comes from taking counter-cinema to new extremes, going not only against the mainstream, but against trends of his own national cinema, and of Third Cinema. I look at his films, and *Touki-Bouki* in particular, as perfect examples of bridging the French New Wave and

Senegalese cinema at the level of the cinematic subject, and in particular, of the female subject. I will analyze the way Mambety makes use of sound, issues of locomotion, alienation and marginality in order to subvert mainstream cinema codes and conventions, as well as the primacy of the cinematic male subject. Finally, I will explore the ubiquitous ambivalence that marks his entire body of work in order to reveal the originality of his personal style. Ambivalence is apparent in the way Mambety delivers a story, in his cinematic methodology, in his political views, and most relevantly in his characters. It is here that I find his work can be seen as a crossing point, between the direct Godardian approach, and the more veiled treatment of marginality displayed by Truffaut (as we will see in the next chapter). The recurring ambivalence of Mambety's films leads to the assessment that, "son cinéma n'est classable dans aucun tiroir" (Sene 39), and partly because of that I find him equally deserving of an *auteur* epithet, since every auteur has his/her own personal "tiroir" or own recognizable style. Similarly, Nar Sene suggests, "Un cinéphile n'est pas dans le même état d'esprit, quand il va voir un film de Godard, de Howard Hawks, de Kurosawa, ou de Satiajit Ray parce qu'ils sont "épithètes" chacun dans son genre. Il en est de même pour Djibril" (Sene 61). So, a strong case can be made that Mambety is a filmmaker worthy of being called an auteur.

More Third Cinema Notions

Most films in Third Cinema constitute political statements in relation to their respective country, and they achieve that either through allegory or even direct satire. In

the case of Mambety, *Touki-Bouki* is really his first political film, "celui où pour la première fois les images convergent pour illustrer un projet de société obliquement nationaliste" (Niang 106). Equally strong in its political comments is the later *La Petite vendeuse de soleil* (1994). In the latter, Mambety's dream is that Africa should leave the "zone franc," and be able to survive on its own resources; this is a suggestion that brings us back to the distinction between First, Second, and Third cinemas. "Third Cinema" categorizes films made in Third World countries (among other factors) and it is mainly understood as an opposition to both Western and Eastern (Chinese, Japanese etc.) cultures. The word "third" places this cinema last in a sequence that includes First World cinema, namely Hollywood, and the Second cinema, that of the auteur. This categorization poses some problems because such hierarchical categorization could be considered dismissive, "Third" implying "less" or "worse." Susan Hayward distinguishes between Third Cinema, which is a more political cinema geared toward countering the ideology of the other two cinemas, and Third World Cinema, which would be geographically widerspread and would cover more thematic elements. Much like Hayward, Paul Willemen thinks of Third cinema as an ideological project, a body of films adhering to certain political and aesthetic programs, regardless of whether or not they are produced by Third World peoples themselves.

Then of course, there is the debate over authenticity: is African cinema an authentic cinema? Initially, African film had to fight against demeaning representations of the continent by the West (we will later see how *Touki-Bouki* addresses this issue), but that has not evolved into a particular, specific style that belongs only to Africans. One

thing that may be different from Western cinema is picked up by Teshome Gabriel. According to him, African film is not linear, it does not follow a single path, and does not tell only one story. On the contrary, "stories tend to bend back upon themselves, to circle as they circulate, so that their fabric contains many interlocking stories and permutations of stories" (Gabriel 203). The bending back, which is really a folding, evokes Deleuze's vision of the Baroque discussed in Chapter I, as the fold generates multiple, smaller-scale[38] stories. One of the ways in which Mambety creates various stories out of one main plot is through his use of sound, a point that I will discuss at length later in the chapter. In Mambety's films, sound is often separated from the main storyline, and it thus takes on a life of its own. What happens is that the film splits and begins telling different stories: "sound becomes disembodied and takes on a force and presence of its own" (Mintz 299). The force of sound and noise, narrative structure, and apparent lack of chronology in *Touki-Bouki* do put into question the validity of the story, leaving room for other stories to be born.

According to Gabriel, there are three main tendencies in Third Cinema. The first one is called "unqualified assimilation" which is characterized by an attempt to imitate Hollywood film, both on technical and thematic levels. He gives no examples of such films, because there are very few examples, and none of them worth mentioning, in fact. A second tendency is called "the remembrance phase" which is characterized by more aggressive attitudes: there is a rejection of "the ways of the past." A third stage is the phase of liberation, the "combative phase" where film becomes an "ideological tool,"

[38] Unlike the bigger picture mentality employed by Godard.

which deals with themes of resistance. These tendencies are mirrored by Manthia Diawara's three categories, as he looks at the history of African cinema, not from the point of view of a clear political opposition between the West and Africa, but rather as cause and effect—specific regimes creating specific practices and products. His categories are called "social realism," "return to the source" and "colonial confrontation," all of which resemble Teshome's phases with the exception of the middle category, which is not as polemical, and supports the creation of a distinctive African film language.[39]

These categories cannot possibly be clear-cut, and there is a lot of common ground between the last two, return to the source and colonial confrontation. All the recurrent themes in African cinema, as seen by Mybe Cham—conflicts between cultures (whether African, European or Arab), challenges posed by post-colonial life, disillusionment with political independence, declining quality of life, political instability and corruption, rethinking gender and gender roles and expectations, the need to rewrite African history from an African point of view etc—crisscross both categories.

It is my claim that the connection between them is made through a constant concern with the position of women in society shown especially by Mambety, but also by other African directors, not just the Senegalese, as we have already seen: Bekolo's *Quartier Mozart* (Cameroon, 1993) tells the story of a woman who becomes a man and finds herself in the position of a pursuer, and in the same vein Adamo Drabo's *Taafe Fanga* (Mali, 1996, *Skirt Power*) portrays women in a village who, through magic, switch

[39] Both sets of categories are discussed by Stephen Zacks in "The theoretical construction of African cinema" (14).

gender roles with the men. Sembène's latest, *Mooladé* (2004), and before it, Cheick Oumar Sissoko's *Finzan* (Mali, 1990) both deal with the issue of female excision. The theme of return to the source switches the focus from ideology and traditional issues concerning African film to pure aesthetics: Gaston Kaboré's *Wend Kuni* (Burkina Faso, 1982), Abderrahwmane Sissako's *La Vie sur terre* (Mali) and Souleymane Cissé's *Yeelen* (Mali, 1987), are all good examples of directors concentrating on the beauty of the African landscape, even though they all still espouse the anti-colonial discourse from the perspective of the masses.

On a more specific level, Third Cinema films address the effects of colonialism, and in the case of West African cinema, its relation to France. From this perspective, one finds such themes as exclusion and oppression. Teshome Gabriel maps out the central themes of political African cinema, a cinema addressing issues of class, race, culture, religion, sex or national integrity. Class struggle occurs at the level of the conflict between the rich and the poor, which in the context of West African cinema carries a nuance that goes beyond the obvious opposition since it explores the parallels between the newly rich and the colonizers. Other conflicts that are common in this cinema are between the preservation of indigenous culture and the colonial presence suggested by technological advancements. Religion plays a big role in the latter conflict, and often from that one can follow the struggle for the emancipation of women, who have been literally silenced and find themselves fighting against a deeply rooted religious tradition that has placed them in a subservient status to men. West African cinema is, for these reasons, a cinema about voice, and furthermore a cinema surprisingly vociferous about

the female voice. Yet, the strongest voice that has to be heard is one that belongs to the community of African filmmakers (usually men). The concept of community is capital in African cinema, as it is in day to day life; the priority of the filmmakers is to make an impact locally, while hoping to reach a universal audience as well. Mambety goes a long way toward establishing West African cinema, and Senegalese cinema in particular, as original and autonomous—themes invoked by Gabriel, also. Not surprisingly then, his cinema is about starting: "son cinéma est celui des départs tumultueux…Départ d'un cinéma, qui lui-même, est de départ, et du départ du cinéma d'auteur sénégalais et africain" (Sene 89). His films do represent departures from the Western stronghold, and his shorter film *La Petite vendeuse de soleil* exemplifies this departure both thematically and cinematically.

La Petite vendeuse de soleil

With *La Petite vendeuse de soleil* (1999), we immediately see the resemblance between the main character, Sili, and the situation of the continent, or in this particular case, that of Senegal. Sili fights against injustice and wants to achieve economic independence (although she moves around in crutches, she finds a job selling the newspaper *Soleil* in Dakar). Yet among the obstacles on her way are the competition from the boys selling papers and also her own infirmity. Mambety's film presents itself as a metaphor for the current situation of African countries, physically challenged entities as well as victims of globalization. As Lieve Spaas remarks, "The optimism conveyed by

the girl's victory over natural and social adversities may be read, on an idealistic level, as Mambety's dream for his country and his continent; a program promoting social equality, economic policies and a belief in change for Africa" (29). The dream takes clear shape in the conclusion of the film, when the front page of the newspapers reads "L'Afrique quitte la zone franc." But the viable solution the director seeks in the end is that African countries help one another. Even though Sili is extremely tough and proves she can overcome certain obstacles, it is obvious that neither she nor Senegal can manage on their own. Thus, going beyond the obvious metaphor, the film raises other issues, especially concerning the position a woman occupies in society, and the connections between issues of locomotion and the technological development that does not necessarily facilitate movement. The tension that occurs between the theme of departure, or rather the impossibility of departing, and the female cinematic subject is the driving force behind *La Petite vendeuse de soleil*. One of Mambety's major concerns is indeed the reinstatement of woman to her rightful place in society: "Dans son cinéma c'est la femme qui tourne la page décisive des destinées. Les grandes mutations sociales sont le fait des femmes qui seules, continuent l'aventure de la vie. C'est elles qui sont au centre et tiennent le rôle principal de l'histoire" (Sene 79). Women in Mambety's world take on the role of a catalyst meant to propel the modern African society forward.

On the contrary, though, the first shot of *La Petite vendeuse* shows us women waiting. Then suddenly, our view is cut by cars driving very fast on the highway. We see from the very beginning that there is a conflict between the technological development represented by the multitude of cars, and African women, still waiting for something, still

not moving. The first episode of the film introduces a recurring subplot of a woman in the market, accused of theft. The scene is organized so that the woman is always in the center of the frame, and also the center of attention: everyone else surrounds her and watches her struggle first with the accuser, then with policemen who literally undress her and force her into a van. This is how the film begins: a woman, surrounded by males, forced into imprisonment. She is indeed alone throughout the scene, and the isolation is emphasized not only by the theatrical setup, but also by the subsequent shot that reveals her behind bars, pacing, alone and very agitated. The fact that she is shirtless suggests even more her powerlessness, her inability to defend herself or do anything about the predicament she is in. Her bitter words, "everyone's gone crazy in this country," sound prophetic and emphasize the fact that the country is in disarray.

After this episode, the main character, Sili Laam, is introduced and from this moment on, the camera will focus a lot on her legs and feet. Later we get a traveling shot of her feet going in and out of the frame creating the impression that she is zigzagging, which suggests misdirection. In this scene we never see the rest of her body, and also toward the end, when she is with Babou, the boy who helps her throughout the film, we only see their feet in the same shot. The insistence on feet and legs not only keeps us aware of the importance of locomotion, but because we do not see their upper bodies, it universalizes the characters—they could be anyone from the crowd. This is reinforced by the fact that Mambety only used non-professional actors, people "from the crowd" so to speak. In an interview with Ukadike he declares, "The professional actor does not exist.

Economically, yes, but basically, no. Professional actors can break the magic of the dream and the magic of cinema" (Ukadike 128).

In stark contrast is the handicapped boy in a wheel chair, who cannot move independently because he lacks legs, but who owns wheels. He also owns a radio that he carries around everywhere (this character brings to mind Spike Lee's Radio Raheem in *Do the Right Thing*): so the new generation is presented itself as aware of technology, but still remains practically and sociopolitically incapable of fully taking advantage of it. By comparison, the older generation is much less in tune with technology. We see an old man splitting rocks in order to make gravel—once in contrast with a plane landing in the background, and then in contrast with a group of young athletes running. In this second case, it is not technology that provides the conflict, but rather a different dynamic—the young generation is moving, running toward the future, the old one is immobilized in a present that does not belong to it anymore. It is the same situation in *Touki-Bouki*, as we will see, for Anta and Mory, who are always on the move, often running.

Mambety emphasizes the question of movement by showing lots of people pushing carts—there are three separate instances in the first fifteen minutes of the film, in which images of legs and feet are juxtaposed with the cars on the highway. This image of fast cars keeps coming back to underline the speed of a new age. In the city, Sili walks in front of refrigerators sitting on the sidewalk, and because of her slow pace, we always have plenty of time to observe everything that surrounds her. On occasion, Diop Mambety uses very long takes that give the impression that time is expanding; everything that happens, happens very slowly. The choice of refrigerators cannot be random—this is

a symbol for technological improvement, but also for the invasion of Western culture. The image of the refrigerator comes back in other African films, for example in Dani Kouyate's *Keita: l'héritage du griot* there is a tracking shot of two men also moving a refrigerator in a cart pulled by a donkey. Departures imply distances, and Sili appears to be always left behind. She is passed by a truck, then by a man on a bike. Later, while walking with Babou, Sili is also passed by a motorcycle.

It is mostly in this physical distancing that we perceive Sili living in isolation. Sada Niang remarks: "ce personnage vit dans le manque, isolé de toute institution scolaire, méconnu des services de santé de la République" (192). Although everything seems to be going against her, Sili is the bearer of happiness. In the title of the movie, *La Petite vendeuse de soleil*, the word "sun" is not capitalized, and it uses "de" not "du" as it should be if "soleil" referred to the paper's name. Instead, this suggests that, along with the papers, she is selling sun or happiness. Later in the film we see her wearing new yellow clothes and also sunglasses with yellow frames, accentuating her relation to the sun. She also signs for the papers with the drawing of a sun. The fact that she finds a job tells us she can manage on her own, and she echoes the opinion of the woman distributing the papers, "What boys can do, girls can do, too!" Her relation to the paper inspired Mambety's wonderful superimposed shot of Sili's face over the running print of a paper; with this shot, in Ann Willey's words, the director "coalesces the discourses of modernity, technology, tradition, and literacy" (83). I find Willey's reading pertinent, but I would add that the character Sili also functions as a means to bring people together,

which goes beyond uniting conflicting discourses. An appropriate example is her relationship with Babou.

He, like the menacing boys, sells papers, but the *Sud* rather than the *Soleil*. When Sili asks him why the people prefer *Sud*, he answers that it is the paper of the people and that *Soleil* belongs to the government. In this moment we see again that Sili's role is an idealistic one (and that Mambety himself reveals his political stand), as she answers, "I'll stay with *Soleil*. That way, the government will get closer to the people." Obviously, Sili's story presents itself as something of a fairy tale. A previous episode at the police station supports this argument: she talks back to an officer and convinces him to release the woman accused of theft, something that would likely not happen in reality.

Mambety uses a fairy tale to bring the two main characters closer together, and also ends the film with a formula used in Wolof fairy tales: "this tale is thrown in the sea." The director thus suggests a reconciliation between a traditional oral culture, whose knowledge is often encapsulated in folk tales and imminent technological development, rather than a complete abandonment of the former. There is a connection between the book Babou carries around, and the story Sili tells while holding the same book, although both of them are illiterate. Ann Willey understands that Mambety "suggests that the written version of the folktales that the children narrate to each other supplements the oral ones, does not replace them," (85) which would be consistent with the desire to maintain certain traditions while accepting the fact that it is a new era. While technological development is one of the first signs that a society is moving in a new direction, it does not necessarily mean that it is a better one. The most important line in the story told by

Sili (who had been told this story by her grandmother) is the last one, uttered by Leuk le Lièvre, canonical hero of West African folk tales: "make room, I'm about to be born." In this final utterance we hear the voice of the director, the rebirth cry of Senegal, of the whole Africa. This rebirth, coupled with Mambety's words about reinvention, points to the emancipation of Senegalese cinema and the (re)affirmation of West African Cinema.

Sound in *Contras City*, *Hyenas* and *Babou Boy*

Mambety favors the individual, the marginal perspective, without ever losing sight of the community picture, which comes through most forcefully through his unique use of sound. Most of his films are set in his old neighborhood in Dakar, an area called Kolobane (a name he would later borrow for the fictional town in *Hyènes*), which Nar Sene refers to, oxymoronically, as "épicentre de la marginalité" (11). This particular critic has a very distinctive approach in his book on Mambety, which is more of a lyrical piece, rather than a critical study. I do find his approach fitting, however, given the fact that Mambety is in some ways a poet,[40] and Nar Sene rightfully points to the connections between the director, his birthplace and marginality: "Tous ces films sont royalement 'hors-champ,' dans la marge, avec les marginaux, dont il fut prophète et membre actif" (12). As a result, the films end up being a veritable map of that part of the city, and they construct a certain image of it. At the same time, sound creates another, parallel (sonic) story. At a superficial glance it would appear that the films are, then, about the larger

[40] He expresses thoughts and feelings throughout his oeuvre that is often dominated by a subjective voice.

context of the community. In fact, they are at least equally about the individual, contrary to what Nar Sene believes, “Il y a très peu de gros plans dans un film de Mambety. Sa caméra ne cible pas un individu, mais toute une classe sociale” (33). While I do not dispute that there seems to be a lack of close-ups in the cinema of Mambety, I find that he remains attracted to the particular, even if the camera maintains distance from the cinematic subject. Furthermore, this distance allows for a better acoustic effect reflected upon the audience. Once again, Mambety aptly navigates between two opposing entities, in this case, between the universal and the particular, between community and the individual, creating thus a constant movement inside, outside.

His early film, *Contras City* (1968) focuses more on the community, a community that has changed and become too cosmopolitan, and he points to those changes which he sees as negative. Following this initial effort, his next three shorter films change the focus to the individual. *Badou Boy* (1970) follows the adventures of a young boy chased around Dakar by an overweight policeman; *Le Franc* (1994) tells the story of a man trying to claim a winning lottery ticket that he had glued to his door because he feared losing it. Along with *La Petite vendeuse de soleil* (1998), *Le Franc* is part of an unfinished trilogy about “les petits gens.” Aside from the shorter movies, there are two full-length features: *Hyenas* (1992) is an adaptation of a Swiss play (*The Visit* by Friedrich Dürrenmatt, 1955) about the destruction of both the communal and personal space; *Touki-Bouki*, his most memorable film, is on the other hand about (re)building an identity from the fragmented stories of two young lovers, Anta and Mory, set to immigrate to France, but of whom only the girl follows through with the plan.

The fragmentation that characterizes *Touki-Bouki* raises questions about Mambety's editing choices. When asked by Frank Ukadike about his particular style and his editing techniques, Mambety replied, "It's the way I dream. To do that, one must have a mad belief that everything is possible—you have to be mad to the point of being irresponsible. Because I know that cinema must be reinvented, reinvented each time, and whoever ventures into cinema also has a share in its reinvention" (Ukadike 4). It would seem that inventing or reinventing African cinema is not even under question; rather, Mambety reinvents cinema itself. In the same interview, he talks about his use of sound and music: "I do not choose the music, I choose the sound. All movement is accompanied by a sense...It has to do with stimulation: from the images I do the music, from the music I do the sound. But sound is not something foreign to adorn the film. It is intrinsic to film; it magnifies the action" (Ukadike 4). However, following Jacques Attali's argument, it would appear that music can play an equally important role in creating meaning in cinema, like noises and sounds. For Attali, music has a strong political inclination, music is "a tool for understanding" and "a play of mirrors in which every activity is reflected, defined, recorded, and distorted. If we look at one mirror, we see only an image of another. But at times a complex mirror game yields a vision that is rich, because unexpected and prophetic. At time it yields nothing but the swirl of the void" (Attali 4-5). I find very intriguing the use of the words "distorted" and "mirror." Both of these terms are very pertinent to a reading of Diop Mambety's films, which alter the image and the narration by means of sound, and which also create a chain of mirrors meant to show us another version of reality. His native neighborhood, Kolobane, is filled with noises and

sounds, and if I take his words literally, those particular sounds do not create conflicts, but they rather tell another, parallel story. Nonetheless, while his later films do follow the traditional idea that sound "magnifies" the action, I think that there are several "counter" instances in his earlier work to point otherwise, allowing Mambety to keep moving in and out of Counter-Cinema.

Contras City is a very interesting short film, and it begins with a very funny sound effect: as French classical music is played, we get a shot of a very nice building, a hotel, which would appear to be placed in France; when the camera reveals the Senegalese flag and the voice over pronounces the word "Dakar," the music is altered as if it were played on a defective record. This creates a sense of disruption, and a conflict is born between the steady flow of the image and the broken soundtrack. In this movie too, shots of the city are combined with street noises. In what may be the most interesting scene of this film, two women talk in front of a newspaper kiosk. Surprisingly, they begin to make sexual noises, literally moaning as they are flipping through magazines. This particular episode points to the intrusion of Western culture, which is not seen as positive: anything related to Western culture can be perceived as promiscuous. The final sequence of this short film begins with a sign that advertises going to Saint-Louis, and then the camera literally departs, moving right to left, in a long tracking shot of a building, and in the background we hear the sound of a train. As the train and noise stop, the camera reveals the word "Arrivée." The end of the train route coincides with the end of the movie. *Contras City* does not have a traditional plot; in fact, it reads more like a documentary piece. However, the few examples about sound use mentioned above foreshadow

Mambety's aural thematic tendencies in his later films, to which I will return in a moment.

In *Hyenas*, music, sound, and noise are more congruent to the image on screen, and the narration is more conventional. There are few interesting sound effects, and they mostly relate to images of animals, while musically something else is happening in the background: shots of a vulture descending are covered with a choir song, applause, dialogue between Ramatou and Draman or relative quietness, with Draman speaking softly. There are also shots of hyenas and owls, but for both the sound is post-synchronized giving the feeling that it comes from a different source. A couple of other interesting moments in this film are the exaggerated laughter of the character in charge of the toll booth in the middle of nowhere and the often interrupted dialogue in the grocery store: they both mirror, or rather complete the anachronous sound overlapping the shots of hyenas. This way, we are forced to think of these people, and the rest of the village, as animals, and even worse, as hyenas. Finally, the ending provides us with very masterful techniques of using sound. There is a long sequence of continuous murmuring, almost chanting, of the people executing Draman, and that dissipates into quasi-silence. Then, just a little wind is heard, before complete silence sets in for a very long time, which eventually is broken by crows cawing. The sound here works toward achieving a common goal with the image; it contributes to making Draman's death more powerful, more meaningful. It is as if the world stops once he dies, and then the reconstruction begins when the bulldozer comes into the frame.

However, the film that exemplifies the best the use of anachronous and contrapuntal sound is *Badou Boy*. I would venture to say that *Badou Boy* is about music and sound, much more than anything else: this quasi exercise in sound editing attempts to reinstate the primacy of oral storytelling over image. The treatment of sound, noise, and music is so careful that the story takes a secondary role—as a matter of fact there is not much of a story: a police officer chases Badou Boy through the city. An element that could support my argument that this is a film created through music and noise is the presence both at the beginning and the end of the boy carrying a string instrument. The camera lingers on him both times, emphasizing the importance of the instrument. Surprisingly, the boy never plays it. Instead an old, blind man does. This is a man who actually regains his vision at the end of the movie in some sort of miraculous twist that hints at the healing powers of sound and song. We return to the image of this instrument many times, and we see the old man playing it and close-ups of his eyes blinking rapidly, as he is almost in a trance, half praying, half playing music. He is at the heart of the city, and he is always surrounded by chaotic movement, and accompanied by other sounds: there are kids playing, dogs barking, and of course, the inevitable street noises, including cars honking.

There is a lot of circularity in this film, which is obvious at the level of sound, because most sounds or pieces of music are repeated, or envelop a radically different passage: moments of silences are placed in between identical pieces of synthesizer material. The beginning is very illustrative of that process, as the crew is preparing to shoot the film—this shot is flanked by background music, while the shot itself is covered

by African rhythms, mostly percussion. There is also a tune that keeps replaying, and it comes from a synthesizer that sounds like an organ, combined with drums and eventually leading to a sharp noise, a sort of climax. This tune is repeated, sometimes softer than other times, but it remains the theme song. There are five instances when this tune is used, and the officer comes into the shot every time. The several repetitions of sounds mirror what happens on screen: the movie begins with an image of the boy, against a metal fence, his arms raised to the sides as if he were crucified like Jesus. We come back to this image later, but the police man is also in the shot. The whole movie is about this chase,[41] but it singles out these two scenes which anchor the entire narration of the film.

The dialogue is seemingly carelessly, but purposely, added to the image, and post-synchronized, which creates an obvious discrepancy between sound and image. An interesting dialogue effect happens when a female character is given a male voice, and then at one point, he/she begins to cough, which he/she does for a very long time. This gender reversal is repeated later in the movie when we hear a man and a woman speaking to each other, but we see two women interacting in the market. These reversals are meant to impede our identification with the characters, because they make us aware of the cinematic act. Mambety interrupts the flow of the narration, or actually, he interrupts the flow of the sound, because he wants to make us aware of it, aware of the presence of sound. Another example of interruption would be the sound of the police siren, which is briefly cut off by the sound of kicking a ball (shaped, it appears like a skull), and then going back to the sound of the siren fading away. We see a man urinating against a wall

[41] The chase is a tribute to Charlie Chaplin who initiated the cop chase genre. The image of Chaplin will come back in the analysis of Sembene's films.

that bears the words “défense de pisser” and we hear the sound of a toilet being flushed. The sound of balloons exploding sounds more like a gun going off. Again, superimposing these shots with the respective choice of noise/sound creates a feeling of disorientation in the audience—we do not know which story to follow anymore, the one on screen, or the one we hear. I do not think that it is imperative we decide which story to follow, though. The sound is an entity of its own, and because it is independent of the image in this case, it allows for permutations. So the aural story splits into multiple stories and becomes something else—an aural hybrid narrative.

One of the most important documents concerning sound in cinema is Eisenstein’s *Statement on Sound* (written with two other Russian directors), which, maybe because of Eisenstein’s background in silent film, does not strongly advocate for sound in film, but does try to find a beneficial way of integrating it into the medium that had achieved “one of the first places among arts” (317). The ability to add sound to film has affected the continuing developing of cinema by undermining its basic “hook” on an audience—the image on screen. To remedy this, the group of Russian directors thought about using sound as a montage technique because montage is what “brought the cinema to such a powerfully effective strength” (317). It is interesting to note the fact that the three directors admit to not being ready technologically to use sound, and, since montage was one of the things they did best, one has to wonder how much of this theory has to do with trying to stay alive in a very tough, fast developing market.

Sound used in a naturalistic way, sound that matches the activity on screen perfectly, will only create commercial movies according to Eisenstein. Moreover, “every

ADHESION of sound to a visual montage piece increases its inertia as montage piece, and increases the independence of its meaning—and this will undoubtedly be to the detriment of montage, operating in the first place not on the montage pieces but on the JUXTAPOSITION" (317). What the group of directors proposes instead, and something that Mambety, as we have seen in the examples above, does very well is a "contrapuntal use" of sound, which would allow for new development and ways of perfecting montage techniques: "The first experimental work with sound must be directed along the line of its distinct nonsynchronization with the visual images" (318). The three Russian filmmakers do not offer any examples, but their central argument is that sound has to be an independent part of the film process, something that adds to the art of film, almost as a separated entity.

The separation of sound and image occurs quite frequently in the films of Mambety, and it causes a detachment from the action on the screen, as the audience is made aware of the cinematic act. Typical of counter-cinema practices, and opposing classical Hollywood cinema, filmmaking that reveals its own apparatus leads to the alienation of the audience. Alienation effects occur frequently because Mambety's world dwells in marginality. For Berthold Brecht, both theater and cinema are processes of alienation—they have to achieve and maintain the audience at a certain distance. The audience is already alienated from its own social condition, so that distance is meant to make the audience understand and resist its (social) alienation. Brecht's ideas, as I qualified them through Kaja Silverman in Chapter I, are relevant for Mambety's films as well. The director also creates a narration that is fractured, he does not use established

actors, and he upholds the Brechtian concept of thorough separation of the elements that comprise a film. Mambety's films can be cut up into pieces, like Brecht famously suggested, but those bits would still mean something, they would be able to exist on their own. The perfect example from Mambety's oeuvre is what he accomplishes with *Touki-Bouki*.

Touki-Bouki

What separates *Touki-Bouki* within the context of West African film is thematic richness: unlike the earlier, shorter features that have a clear focus, this film, his first full feature, almost comes across as disorganized, as if the director did not know what to do with the additional time. However, the more one watches this film, the more it makes sense, and the more details are revealed. This is a movie about the particular, but also about the universal and the community; it is a political satire, a lyrical work about love, a drama about exile, about the contradictions between outside and inside, even though "Il est difficile de se souvenir d'un plan tourné en intérieur dans un film de Djibril. Mambety est clair. Il travaille en plein jour et devant tout le monde" (Sene 79). There is a stark contrast between the constant shooting outdoors, and the inside drama, the internal struggle of each character. *Touki-Bouki* is poignant in its incisive socio-political commentary, but is also slow and indirect when dealing with marginality, which forms the personal drama of the two main characters. Anta and Mory are a young couple dreaming of immigrating to France; the obvious first obstacle is that they have no money

to travel, and as they become a sort of Senegalese version of Godard's Patricia and Michel in *A bout de souffle* (this time around the woman, Anta, is fully an accomplice to her male counterpart; Patricia is really a *petite vendeuse* herself, but in the Parisian context where she sells *The Herald Tribune*), they face the harsh economic and social realities of their country, while they also undergo constant changes. The two main characters of *Touki-Bouki* oscillate between modernity and tradition, and I disagree with Sada Niang's assessment that Mambety does not use that opposition to define his characters,

> *Touki-Bouki* nous fait vibrer de cette ambivalence: fascination pour l'ailleurs et integration de l'origine. Certains ont voulu y voir une opposition entre tradition et modernité. Mambety a toujours échappé à ce manichéisme. Pour lui, la modernité était dans la marginalité, dans l'irrévérence et l'indiscipline, dans l'indocilité, dans la force de dire "je" tout en intégrant le "nous," non pas le "nous" des contraintes sociales mais celui des valeurs essentielle portées par l'origine, transmises par le conte et le mythe. (Niang 7)

I find that the character of Mory encompasses both traditional elements (his very strong connection to the land), and modern one (like his passion for the motorcycle).

As a matter of fact, both characters in the film are hydrids, and so is the film itself. It mixes Western cinema and the oral tradition of West African story-telling. Already from the title we can make a connection to the stories of Birago Diop, *Contes d'Amadou Koumba*, which place the hyena as a central figure in West African animal tales. However, there is an ongoing debate over the validity of the translation of *Touki-*

Bouki into "The Journey of the Hyena," which equates Mory with the hyena, "an animal accused of greed and mischievousness" who "symbolizes trickery and social marginality" (Pfaff 220). Furthermore, the hyena is always portrayed as being dirty, and lacking intelligence. Obviously few of those attributes apply to the male character of the film, although some other critics have fully accepted the parallelism: "it is the main character who is the hyena: on the margins of a society convulsing with rapid, profound, and irreversible cultural change, he strives to achieve his fanciful goal at any cost" (Essar 78). Sada Niang's compelling book *Djibril Diop Mambety: un cinéaste à contre-courant* (the title of the book very aptly describes the course of Mambety's work) offers another translation. In his opinion the title remains enigmatic, but he separates the two words suggesting that they are in fact entire sentences, and that the full, correct phrase should read "*Touki bu nu buki*, qui se traduirait par *un voyage qui a été hyénisé*" (Niang 129), in which "hyénisé" refers to achieving one's goals and ambitions. Regardless of the outcome of this debate, it is certain that Mambety's film exudes ambivalence from its very title. And this is where Mambety further separates himself from other African directors—in his dualism. His films, and in particular *Touki-Bouki* are not mere attempts to appropriate an existing style (the French) and to adjust it to an African context. There is definitely an auteur aesthetic influence present at the level of film technique that is most evident in the lack of narrative linearity, but in the end the main plotline is very simple, and that straightforwardness harks back to the stories told by griots.[42] So, the

[42] A 'griot' is a story-teller, and the name has various forms: "gewel" in Wolof, "gawlo" in Fulani, "djeli" in Bambara, etc. They can be musicians or poets, and they range from money chasing local griots, who crash marriages and naming ceremonies in the hope of getting small

final product is quintessentially African and more specifically Senegalese. Given the hint of European cinema that runs through it, *Touki-Bouki* showcases an example of successful blending of African and European storytelling techniques. But Mambety does not simply "Africanize" the European (auteur) cinema of the 1960s; rather he balances that with a revamped way of looking at West African oral tradition and storytelling. The modern day *griot* has had to develop a new personal style to deliver the stories, and he has taken the best of two, often conflicting, worlds.

The film begins with two shots of a herd of cows led by a young boy on an ox, shots that flank a series of images of cows being slaughtered in a slaughter-house. From the beginning thus, there is a movement from outside to inside, and this back and forth becomes a trademark during the development of the movie. The outside-inside movement is cinematically doubled, and therefore reinforced, because the little boy and the herd are shown in long shots, while for the gory images in the slaughter-house the camera moves in much closer, into medium shots and even close-ups. One particular graphic shot shows a man slitting a cow's throat open, and then the camera lingers, as blood pours out. It is, however, the only shot in the sequence that is out of focus, as if the director could not decide to show the full-blown violence and tried somehow to mask it. Here also, at the simplest level of a single shot, one witnesses the director's and the film's ambivalence.

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sums from the celebrants, to griots who legitimate rulers by singing their deeds, and advise heads of state on policies. Griots are a caste one must be born into, and there are both griots and griottes, though there usually are some gender rules about what functions women can perform. In general, griots do not tell stories like the animal fables, but sing praises of their patrons, sing genealogies that keep up historical memory, and of course sing and speak epics like the *Sundiata.* Stories involving Bouki (Hyena), Golo (monkey) and Leuk (hare) are not at all confined to casted griots and could well be told by mothers to their children.

Images of cattle being herded as a metaphor for the human condition are nothing new to cinema,[43] but in this case there is another subtext, which will continue in a later scene when Mory is attacked by fellow students: the cattle are being slaughtered by Senegalese men, the aggressors and the victims are both products of the same place. On one immediate level, this sequence is a negative commentary on the halal beliefs. On a more speculative level, it reminds us of Franz Fanon's warnings about the colonized (middle-class) taking the place of the colonizer and acting in the same abusive way. Also in this opening sequence, one can notice that *Touki Bouki* makes interesting use of noises and anachronous sound. As the animals are being slaughtered, the sound works mostly with the image, instead of going against it. However, the horrible cries of animals dying are slowly muffled, to the point that they become indistinguishable; we get the sense of a very chaotic world, paralleled by a very chaotic noise mixture. As sound comes in and out of focus, a certain sonic rack-focus effect is created. Visually, when a shot comes in and out of focus, the effect is called "rack-focus." I find it that on many occasions Mambety extrapolates the concept and applies it to sound. So in the end, the sensation created is that we cannot make out any details anymore, everything is lumped in together and our senses are so overwhelmed that they are not to be trusted anymore. It is a very close appropriation of the feeling of acute pain that diffuses itself throughout the body to the point that the original source of pain is no longer clear. So, the violence of the slaughters is transposed onto us, the audience, who experience it secondhand. It is a very powerful beginning, one that announces the complexity of this film and the difficulties

[43] For example, Georges Franju's *Le sang des bêtes* (1949).

one may have in understanding it; it is also an opening that will be mirrored by a similar meshing of the senses at the very end.

The beginning sequence of the film also establishes Mory as a biblical (or Koranic) presence, almost akin to a Messiah. The image of the little boy herding the cattle, and later on alone on the ox, is doubled by the sound of Mory's motorcycle roaming through the outskirts of Dakar. There is a mixture of sounds in this sequence also—there is flute music playing, and children's cries are added as well. Mambety obviously favors these combinations of sounds and noises, trying to create another effect, something that encompasses more than "meets the ear": a holistic effect that emerges out of chaos.

In the opinion of some critics, the little boy is literally young Mory, and the cut we have to older Mory represents a jump in time and space, but I do not think there is enough evidence to support this view. Rather, the little boy is a projection of an image, that of a leader. Mory is also depicted as a leader, and people will follow him. This fact is emphasized by the crowds of children running with him, or rather after his motorcycle. Moreover, in the long dream/fantasy sequence toward the end, the sorceress refers to him as the prodigal son and celebrates his return; his connection to the sorceress is revealed early in the film when it is said that he owes her money for rice. We see here a strong connection that Mory has with his native country; rice is the most common food in Senegal, and it is also something that everyone can find, and that usually no one lacks. Mory is tied to the native soil through this debt, an absurd one really. However, Mory is connected to the biblical, too, a fact solidified by two shots posing him as a crucified

Jesus. The first one has him literally tied to a Jeep, which then becomes a modern-day version of the cross—the place where humanity goes to die—which reminds us of Godard's connection between the Jeep and napalm. The second shot that echoes the crucifixion finds Mory resting after being chased in the street. The film is filled with instances in which Mory is tied down, whether literally or metaphorically: he owes money, he is tied to a Jeep, or he himself lassoes and then ties up his motorcycle to a baobab tree. All of these contribute to creating his character, one who cannot abandon Senegal because he is too linked to it, and this prefigures his change of heart at the end of the film.

Even though the two are a couple, Anta is quite the opposite of Mory. The man appears to be more connected physically to Senegal, and the woman is the part that enjoys more freedom. She can flee the country. After we see Mory run around on his motorcycle, we are introduced to Anta. But first we see her neighborhood, in two long, establishing shots, one slowly panning to the right and the other panning the opposite way. To the back and forth movement, Mambety also adds the left to right, and right to left movements, almost always coupled, which in my opinion suggests staying still, or perhaps a lack of progress, a hesitation. The film slows down considerably right before the introduction of Anta; aside from the aforementioned shots, we also have a fixed camera shot of people coming down from a bridge, and the camera once again lingers.

Then, as we finally see Anta, and she is writing a letter, there are several extra-diegetic noises that cover up the soundtrack. First, there is the sound of a plane, a sound that will come back later in *La Petite vendeuse*, heavily contrasting with the poor, rural

setting of Anta's home. Then, in order, we hear a baby crying, an Islamic chant, a police car and the baby crying again, while another sound, that of a dog barking, is somewhat muffled. What is interesting about this series is that some of the sounds overtake the others at certain moments: the babies' cries become the predominant noise, while the dog barking sort of takes a backseat, it becomes softer.

Mambety thus goes in and out of certain sounds, another example of a sonic rack-focus effect—a parallel oscillation to the image movement from outside to inside. There are many ways in which one could understand the choices behind these particular sounds, but one thing is certain, that the repetition of the baby crying pushes this particular sound to the front. In my opinion, this "noise" refers to a new beginning, one maybe suggested in the opening sequence of the film as well. The other two sounds are more complex, and rather ominous. On the one hand we have the obvious threat of a police siren going off. On the other hand, and because of the presence of the police siren, the Islamic chant becomes a subtle comment against Islamic values. The Islamic chant is the most constant sound in this scene, and the abrupt interruption caused by the siren functions as a warning about the dominance of religion (in this case, the dominance manifests itself aurally). Therefore, any new beginning (like a newborn for example) is subjected to an established set of religious rules. There is a heavy, Islamic presence in Mambety's films, "tous ces films se baignent dans ce contexte (de l'Islam) et affirment l'importance de ce facteur dans le quotidien des personnages" (Niang 120). Sometimes this presence is perceived as having a positive influence on the quotidian, and the best example is Sili's grandmother, whose Islamic singing serves as a wonderful (aural) decoration of the neighborhood. On

other occasions, the Islamic presence gives off a negative vibe, as in the scene when Mory is tied up to a Jeep, or in the scene above, which is marked by the menacing sound of the siren. Overall, though, Mambety admittedly opposes religious practices, and he usually turns to parody when dealing with Islamic discourse as a way to avoid a more direct type of commentary.

Anta's mother and her neighbor engage in a conversation about the former's son who is in France and has not given any signs of life in a while. This is also where the role of the postman becomes more obvious, and there are a few long takes of him, slowly walking around, but never putting any letters in any mailboxes; he is a mailman who brings no letters. The lack of word from departed ones means that indeed, like the neighbor says "those kids never come back from France." She adds scornfully, "or they bring back white women with their diseases." It is a reversal of the stereotypes that so heavily burden Africa and Africans; the tables are turned, and it is the French who are "dirty." The neighbor further blasts France, saying "France? Nothing good comes of it," suggesting another reversal, in this instance toward local values.

It is unclear what Anta is writing, but as soon as she leaves her house we realize that she will have no problem leaving Senegal. She interrupts a dialogue between her mother, who is selling vegetables, and their neighbor who had just bought on credit, as is often the case in the markets of Dakar. Anta's reaction to this transaction is that the neighbor should pay upfront, and she violently takes away the vegetables. She goes against tradition on several levels, showing a more practical side because she does not trust the neighbor, and also being aggressive with an elderly woman. The character of

Anta is physically and morally constructed as an opposition to the usual Senegalese representation of women: "[Anta] ne veut être ni épouse ni mère, encore moins soumise à un mari qui ne pourra lui permettre d'accéder au confort convoité" (Niang 112). She is in complete charge of her life, and especially her body (also in 1998, Safi Faye makes *Mossane*, a movie entirely about this particular right of women to own their body, which will be discussed in chapter V).

A few minutes later, Anta is walking toward the University. The fact that she is a student, unlike Mory, also points to her emancipation and reminds us of Ousmane's Sembene *Xala* in which the daughter of El Hadj attends *Université de Dakar* and exhibits a strong nationalistic side. She passes several women who are washing clothes, thus marking another level of separation between her and the rest of the traditional women of Senegal. Soon after this episode, the camera gets distracted and the film moves outside of its main diegesis as it shows several young girls getting water, and carrying away buckets of water on their heads. It is a rather strange sequence, in which the eye of the camera, with no clear point-of-view of any actual character, persists in exposing the voluptuousness of the young girls, in one instance starting out with a shot of a girl's buttocks, and then lingering as she moves away, focusing on the undulation of her hips. The general point-of-view adds an element of documentary aesthetic to this scene, and it certainly places the audience as the main viewing subject. There is a strong contrast between these very feminine women on display only for the delectation of the viewer in a very traditional voyeuristic fashion, and Anta, the main female character of the film. The shots of the beautiful young girls, carrying buckets of water, are stereotypical African

images. On the other hand, Anta is definitely not archetypal, and she is masculinized through the opposition with other girls seen in the film. Furthermore, she wears short hair, no braids, and dresses in a quite masculine way—pants and a shirt. Between the two, Anta and Mory, it is she who takes on the masculine, traditional role of being the one who sets a course for herself, for her life. The shift toward a less male dominated society is further marked by the ending of the sequence, when two women who had been fighting one another engage in a separate quarrel with a man, whom they literally take down.

The sequences that follow represent the turning point of the film, and in my opinion this moment represents the hidden ending of the film, but I will come back to this point in a moment. The sequence begins with Mory being hazed by a few male students, and (triple) cross-cuts with shots of a goat being sacrificed, then with Anta running. The sequence is deeply ominous, a feeling the director further underlines by shooting Anta in Dutch angles, and altering low and high angles. The same running sequence comes back a moment later, shot in a normal angle. Everything that happens here is put in question because of this repetition, because it seems that the director takes us out of the diegesis again. Mambety plays around with the editing, and he doubles the shots of the slain goat with shots of Anta looking down, as if she were witnessing the sacrifice. We have in this instance a sort of "fake" shot-countershot because we later realize that she is looking down at Mory. The fact that, in our minds, we are forced to suture the images of the sacrificed goat with those of a missing Mory, explain why we get the interlaced shots of Anta: she becomes the imam who is sacrificing an animal, thus challenging the male

dominated religious system. We discover later that she in fact lowers herself toward Mory, and thus he is her sacrificial gift, a gesture that foreshadows her departure at the end of the movie: she leaves him behind, and sacrifices her love. Her upper body is shot from a low angle, which reinforces the fact that she dominates this scene, and also Mory. That image of her, undressing, and lowering out of the frame to be with Mory is also atemporal[44], since it has not happened yet. Not only do we physically move back and forth between two separate courses of action, but we are moving back and forth in time. The feeling that what we are watching is not (yet) happening is again reinforced by another shot of Anta taking off her shirt, very similar to the initial one, but she is not quite in the same position, so it is not a mere duplicate. Mambety's sense of time is on display in this scene, and for him chronology is not capital. Nar Sene says that time is more of a "rhythm" (61) for Mambety, but he does not expand on his affirmation: in my estimation, the rhythm of time emulates the often irrational rhythm of real life, which also explains Mambety's frequent choice to alternate between a fast and a slow pace.

The lovemaking scene between the two main characters is preceded by another strange quick sequence in which we see Anta facing and leaning against a rock while arching her back, arms up, and basically sticking out her buttocks. It is an unnatural position to say the least, and it is coupled with a high angle shot of foamy sea water entering a shallow, closed spaced. The sequence obviously foreshadows the lovemaking scene, and it also establishes the connection to water. Water is a universal feminine symbol, and if we were to separate the two characters according to cardinal symbols,

[44] Really it could be considered a flash-forward, but regardless it is uncommon and consistent with counter-cinema aesthetics.

Anta's would be water (this complicates her character even more given the fact that she is also portrayed as masculine), and Mory's would be earth. Thus, we actually have a gender role reversal, as Anta is the one "entering" Mory and not the other way around. In a later scene, we see them both on the beach, Mory covered in sand, even on his face, while farther from him Anta is unsuccessfully trying to maintain her balance, as if she were not in her element. The power and fluidity of the water medium opposes the stability of the land, of the earth, and in the sex scene there is a constant movement between water and land. Not surprisingly, the final decision in the film, Mory staying put while Anta gets on the boat for France, also separates the two according to their respective elements.

The image of a half-naked Anta, opposed by a pagan cross on the right of the frame, jumpstarts a very poetic scene. The sex scene between Anta and Mory is very lyrical, and it is also revealing for the treatment of contrapuntal sound. I believe that Diop Mambety has a strong poetic inclination. He is more concerned with creating reactions in the viewer and the use of sound and noises grants him the necessary access to the audience's emotions. Alberto Cavalcanti's study of sound in film is concerned exactly with this connection between noises and feelings, because noise "speaks directly to the emotions...Pictures speak to the intelligence. Noises seem to by-pass the intelligence and speak to something very deep and inborn" (Cavalcanti 109). There is a hint of Russian realist influence in this scene in the way Mambety uses the ocean waves and their sound (like Eisenstein's continuous exchange between land and sea in *Battleship Potemkin*). The movement between sea and land is punctuated by two long takes of the water

crashing against the shore, or against the rocks sticking out of the water close to shore, as the soundtrack is soon flooded with Anta's moans. The noise orgy begins with a superimposition of the sorceress' laughter and the sound of the waves breaking at shore, then seagulls are heard, but their shrieks are distorted, and unnaturally enhanced, probably with a synthesizer. The entire beginning creates a sense of repetition through the rhythmic sound of the waves, the echoes lingering, and every element prepares us for the love scene. So, the sound becomes a mise-en-abyme of the love scene, which we do not actually see. As the love making process begins, the waves are still present in the soundtrack, but moans and sighs are added; then Anta's moans begin to sound like crying, which is again very interesting when seen in correlation with the presence of water. The rack-focus shots of her hand on the religious symbol reinforce yet another inside/outside movement, as the camera goes into and out of focus twice. The sex act is thus emulated cinematically as well. A shot of a big wave crashing against a rock and splattering punctuates the climax of the scene literally providing an "explosion." As the moaning and crying intensify, a climax is reached (and very suggestively we get a shot of foam produced by the waves spilling over rocks close to the shore) and then we go back to the simple, soothing sound of the waves. This type of narrative gives the film circularity, and another narrative fold emerges. At the conclusion of the film, we return to a high angle shot of Anta and Mory who are still on the cliff, as if they had never left, as if perhaps nothing had ever happened, and they had never done anything. So the possibility remains that nothing happens, that it is all a dream.

What is also interesting about this scene is the conspicuous lack of shots of Mory, the male whom we see only at the very end of the scene, when the camera finally moves back. The high-angle establishing shot of the place where the two had just made love is yet another example of the director avoiding the norm; in a traditional, mainstream narrative, the establishing shot would occur before any of the action. In some ways this shot is unnecessary at this point, but it does help make another connection at the end of the film, as we shall see shortly. The power of the male is further subverted by the insistence of the camera on Anta, before all but her hand disappears from the frame. An argument could be made that the scene follows a traditional voyeuristic dynamic: the woman is made hyper-visible, while the man is quasi invisible. However, Anta is the one *looking*, so she controls the gaze.

The moments that follow are filled with silence. As the two mention for the first time their desire to go to France, we get two separate long, fixed shots of boats coming in on the left of the frame and exiting right. Life passes by. Usually boats in Mambety's films are moving about, except for one, when the couple is on the beach and Mory looks at an abandoned ship, and an off-screen boat horn goes off on the soundtrack. The connection between the abandoned ship, stuck in shallow waters, and Mory's condition, stuck in the sand of his country is evident. Unlike the shot of that particular ship, and like the refrigerators mentioned before in *La Petite vendeuse*, the kind of shot that rather tracks movement from a fixed stance is very typical not only for Senegalese filmmakers like Sembene, but for West African cinema as a whole, with Sissako's *La Vie sur terre* being the most obvious example. The fixed camera, the long shot, and the act of having

to “wait” for an object or person to move from all the way to the left of the frame to being out of sight on the right slow down the pace of the movie drastically. *Touki-Bouki* often recreates the rhythm of time/life mentioned above through alternating fast-paced editing with slower moving shots.

The same rhythm is further displayed in the sequence in which Anta and Mory ride his motorcycle, and which ends with them disappearing behind a set of baobab trees. The camera follows them until that very moment only to stop then, once again lingering on the scene for about ten seconds. This is a shot that will be later imitated by Ousmane Sembene in *Guelwaar* (1992) when an entire Jeep hides behind a baobab tree. In the two cases the effect is similar, although the message is somewhat different: the grandeur of the baobab tree, a national treasure incarnating Senegal, swallows and covers up the insignificance of a symbol of the West (the Jeep), and also the problems of the young couple. This is also one of the six moments in the film when the song *Paris, Paris* comes on the soundtrack generating an even stronger contrast with the pastoral shot of the trees, and subverting the idyllic scenery of Senegal, as Joséphine Baker proclaims that Paris “c’est sur la terre entière le paradis.” There is a strong contrast between the lyrics of the song and the actual paradise, the beautiful reality the viewers are witnessing.

The juxtaposition between the West and the Senegalese cultural values continues in the next segment, where Anta and Mory are trying to steal a box which they think is full of money. They go to a traditional Senegalese wrestling event, which is announced in the background to be a fundraiser. The announcer says that the top wrestlers of the country are putting their titles on the line in order to raise money for a Charles De Gaulle

memorial. Soon after the same words are heard again on the soundtrack, and in this instance Mambety proves to be again very Godardian in his approach: he makes sure that everyone heard the announcer, and leaves nothing to subtlety. A few minutes later, when the couple absconds with the box, Mory angrily says that, "De Gaulle can wait!" cementing the director's point that such a fundraiser is ludicrous. At the level of the sound, it is worth noting that the soundtrack is filled with stadium-like noises, cheers and shrieks, whose source is not displayed by the camera. The stands are full, and the camera slowly pans to show everyone in the crowd and to reveal that a lot of the spectators are probably important judging by their lavish outfits. They obviously represent the upper class, and conspicuously remain subdued, removed from the action of the wrestling match.

When the box they stole proves not to be what they had expected, Mory has the idea to rob one of his acquaintances, Charlie, whose name reminds us of that of De Gaulle, and who happens to be a homosexual. Charlie is well off, and his sexual preference further subverts the masculine primacy in this particular movie (albeit in a derogatory way; Sembene's use of impotence in *Xala* is a more subtle variation), but also in the larger context of the country. As a matter of fact, there are no strong masculine characters in *Touki-Bouki*. The sequence that takes place at Charlie's house is filled with close-ups of beautiful women, all of whom are just lying by the pool. As stated before, Mambety rarely uses close-ups: he prefers to tell the story from a slight distance, so his insistence on the faces of these women is all the more curious. As opposed to Anta's masculine features and haircut, these women almost seem to be on show. These women

lay motionless on beach chairs, and look lifeless, almost like statues. Mambety uses this series of close-ups to further deconstruct African stereotypes. The stereotypical image of the African woman in paintings, or as statuettes is countered by this very aesthetically pleasing display of feminine beauty. However, the question of female beauty is further complicated by the location of their display: they are not quite in a public space, even though they are outside. The women are in fact in a private space, which belongs to a homosexual, who really would not be interested in looking at and admiring these women with a sexual interest. So in the end, while it is a display of feminine beauty, it can also be construed as superfluous display.

As Mory and Anta flee Charlie's house, Mory begins to undress in the stolen convertible. At this moment another ambiguous sequence begins, in which Mory, and then Anta are welcomed into the streets of Dakar by hundreds of people, as if it were the inauguration of a new president. The act of taking his clothes off, standing up in the car and waving at an invisible cheering crowd represents the moment Mory is freed. Completely naked, he is exposed and vulnerable, which to me means that he is at a most sincere moment, so that is the way in which he offers himself to his people. Dozens of children are running along his side, similar to the crowds of children following him in the beginning of the movie when he is on the motorcycle, and he fully converts to the figure of a leader. All of the signs pointing to his status as a (religious) symbol rather than a person that we have witnessed until this moment lead to this climax: the son of Senegal is reborn. Soon after, the camera shoots Mory, this time next to Anta, from a low angle, as they wave to the crowd. We come back to this shot seven separate times, as the director

again insists on making a point, assuring himself that everyone is aware that this is a projection, and not reality. The counterpoint to this sequence is the parallel action of Charlie calling the police to file a complaint about being robbed. Charlie's description of Mory as being hungry and loving money, thus poor, contrasts with the projection of the lavish parade. The name of the inspector Charlie talks to on the phone is Mambety, and thus the director further marks his presence with a very strange, acoustic sort of cameo.

During the last part of the movie, most of the action takes place in the harbor, as the couple prepares to embark on the *Ancerville*. These last scenes are the culmination of the film, in which everything seems to blend together in a sort of a mind numbing collage. Additionally, there are elements that surely remind us of two French New Wave classics, Godard's *A bout de souffle* and Truffaut's *400 coups*. As I have mentioned before, Anta and Mory resemble Patricia and Michel because they have a dangerous lifestyle, except that Anta is much more than a simple accomplice. A radical difference between the two couples is the lack of affection shown by Anta and Mory; there is not much physical contact actually shown on screen, and the declarations of love are missing completely. However, the similarity between the two films lies outside of the main characters' respective relationships. On the one hand, Françoise Pfaff notices a connection to Godard through deconstruction (which we have seen in the previous chapter), because in her opinion *Touki-Bouki* requires the viewers to actively and constantly reconstruct a deconstructed reality (Pfaff 222). The spectators have to put together the bits and pieces of the story, and fight their way through the lack of temporal linearity as well. On the other hand, a more obvious parallel is the interview that Patricia

conducts at the airport with a certain writer named Barbulescu (played by Jean-Pierre Melville), mirrored in Mambety's film by an interview of a certain white character, a professor by all indications. The few things he says are as disparate as the comments made by Godard's Barbulescu, but they are equally poignant and derogatory. Mambety's "professor" first talks about a need to kick out of the country all neocolonialists (whom, ironically, he represents). The irony is that everyone is aware, including the neocolonialists themselves, that a change is needed, except the most important component of the equation, the colonized, the Senegalese people. The professor continues by attacking Senegal, "there is nothing in Senegal. Barren. Intellectually as well," and "African art is a joke made up by journalist in need of copy." The film we are watching as he utters these words is living proof to the contrary.

As many young men of Senegal embark on the *Ancerville*, sounds of creaking metal are heard extra-diegetically on the soundtrack. The ship is obviously large enough to hold everyone, but the message is that maybe too many of those young men are setting off to France. The ominous sounds of the metal could also bring back images of overloaded slavery ships, as the West still entraps and lures Africans away, but does so with the promise for a better life. Furthermore, those awful sounds bridge the ending of the film with its beginning, closing down the cycle, as we return to images of the slaughtered cows, which generates another narrative fold. This is the moment when Mory hesitates, and after a few seconds, he takes off running the opposite way. His movement represents the other connection, the one to Truffaut, that I mentioned earlier. The ending of *400 coups* is basically a series of tracking shots of the main character, Antoine Doinel,

running. In *Touki-Bouki*, Mambety also makes use of the tracking shot, but he cuts the action a lot more. If in *400 coups* the act of shooting the running in long takes slows down the film as it comes to its conclusion, in *Touki-Bouki* the fast montage style, and the alternation between low and high angles, increases the tension of the action. The camera ends up moving very fast, circling, and not focusing on anything in particular, while the shots are all point-of-view, suggesting that Mory is getting tired, dizzy from the running. Aside from the heavy visual stimulant, the soundtrack becomes inundated with a mixture of cow moos and very eclectic, multiple instrument jazz band music. The decision to stay is charged with emotions, and the film cinematically supports that tension at both visual and sound levels.

In the denouement, Mory tries to reclaim his motorcycle and the ox skull attached to it, which seems to be another connection he has with the land. Unfortunately, the new owner of the motorcycle—a white man dressed like a savage—crashes it in the middle of the street. The image of the white savage, one that appeared once before, after the couple fled Charlie's house, is another stereotypical reversal operated by the director. In the same way that the neighbor declares that French women are "dirty," the perennial stereotype of the African savage is reversed using whites. The accident takes places in the middle of the street, creating a traffic jam, and here I cannot help thinking once again about Godard's *A bout de souffle* and Michel's tumble at a crossroads. Since intersections facilitate connections, in both cases then, a breakdown in communication is suggested. Moreover, Mory finds the ox skull to be broken. His decision to stay back does not appear to be off to a positive start.

From this point on, there are only a few shots left in the film, and they are mostly shots that revisit and mirror earlier ones. Both Anta and Mory are shown to be alone, she on the boat that is suddenly unpopulated, and he in the street, also rather lonely. The disappearance of everyone is rather bizarre, and it points to the possibility that they are both part of a dream sequence. The postman makes another appearance, and still he has no letters to deliver. The *Ancerville* also sets in motion, shown in two separate shots, one moving from right to left, the other one from left to right, and as suggested earlier, the feeling it creates is that of a movement in circle; it is as if it is not going anywhere. One of the last three shots of the film goes back to the high angle establishing shot of Mory and Anta lying on top of a rock after having just had sex. It is the same exact shot, and it could be just a memory of the moment that the two have, but it could also mean retuning to the moment when the two first discussed the possibility of leaving. Given the allegorical ending of the film, it is quite possible that nothing that we have witnessed since the first twenty minutes of the film is real, and that it is all a fantasy belonging to one of the characters. The film continues to further bend back on itself, as it returns to the original shot of the little boy riding the ox. When he moves completely out of sight, to the right of the screen, the film ends in a freeze-frame, again reminding the audience of *400 coups*.

It is the character of Mory who solidifies the transition into the work of François Truffaut (the subject of the next chapter), and one of the central arguments of this thesis, the *caméra-flâneur*. As it will become clearer in the next chapter, Mory can easily be seen as a *flâneur* in the African context, and Mambety's "lazy," lingering camera

provides us with many examples of *flânerie*. Sada Niang notices the following about Mory, “Mory, le premier personnage méticuleusement construit de Djibril Diop Mambety, s’exprime autant par le mouvement et la gestuelle que la parole, se déplace constamment, n’a ni famille, ni ami, et tentera jusqu’aux derniers moments du film de quitter le pays” (Niang 195). The most important description of Mory in the quotation is the fact that he is constantly on the move. He is a different breed of *flâneur*, given the fact that for the most part he moves around on his motorcycle, which prevents him from being an observer. However, the motorcycle allows him to cover more ground and gain a better geographical knowledge of the city, “Grâce à ce nouveau moyen de locomotion, il conquiert l’espace urbain, délaisse les silhouettes ombragées des arbres de la campagne pour aller s’étendre sur les plages ensoleillées et désertes de la capitale” (Niang 105). His ability to move so swiftly inside and outside of the city puts him into a separate category from that of most other Mambety characters, opposing especially what we saw in *La Petite vendeuse*. His lifestyle is hectic, it does not allow for much reflection. That role is taken upon by the director, who, in his turn and along with his camera, becomes yet another type of *flâneur*.

Chapter III: An Act of Love: Truffaut's Incursion into Marginality and the City through the *Caméra-flâneur*

The current director of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Jean-Michel Frodon, makes an interesting distinction between modernity and New Wave directors; in his opinion, it is only the five core directors (Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer, Rivette) who constitute the New Wave movement, everyone else falling into the modernist category. In the first chapter I have tried to show that Jean-Luc Godard, with the exception of *A bout de souffle*, is more of a modernist himself. At the opposite side of the spectrum, there is François Truffaut who, in my opinion, is the quintessential New Wave director because of his writings, because of his fairly constant style, and interest in marginality, but mostly because of how he uses the camera. The second chapter showed how marginality makes its way onto the screen in Mambety's movies. Truffaut's films, though, give us the opportunity to really understand not only the dynamic between characters dwelling in marginality, but also that of the city in which they live, as well as a third dynamic that combines the last two. The latter dynamic is an emblem of modernity, as the modern city becomes the suffocating presence that often alienates its subjects and pushes them to the outer limits. Each character develops his or her own personal relationship with the city, while struggling to emerge from marginality. Characters and surroundings can be taken as a whole, but they can also be separated, and in the latter case the city takes on a (filmic) life of its own. The modern city is an automatic and autonomous entity that can swallow up the modern subject. This is evident in the process of unveiling the city of Paris in films, and Truffaut's vision of Paris, specifically, takes shape through the use of a

caméra-flâneur. Here I apply Walter Benjamin's notion of the *flâneur* to the cinematic apparatus. Truffaut's camera, especially in the film *400 coups*, reveals the mundane, as it hovers unhampered over the city, and creates the quintessential marginalized character: runaway teenager Antoine Doinel. By looking at the history behind the New Wave phenomenon and revisiting the notion of the *flâneur*, this chapter attempts to show how the *caméra-flâneur* and Antoine come to life with the advent of the French New Wave, at the cross between film noir and Italian Neo-realism. Truffaut's most memorable character, the marginalized teenager Antoine Doinel, is a film noir hero in the neorealist setting of the modern city.

Like most artistic movements, the New Wave came about from a debate, started in the twenties, between the idea of auteur film and film based on a scenario, a script imposed by studios and production companies. I will return to this point later. Another debate, which attempted to distinguish between high-art/low-art[45], also fed into the contradiction. Some see the New Wave as an artistic school, as does Michel Marie.[46] Many others have simply decided to avoid trying to define with exactitude the New Wave; Richard Neupert uses the words "complex network of historical forces including all films made by young directors exploiting new modes of production as well as unusual story and style options" (41). What seems to be the common denominator for all the definitions is the word "young"—this current, movement, school or maybe even *idea(l)*

[45] The Frankfurt School theorists spent considerable time on this debate, and a prominent example is Walter Benjamin's "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Later in the century, postmodern art would successfully mix the two through bricolage and collage, as mentioned briefly in the Introduction.

[46] He actually uses the expression for the title of his book, *The French New Wave. An Artistic School* (2003).

belonged to the youngsters of the time, and generally speaking spanned the 50s and the 60s.

The actual term New Wave was first used in the late fifties by Françoise Giroud, editor of the weekly *L'Express*, and she was indeed referring to the youth of the time.[47] Giroud is an important figure in the history of the New Wave, and she is not mentioned enough as a strong influence. However, a recent book by Geneviève Sellier, *Masculine Singular: the French New Wave*, discusses the editor's contribution to the shaping of the movement. Giroud attempted to analyze the characteristics of the young generation, and her research found very unbalanced responses from the men and the women: "The letters published by Françoise Giroud in fact bear witness to the dominant conservatism of the young men….most of the women, on the other hand, emphasize the good fortune they feel is theirs for living in an era of women's emancipation" (Sellier 12). What results from these findings is that the young men of the generation inscribed women in the private sphere, looked at them mainly through the maternity scope, and feared the *masculinization* of women. However, women wanted access to equal job opportunities, unlike the previous generations. The contrast between the two visions, male/female, is important in the context of how marginality is portrayed in the films of the young (men) directors of the New Wave. A lot of these filmmakers focus on male characters, but there are exceptions as we will see later in this chapter with Truffaut's *Jules et Jim*.

[47] The term was the result of a national survey started by the journal that was aimed at young people, and was trying to find out what the new generation (la nouvelle vague) was really like. The questionnaire had twenty-four questions about the state of the country, the fate of France, and also personal questions about happiness and future plans (Neupert 14-15).

In spite of Françoise Giroud's use of the term *New Wave* to refer to the generation born before the war, and that came to maturity after the Liberation, there is still some debate over who employed the term for the first time, as some critics say that it was created by Henri Langlois, co-founder of the Cinématheque française.[48] Nonetheless, the term became soon after associated with the contemporary cinema, especially because of the success that twenty-eight-year old Roger Vadim enjoyed with *Et Dieu créa la femme* in 1956, a film that also propelled Brigitte Bardot to the international stage. If one takes into account the fact that, prior to the release of Chabrol's films and Truffaut's *400 coups*, it was in fact Agnès Varda's film *La Pointe courte* (1954) that announced the arrival of the New Wave, then we have a triad of women, Giroud, Bardot and Varda who jumpstarted a movement completely dominated by male directors. In fact, out of some hundred and seventy directors in the time period, I have only found filmographic references to two women. One of them, Jaqueline Audry, remains somewhat obscure, but Agnès Varda has definitely made a lasting impression. Varda's film, and we will look at her work in more detail in a later chapter, is a perfect example of counter-cinema; she shot it on location, used non-professional actors, deliberately created a Brechtian distanciation so that spectator identification could not occur and ignored the necessity of a sense of chronology or classic narration. Furthermore, she subverted the notion of genre, juxtaposed two different stories and deliberately edited the film in a disorienting manner. The transgression of genre was a tribute to Orson Welles' innovations, a director who was very influential in the construction of *400 coups* as we will see in the later

[48] James Monaco calls him the "Godfather" of the New Wave (15).

analysis. So, genres were either abandoned, or they were mixed, thus giving creative supremacy to the director and transforming filmmaking itself. The making of a film was a genre in itself, a style that Varda called "cinécriture" (ciné-writing, Smith 14) and which featured a textual relation between visual and aural elements. This type of filmmaking would soon become a trend in the cinema that ended up being called the *New Wave*.

In his analysis of the New Wave, Michel Marie also mentions Roger Vadim's *Et Dieu créa la femme*, because the central character is a woman. This woman, played by Brigitte Bardot as noted above, "symbolized the young French woman who was finally free and liberated" (Marie 9). A similat observation is made by Richard Neupert, "Bardot's Juliette was not just another beautiful baby doll; rather she shattered past norms while establishing new conventions for female sexuality" (79). Bardot would seem to have contributed (and maybe she did not set out in her career to do so) to the (re)creation of a woman. She is said to have created a wave of her own, although I am not quite sure if the publicity surrounding her was beneficial from a feminist point of view. It just seems that there was too much objectification of her body and her sexuality.[49] It would not be until Godard's opening scene of *Le Mépris* that her (and the female) body would be demystified, yet concomitantly exploited in spite of Godard's wishes to avoid such display.

According to Michel Marie, the New Wave aesthetic placed the director and screenwriter at the same level of importance, suggesting that, ideally, only one person do both jobs. The films did not follow a strict script and the artistic process relied heavily on

[49] As (bluntly) observed by Pierre Billard and quoted by Richard Neupert: "Roger Vadim owed his reputation as a modern director to Bardot's breasts" (73).

improvisation; there was location shooting (sometimes for the entire film) and no artificial sets in studios, the directors used small production crews and the direct sound recorded during filming so there was no post-synchronization, although this is not a general rule—some of the scenes in *400 coups* were actually post-synchronized. These filmmakers mostly used natural light, and finally, they employed non-professional actors and/or actors with very little experience. The result was that they had "the recipe for quick, cheap, youthful films" (Neupert 39).

New Wave ideology comes from three simultaneous theoretical stands: the writings of André Bazin, Astruc's notion of the *caméra-stylo*, and Truffaut's article "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema." All three critics point to the fact that film could tackle any subject, that cinema was becoming a language that would allow the director to "write on the film stock,"[50] which basically means that the director should have the ability to easily manipulate what goes on screen, and the story itself, while infusing the film with a personal style. Bazin's writings are gathered in a volume entitled *What is Cinema*, in which he presents his theories on film, and especially those on editing. He supported the necessity for a careful *mise-en-scène* process, and wanted to allow the camera to tell the story without much interference in the editing department. As we will see throughout this project, Godard did not follow on these suggestions, but for the most part, Truffaut did. As a matter of fact, Truffaut dedicates his first feature, *400 coups*, to the memory of Bazin. Thematically, André Bazin struggled with the placement of film between the concepts of high and low art: "In Bazin's work…we can see a contradiction

[50] Astruc cited by Michel Marie (31).

between the will to recognize film as popular culture and the desire to legitimate it in its entirety as an element of *cultivated* culture" (Sellier 23). Furthermore, one of the problems he saw was the question of style, which is so central to the cinema of the auteur. Along with the required collaborations and the technical difficulties of making a film, the question of style became an impediment, an obstacle between the director and his work. According to Bazin, this was not the case in writing, where the relationship between artist and the written work maintains constant and personal proximity, while during the filmmaking process other elements (such as the film crew) can interfere and affect the director's style. The second important theorist of the New Wave, Alexandre Astruc, would find new ways to look at the similarities, and differences, between writer and filmmaker.

Astruc's notion of the *caméra-stylo*, which he brought up in his article "Naissance d'une nouvelle avant-garde: la Caméra-stylo" (*L'Ecran français*, 1948), helped briefly revive the debate over high versus low art, since it aimed toward the eradication of any existing differences. The most important aspect of this article is Astruc's insistence on the fact that cinema was becoming an alternate means of expression, and that it could be equated to the process of painting, or writing a novel. To him cinema "is gradually becoming a language. By language, I mean a form in which and by which and artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may be, or translate his obsessions exactly as he does in the contemporary essay or novel" (as translated by Michel Marie, 31). In spite of his argument being slightly abstract because it lacked clear indications on how a film should be made, Astruc proves to be a forerunner to many critics, an obvious one being

Christian Metz, who in the seventies sought to craft the "grammar" of the cinematic language. Another case is François Truffaut, whose idea that the writer and director should be one and the same is also proposed by Astruc in this article. Astruc argues that screenwriters should direct the movies themselves because direction is in fact an act of writing: "the auteur writes with a camera the same way as the writer writes with a pen" (Marie 33).

The dual quality of the auteur, as both writer and director, can further be expanded. Given the financial difficulties of the New Wavers, the director takes on as many responsibilities as possible, including that of a producer. Thus, the film becomes a product that completely belongs to only one person. This type of control brings to mind a Walter Benjamin passage from *The Author as Producer*, in which he attempts to delineate an aesthetics of production: "What matters, therefore, is the exemplary character of production, which is able first to induce other producers to produce, and second to put an improved apparatus at their disposal. And this apparatus is better the more consumers it is able to turn into producers—that is, readers or spectators into collaborators" (1986, 98). The New Wave directors have a track record of helping one another, whether financially, or through inserting references in their own films. Such examples are abundant, especially in the films of Godard, but we find this practice in Truffaut's *400 coups*, as well, when the family goes to see *Paris nous appartient*, by Jacques Rivette.

Astruc's seminal article is followed by François Truffaut's essay in 1954, "Une certaine tendance du cinéma" that so virulently attacked the so-called "cinéma de papa"

and ignited the *Cahiers* discussions on the *politique des auteurs*. This essay adds another dimension to Astruc's discoveries, because it also discusses specifics. The tone of the article was actually so polemical, including attacks on directors that were respected by most of the critics at the time that it was almost not published. The "cinéma de papa" is a generic term referring to post-war cinema in France, which denotes films that were script-led and produced by people who did not adhere to a personal and personalized style of filmmaking—this being one of the main standpoints of Truffaut's essay. But it was not only an indictment of the older generation of filmmakers; it attacked everyone that fit the billing of the "tradition of quality." The films in this category were mostly literary adaptations, and in Truffaut's opinion the film's quality only survived through the prestige of the original source. However, the main problem was that the directors who made adaptations tried too hard, in Truffaut's opinion, to find equivalences between the literary tools and the cinematic tools, and thus they underestimate the power of cinema (Marie 32-33). In the conclusion, Truffaut declares that a valid adaptation should be made by a "homme de cinéma," which, of course, refers once again to the *politique des auteurs*. These men of cinema, unlike the ones pertaining to the *cinéma de papa*,[51] should exhibit "une souplesse d'esprit, une personnalité démultipliée peu commune ainsi qu'un singulier éclectisme" (as quoted by Marie, 33). Another important difference that Truffaut sees between the "tradition of quality" films and the *politique des auteurs* is at the level of the characters. In a "tradition of quality" cinema, the characters are manipulated too much, while in his type of cinema the characters are shown more

[51] Some examples of such directors, as noted by Michel Marie, are Jean Delannoy, Claude Autant-Lara, and René Clément (32).

“respect” and they are allowed to flourish on their own. It would be five years before Truffaut made *400 coups*; his first feature functions as a perfect example of what he meant in the article, as he made way for a shift toward *auteur*-ship.

It was not just Truffaut, but rather all of the *Cahiers* writers who identified and developed the notion of auteur, while linking it to the concept of *mise-en-scène*, which was André Bazin’s biggest contribution to the theory of cinema. However, the proper use of the mise-en-scène was not the only way one could achieve the status of auteur; following the invasion of American cinema after the war, the *Cahiers* critics considered that style was the most important aspect when delineating the concept of auteur. The particular style of an auteur director would be easily recognizable by the viewers because the films would expose an ensemble of recurring traits pertaining only to the respective filmmaker. These traits would create and define the personal universe of that auteur. Thus, auteur could then refer to directors such as Alfred Hitchcock or John Ford, because of their unique, recognizable styles (even though both of them precede the actual birth of the term ‘auteur’). In the case of Hitchcock, the particular style relied on stylization and on the creation of suspense. In spite of the well-documented influence that Hitchcock had on Truffaut, the latter developed his own style, and steered away from both heavy stylization and suspense. However, in some ways I do think of the *caméra-flâneur* as an alternative to Hitchcock’s intrusive camera. The difference is that Truffaut is not much of a voyeur; his camera does observe, but never infringes, because usually there is no hidden point of view (as in Hitchcock’s *Psycho* for example). Instead, the camera contents itself

with moving around and recording the quotidian: people walking down the street, sitting in coffee shops, or driving in the street.

As a result of all these theories and articles, the aesthetic of the *politique des auteurs* took shape. What it stood for can be brought down to three main points, all fleshed out by François Truffaut. First of all, there is one auteur of a film, and that is the director, and he or she has all the creative power. Second, the decision on who is an auteur is based on subjective judgments of value; this point is the one that I find most interesting, because it does not suffice to make a popular film, or a film that is appreciated by a few critics. It is not clear who in fact decides that a filmmaker is an auteur, although it does seem that one should look at someone's entire body of work in order to make that decision. However, it is this kind of declaration that makes me think of the exclusivity of this group, which I take to be generated from a degree of elitism that may have been detrimental to the state of cinema at the time. The last point Truffaut makes supports this view: the only thing that is important in the creative process is the auteur, not even the work, or the final product. Thus, a failed film made by an auteur would be of more value, or more interesting than a successful film by a non-auteur. This claim eliminates a great number of films, and conversely, it limits greatly the number of valuable films. I suppose that Truffaut's ideas about film come from a desire, from a need to "save" cinema; after all, he is a hopeless romantic:[52] "the film of tomorrow will look like the man who filmed it and the number of people in the audience will be proportional to the number of friends the filmmaker has. The film of tomorrow will be an act of love"

[52] The romantics, of course, were infatuated with themselves, too.

(Sellier 222). However, this act of love becomes in my mind a very good example of the self-infatuation tendencies mentioned above. The New Wavers, and Truffaut in particular, separate themselves from the crowd, and in doing so, they distinguish themselves from the *cinéma de papa* directors, too. Sellier also makes this point when discussing the auteur aesthetic, and I quote her at length:

> …it is the figure of the auteur that has become the criterion of value in cinema, on the literary model inherited from romanticism, accompanied by a touch of formalism that establishes the connection with contemporary art. This model valorizes the expression of a subjectivity isolated in an ivory tower and centered on itself—rather than that of an individual engaged with social and cultural determinisms—as well as a fantasy of absolute mastery that makes the filmmaker a demiurge rather than the motor of a collective project. (223)

Sellier's tone is obviously not one of praise. And Truffaut's vision for the romanticized future of cinema would not come to fruition, although there are still many contemporary directors who have followed into the self-centered footsteps of auteur theory, and to whom I will return in the conclusion of this project. However, it is worth considering that the New Wave aesthetic, and the auteur theory included, should not be simply condemned for its elitist behavior, because these directors do in fact achieve what they had set out to do, which is change cinema.

So, to fully understand Truffaut's positioning within the New Wave, and the latter's within history, one has to look also at the impact that structuralism and post-structuralism had in cinema prior to and following the New Wave movement. It seems

that we have established that the *politique des auteurs* focused too much on the importance of the creator, the auteur, who was the central figure in the process of creation, and in doing so, it side-stepped the spectator and ideology. Structuralism of the sixties, paying tribute to Saussure's and Barthes' linguistic theories, brought more structure to the idea of film, by suggesting that meaning was not solely produced by the auteur, but also through the understanding of the relationship between auteur and linguistic, social and institutional structures surrounding him; however, for Barthes, and by way of Saussure, film theory still lacked the presence of the spectator or any trace of ideology. The big proponent of structuralism was Christian Metz who perceived cinema as a language, and consequently believed in the idea that cinema had a total linguistic structure, which reminds in some ways of Astruc's *caméra-stylo*, as I mentioned above. The post-structuralism of the seventies would prove that more than one theory was needed to explain cinema, and that ultimately there was a need for cross-fertilization. Post-structuralism gave the text an ideological presence and importance, and separated auteur and spectator by putting between them four intersecting fields, semiotics, psychoanalysis, feminism and deconstruction, which became vehicles for the understanding of the cinematic act of both filmmaking and film viewing. The collage of critical theories (those four are often present together in the corpus of a New Wave film) is a process which in my opinion is similar to the subversion of genres that was so predominant in the New Wave productions.

The subversion of genres allows François Truffaut to formulate his own cinematic language, and to capture marginality and the quotidian adequately. Truffaut's particular

cinematic language does more than just tell the story, it renders it lyrical; James Monaco observes that, "What Truffaut loves best about cinema is its ability to capture the poetry of *la vie quotidienne*" (30). This everyday life cannot be adequately transposed to cinema through only one particular genre. By mixing neo-realist tendencies with noir characters, and with a documentary-like storytelling technique, Truffaut manages to mimic the spontaneity of normal life, which does not subscribe to any set of rules. It is from the banality of his stories, the fact that he shows the mundane, that his great marginalized characters are born: these characters are not concerned with the effects that society and modernity has on them. For the most part they are immune to being desensitized by technology, they are, as the director himself puts it, "on the edge of society." The director's concern with marginality is what separates the New Wave into two distinguishable parts. According to Susan Hayward there are actually two New Waves: the first one from 1958 to 1962, which is mainly seen as an alternative to the "cinéma de papa," and the second one from 1963 to 1968, which is more political. She sees the movements as short-lived, with most of the directors returning to mainstream cinema in the years that followed (with few exceptions, Godard being the obvious example), and explains the birth of each New Wave in the socio-political context of France at the time: the advent of the Fifth Republic and its new constitution, the problematic decolonizing of Algeria, de Gaulle's authoritarian presidential style, the rise in unemployment etc. From a stylistic point of view, present in both movements, she notices the eradication of the establishing shot (the spectator can no longer easily orient himself in space and time); the editing style is fast-paced, with a lot of jump-cuts or unmatched cuts, all trying to

eliminate the feeling of seamlessness that is so capital to classical Hollywood narrative (Hayward 145-149).

The first New Wave focused on the importance of the auteur and the mise-en-scène. Regarding the narrative, the story disappeared in most cases, there was no more récit, or the story often read as incomplete. There was not a need for having a beginning, a middle, and an end (and as Godard put it, if the story did have all three, they didn't have to be in that order); film became a "slice of life," a term which I have also encountered in Truffaut's interviews with Hitchcock, with the latter refusing to believe in such cinema: "I don't want to film a *slice of life*, because people can get that at home, in the street, or even in front of the movie theater" (Truffaut 55). However, the slices of life revealed by Truffaut have their own charm and originality because the New Wave was also moving toward fewer literary adaptations, which had been very prominent in the early fifties. There was no more high-art literature penetrating into the realm of cinema, but rather simple plot-lines were preferred. Because of the use of unknown or lesser known actors, there were no stars. Interestingly, though, Jean-Paul Belmondo and Jeanne Moreau would *become* big stars once they acted in Godard's films. The discourse was contemporary and dealt with young people for the most part, creating a "race of charming, moving characters who are hardly concerned by the events which happen to them—even treason, even death—and experience and act out obscure events which are as poorly linked as any portion of the any-space-whatever which they traverse" (1986, Deleuze 223)—an opinion congruent with the lack of awareness of the characters mentioned before. The apparent coherence was hardly an issue, since the actual particles (the "obscure events") that made

up the narrative were more important than the larger story. Furthermore, taboos were eliminated, especially those surrounding sexuality, and the idea of the couple was presented as challenging; within the couple there was a lack of communication, and people in the films questioned their identities, and had difficulties with issues of power. All of these issues come across strongly throughout François Truffaut's work, but maybe nowhere more clearly than in *400 coups*, with its dysfunctional marriage, and rebellious teenager who almost completely lacks a sense of identity.

The second New Wave was more political and it dealt with issues such as bourgeois myths (of marriage, family—Godard's *Une femme est une femme*), the consumer boom (here, the car becomes almost a character in itself, contemptuously idealized in Godard's *Week-End*), nuclear war, the war in Vietnam (again Godard with *Pierrot le Fou*), student politics etc. This was a more personal current or movement in the New Wave; it was more aggressively opposed to Hollywood practices than the (initial) beginning of the movement. This was especially true in concern with its aesthetic approach. There was an insistence on shooting with a hand-held camera, and instead of making the film transitions appear seamless, the editing continued to draw attention to itself. Moreover, there was an emphasis on the individual and his or her problems, and on the relationship between this individual and the social institutions surrounding him or her. These institutions were often depicted as having a negative impact on the individual, or on individualism. As a result, the New Wavers attacked those institutions with the same fervor as they showed in their critique of Hollywood and mainstream practices.

An inportant part of what formed the New Wave, as a current or as a movement, was the actual practice of filmmaking. Influenced by Jean Renoir, Alfred Hitchcock, Ingmar Bergman, and especially film noir and Italian neo-realism, the New Wavers started making films that avoided classical constraints. They mostly used their own production money, or took advantage of a government program meant to help the arts, called *Avances sur recettes*. In Truffaut's opinion, as quoted by Sellier, the New Wavers' practices led to the emancipation of cinema:

> …an emancipation with regard to the cinema industry. Films had become impersonal due to constraints. We thought we had to simplify all that in order to be able to work freely and make non-extravagant films about simple subjects—thus, the quantity of New Wave films whose only point in common is a set of refusals: a refusal to use paid 'extras', a refusal of theatrical plots, a refusal of elaborate décor, a refusal of scenes of exposition—these are often films with three of four characters and very little action. (Sellier 39)

Thus, because of the restrictions imposed by the lack of finances, a new way of interpreting cinema and a new way of looking at its narrative strategies began to develop; what was stressed was the personal relationship between filmmaker and viewer, and according to James Monaco: "A movie becomes the sum of a whole set of oppositions: between auteur and genre; between director and audience; between critic and film; between theory and practice; or between method and sentiment, in Godard's words" (18). These oppositions are similar to Truffaut's refusals that I have just mentioned: the auteur refused to be tied down by one genre, or to yield to the audience's pleasures; film turned

upon itself to become meta-discourse and as a consequence its own critic; theory refused to be easily transposed onto practice etc.

In the particular case of Truffaut and *400 coups*, I would also add the meshing between the Italian neo-realism aesthetic and that of film noir. Therefore, the film and its main character, much like the New Wave itself, dwell in ambivalence. This is another manifestation of the ambivalence exposed by the New Wave aesthetic that I mentioned before; Truffaut himself talks about the thin line that his aesthetic walks: "The intentional lightness of these films looks like frivolity—sometimes rightly, sometimes wrongly. Where it becomes confusing is that the qualities of the new cinema: grace, lightness, reserve, elegance, rapidity, lead in the same direction as its faults: frivolity, lack of awareness, naiveté" (Sellier 21). The Brechtian disconnect happens within the audience, but as Truffaut admits, it is not their fault; rather, it comes from the ambiguous qualities of this new cinema. Let us take a brief look at how some of those qualities come to life in the New Wave via the two genres that I have mentioned as best describing Truffaut's main character from *400 coups*: Italian neo-realism and the film noir.

Thematically, Italian neo-realism thrives on the uninterrupted flow of "real" life, and foregrounds the conflicts of ordinary rather than heroic protagonists. Italian neorealists made films with very low budgets, and shot on location, too. The cinematography pointed to a documentary-like style, as it was trying to achieve as much objectivity and authenticity as possible. The directors favored long and medium shots in deep focus, and avoided unusual movements of the camera, or camera angles, and used natural light as much as possible. The editing also tried to convey a sense of reality, by

cutting as little as possible, thus striving for achieving a "real-time" effect. Mark Shiel notices that, "the search for authentic human experience and interaction was a central preoccupation of neorealist cinema from the outset" (13). The interaction between humans was best observed in the setting of the post-war Italian city, which led to the one capital characteristic of the movement—the image of the city. The neorealists were deeply concerned with the city and the process of modernization, focusing for example on post-war reconstruction and industrialization, which, obviously, mainly took place in the city. The experience of war came through more clearly in the urban context, because the destruction was more obvious. Furthermore, "Neorealist films set in urban space were deeply preoccupied with the iconography, social make-up, phenomenological experience and widespread influence of the city: as a physical space with distinctive sights and sounds; as a lived environment in which the struggle for food or work was particularly intense…" (Kriel 16). The wide range of themes concerning the Italian city would later be appropriated by the French filmmakers.

As mentioned before, the writings of André Bazin had an immense influence on the New Wavers, and he is also someone who, along with Siegfried Kracauer, shared an interest in the place of the city in cinema, as well as spearheaded an interest in the neorealist movement. Bazin, speaking about the Italian context says, "City life is a spectacle, a *commedia dell'arte* that the Italians stage for their own pleasure. And even in the poorest quarters…offer outstanding possibilities for spectacle…Add to this the sunshine and the absence of clouds…and you have explained why the urban exteriors of Italian films are superior to all others" (Bazin 28-29). The term "spectacle" is used very

loosely, and to my mind it refers more to the possibility of making cinema anywhere: anything is filmable, and could be interesting. André Bazin was also concerned with what he called the "ambiguity of reality," and in order to display that type of reality on screen properly, he supported the use of depth of field/focus and *mise-en-scène* (hence his, and subsequently the New Wavers' fascination, with Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* and Italian neo-realism). Depth of field allows for all planes to be in focus concomitantly, and it is achieved by using wider lens for the camera. *Mise-en-scène* is all of the elements placed in front of the camera to be photographed: settings, props, costume, lighting, make-up, and figure behavior. These two elements allow the spectator to have a "more active involvement," bringing him or her into a closer relationship with the image. Instead of using too much disruptive editing, the director allows the spectator to take everything in at his or her own pace.

Nowadays, though, the endless possibilities that digital media have brought to life are challenging the very basic ideas of film that we have come to accept in the last fifty or so years. If one thinks of Siegfried Kracauer's definition of film, then the specificity of film comes from an ability, based on photography, to "record and reveal the physical reality" (28). This idea applies easily to the practices of the New Wave aesthetic, although contemporary cinema has changed quite drastically. Kracauer thought about physical objects, the "transitory world we live in," but that world can now be created on a computer. Everything comes into question: a chair in a room may or may not be there, and even the person sitting on it can be subjected to such questions. For Kracauer, the transposition of reality still had to obey certain stylistic choices/rules, such as editing or

framing. Although editing and/or framing are still intrinsic parts of the filmmaking process, they are no longer necessarily secondary to the notion of reality, but rather the other way around. However, in the context of Italian cinema, and then later for the French New Wave, Kracauer's writings on reality echo those of Bazin. Kracauer talks also about shooting the streets in cinema, and how it contributes to suggesting the flow of life: "the street is in the extended sense of the word not only the arena of fleeting impressions and chance encounters but a place where the flow of life is bound to assert itself" (72). It would seem that indeed the key word for the Italian neo-realism aesthetic is "flow," and the city is the one setting that allows, unabashedly, for the flow of life to be transposed onto the film-stock.

With film noir, we move away from the outside and the flow of the city toward a more internalized tension. The aesthetic of the film noir, a genre/movement that also puts an emphasis on the description of the city, strives on (internal) conflict. Unlike neorealism, film noir is highly stylized, making extensive use of low or Dutch angles, and of lighting contrasts, alternating low and high-key, creating an effect called "chiaroscuro." In Stephen Neale's opinion, the archetypal shot in film noir is "the extreme high-angle shot, an oppressive and fatalistic angle that looks down on its helpless victim to make it look like a rat in a maze" (68). In Truffaut's film, this particular shot takes on another, less threatening meaning, as we will soon see. The aesthetic choices of film noir are all meant to generate an ominous atmosphere, a dangerous city, or setting dominated by crime. It is indeed the presence of crime that gives noir its most constant characteristic (Neale 19), but complicating the issue is the ever ambivalent main

character who makes it hard for the audience to take sides. The character of Antoine Doinel is similarly constructed, as we sympathize with him all the while knowing he lies and is mischievous. There is an obvious connection between the noir character, Antoine and the existentialist man, who is basically a disoriented person facing a confused world that he cannot accept. Albert Camus' exploration of the myth of Sisyphus cements the theory behind the existentialist character, who is faced with a choice. Camus rejects the possibility of suicide, and claims that one has to imagine Sisyphus happy because he is acutely aware of his condition and he embraces it. Geneviève Sellier finds similarities between the New Wave and Camus through another Camus absurd character, Meursault: "New Wave heroes live an absurd everyday life directly inherited from Camus's *L'Etranger*: nihilism and the absence of altruism" (Sellier 96). Most film noir characters, and Antoine too, face a similar alienation and occasional lack of logic, and they, too, never reach a state of "happiness." These characters have to choose between Sartre's being and nothingness, but they fail to make a decision, and are therefore condemned to constant lament, and are pushed into perpetual alienation and marginality.

Truffaut's first journey into marginality, *400 coups* is the movie that defines him as an artist, and that sets up his whole career, and by choosing a teenager, Antoine Doinel, as his first character, Truffaut looks at a category that by definition feels marginalized. At the same time, the city of Paris is not forgotten and the audience has the opportunity to observe it in a way it had not been shot before; as the camera follows Antoine around, Paris itself is revealed, but not the touristy city of lights, rather its outskirts. The very first shot of the movie travels toward the Eiffel Tour, only to move

backwards very fast, once the credits are finished, clearly creating separation from the symbol of Paris. This initial sequence has nine different shots of the Eiffel Tower, and it is flanked by fades. As a matter of fact, Truffaut often uses fades to bracket certain episodes in the film; it is his way of separating individual episodes from the body of the main narrative, which actually is quite a simple story: a rebel teenager alienates himself from his family ending up in a correctional institution from which he escapes at the end. The real story is formed by all the other, smaller-scale stories generated by secondary characters and actions.

By focusing on the most recognizable emblem of Paris, the Eiffel Tower, in the first sequence of the film Truffaut demarcates from the beginning what the idea of a "center" implies, and then promptly proceeds to move away from the designated center. The tendency to favor marginality begins with a rejection of an established image of Paris. The many cuts and angles from which we view the tower prepare us, the audience, for a story made up of smaller pieces. Truffaut's intention was to film bits and pieces of life, and then to try to paste them together. Even though the credits are rolling over the image of the tower, the city itself is clearly marked as a subject of the film and of the camera. The nine tracking shots, from a moving car, are also obstructed by various buildings. In fact, the first shot of the film cuts to a different tracking shot at the exact moment when the tower fully disappears behind a building. By the fifth shot, the car finds itself right under the tower, so the spectator is in the heart of what Paris represents to visitors, to foreigners. The next four shots, still tracking the tower, move away from it, farther and farther until the sequence ends in the aforementioned fade. The mise-en-

abyme is evident: the film itself is also an attempt to move "away" from the common and the clichéd; the city that we are about to see is not that of the Eiffel Tower, but rather a more personal version of the city, descending into its neighborhoods. Even though the first sequence of the film is shot from a moving car, one of the most important aspects of Truffaut's filmmaking, observation, still comes into focus. The act of moving about and observing reminds the viewer of the nineteenth century figure of the *flâneur*.

Walter Benjamin's[53] discussion of the *flâneur* in the *Arcades Project* introduces the character of the wanderer, which the author considers to be a product of the city of Paris, "Paris created the type of the *flâneur*" (1999, 417). Since the city is already an emblem of modernity, the *flâneur* becomes subsequently the epitome of modernity as well. The *flâneur* is a sort of a stroller, someone who walks around the city, traditionally someone educated, and maybe even wealthy, capable of a leisurely lifestyle. He mixes in with the crowd and uses anonymity so that he can freely observe the surroundings. The wanderer is a (male!) pedestrian who finds pleasure in walking aimlessly and leisurely through the city, but who can never associate with or be assimilated by the crowd, and thus he stands alone and unique. Even though he is never part of the crowd, there is a sense of abandonment in it that follows him: "empathy is the nature of the intoxication to which the *flâneur* abandons himself in the crowd…Like a roving soul in search of a body, he enters another person whenever he wishes" (1986, Benjamin 55). His foremost trait is his detachedness ("detached observer, skimming across the surface of the city"—Wilson 78), yet, he still does all this without being aware of any it: "The dream is the realization

[53] Before Benjamin, and before Baudelaire, there were other writers (eg. Rétif de la Bretonne) who had *flâneur*-type of characters.

of that ancient dream of humanity, the labyrinth. It is this reality to which the *flâneur*, without knowing it, devotes himself" (1999, Benjamin 429-430). The lack of awareness is a common trend in the New Wave characters, as they move through life propelled by unclear reasons.

The *flâneur* prefers the arcades of nineteenth century Paris, and the exterior, but he also has the power to transform the boulevard, the outside, into an interior because of his affinity for arcades. He looks upon the city in a panoramic sort of way, and from his detached point of view the city almost becomes a phantasm, a fabrication. He has a close relationship with the objects he gazes upon in the shop windows because he himself is a commodity: the *flâneur* inserts himself in the geography of the city and becomes a part that can catch other people's attention. He is a subject and an object at the same time. He walks in a city that he creates, and Paris takes shape according to his observations. The city of Paris exposes its duality by having an interior and an exterior, both on the *outside*. The arcades allow for this duality to take shape. The arcades were passageways in the nineteenth century Paris covered with a glass roof, so the visitors were neither outside, nor inside. The passages were full of shops, and they become a sort of city within the larger city, like Truffaut's stories within stories. The reason the *flâneur* feels so at home in this kind of setting is the mirroring of interior-exterior boundaries; his personality is also at a cross between interior and exterior worlds, as a figure of marginality, and because of his ability to be both active and intellectual (reflexive) at the same time. He dwells in the contemporary urban space, but he has the ability to look back to the past. The city is constantly shifting shape, part of the development and modernization process,

and along with it, so is the *flâneur*, although he continues to remain unaware of the impending changes. It is interesting to notice that ceaseless transformation also marked Benjamin's writing of the *Arcades Project*, which were never fully finished and remain fragmented.

Susan Buck-Morss also talks about the evolution of the *flâneur* who "becomes extinct only by exploding into a myriad of forms" (2006, 38). His disappearance leads to the creation of new forms. Buck-Morss hints at a hybrid quality of the *flâneur* that reminds me of my previous definition of modernity. The *flâneur* does not disappear completely, but it simply becomes something else. This is the same quality that characterizes modernity through the three historical moments laid out in the introduction, the Baroque, the nineteenth century Paris, and the avant-garde. Modernity does not disappear—it only takes on diverse shapes. As a result, the constant evolution of the city and that of the *flâneur* find the perfect embodiment in the cinematic apparatus, which to my mind is one of those new forms. In the reality of the nineteenth century setting, the *flâneur* actually disappeared once department stores came about, which were completely separated from the outside world, and clearly marked the inside. There was no more outside/inside tension to catalyze his existence. However, the aftereffects are still felt:

> The *flâneur*, though grounded in everyday life, is an analytic form, a narrative device, an attitude towards knowledge and its social context. It is an image of movement through the social space of modernity…the *flâneur* is a multilayered palimpsest that enables us to move from real products of modernity, like commodification and leisured patriarchy, through the practical organization of

> space and its negotiation by inhabitants of the city, to a critical appreciation of the state of modernity. (Jenks 148)

This modern image of movement, in spite of its constant metamorphosis, fails to find an accurate gender counterpoint.

Regarding the lack of a female counterpart for the *flâneur*, Susan Buck-Morss brings on the subject of the prostitute as the only possible female *flâneur*: a woman could not possibly be considered a *flâneuse* because "all women who loitered risked being seen as whores" (2006, 49). This possibility becomes interesting when seen in opposition to Varda's drifter character Mona in *Sans toit ni loi* who crosses paths with an actual prostitute who will ask her to be on her way because she "works" there. Here we see Mona is a *flâneuse* in her own right, unconnected to the traditional association to the prostitute, but nonetheless trapped in the same world. I will expand on this point in the last chapter, but for now it should suffice to note that Mona is held against her will in a restrictive society that places her on the same level with a prostitute. The idea of a forced enclosure is reiterated by Elizabeth Wilson in her article "The Invisible Flâneur." She suggests that the city is a labyrinth that one cannot escape, and therefore is condemned to solitude. Indeed, the *flâneur*, male or female, remain a manifestation of modernity because they "characteristically appear as marginal" (Wilson 86). Therefore, in a world of commodity, and as a creation of modernity, of luxury and consumption, the *flâneur* becomes the archetypal expression of alienation, marginality, and by extension, of modernity.

In spite of all the thematic similarities between Antoine and the *flâneur*, the boy cannot be considered one, at least not in the Benjaminian tradition. He is too young, not cultivated enough, definitely not rich, and his rational analyses (most are done with René) always seem to get him in trouble. However, by following him, Truffaut's camera does what Antoine is not concerned with—it observes. The camera supplants the main character, and it becomes radically more important as it continues to reveal the "rest" of the world. As mentioned before, the New Wave finds one of its influences in Italian-Neorealism, and one of the main characteristics of Italian-Neorealism was introduced by Vittorio De Sica, who added a little more to the simple retelling of a "real" situation. On a few occasions his camera would get "distracted" by action that occurred around the main characters and plot. One of the most obvious and famous scenes occurs in *Bicycle Thief*,[54] when Antonio (notice the similarity of their names) is learning how to put posters up on walls. As he is listening to the directions given by his co-worker, two children, one of whom is playing the accordion, come into the frame. Antonio's co-worker proceeds to kick the accordion player in the back. When a third grown-up enters the frame, and judging by his clothes a wealthy man, the two children start running after him, begging for money. At this point the camera has completely moved away from Antonio and it follows the two little boys. This exemplifies what Truffaut called "a slice of life," a completely random episode, with little to no bearing on the main plot, but a story in itself. Beyond the story that forms in the spectator's mind, this brief episode further helps construct the deplorable image of post-war Italy.

[54] Most English translations use the singular form, as opposed to a correct plural from the Italian original "*ladri*," which obviously labels both father and young son.

Similarly then, but never to the full extent, Truffaut's camera catches in its peripheral vision the life around the main characters, around the main plot. But Truffaut's side-stories are often only seemingly random, and in fact they add substance and layers to the characters. One such example in the movie is the episode when Antoine goes out of the apartment to get some flour for his mother. After he crosses the street, he stops in front of the store, behind two women who talk about giving birth with a c-section, and about blood. Antoine is shown getting a little pale, but at first sight, the dialogue we have just witnessed has absolutely no bearing on the rest of the film, and it is a complete deviation from the diegesis. However, later in the film when we uncover the complicated relationship that Antoine has with his mother, we realize that this particular scene foreshdows that relationship. Antoine lacks a necessary constant in his life—the unconditional love of the mother. When he becomes visibly ill because of talk of c-sections (an "unnatural" birth), Truffaut subtly points to Antoine's hidden adversion for his mother. An example of a superfluous episode, though, is the sequence in which Antoine takes out the garbage, and there is no context for this episode. It, of course, sets up the mundane, repetitive activities of the teenager, but beyond this fact it does not add anything of importance to the diegesis. There are five different shots of Antoine taking out the trash, two inside the apartment, three outside, and the insistence of shooting him on the stairs (something we will come back to later) is clear. When Antoine is in front of the garbage can, as he tries to discard of the trash, the light in the corridor goes off, although for a second it looks like a fade out. He turns the light back on, and then a few seconds later, the director actually uses a fade out to transition into another episode. It is

ironic that the scene should have two fade outs, and in a way it almost seems that there is a subtle comment about the directorial (auteur) power: only Truffaut decides when the lights go out, when the scene is over.

In spite of the multiple, smaller stories that make up the body of *400 coups*, the film generates the feeling of an uninterrupted flow. The idea of continuity is reinforced in several shots in the film, where the director chooses not to cut, but rather follow the action, let it unfold naturally, as if it were observed with the naked eye. One such example occurs in the first shot inside Antoine's school, when the camera follows the pin-up that the boys are passing around, instead of cutting every time the magazine reaches another destination. This shot is replicated almost exactly later in the film, when the boys destroy the goggles of the kid who goes to Antoine's parents, with the goggles traveling, like the pin-up from desk to desk, all shot without any cuts. Similar, but following a person, is the shot that tracks the movement of René's mother who retrieves some money; it takes a long time for her to come down, get the money and then climb back up a flight of stairs, and all the while we are stuck watching the endless scene, with no cuts. The lack of interruptions allows for the film to flow unaffectedly, and Truffaut makes extensive use of this type of shot. For example, whenever Antoine and René are in the street, the camera moves from one side of the street to the other in order to expose the entire neighborhood. In one instance, the camera leaves the boys on one side, and then it finds them on the opposite side. In another instance, the camera shows Mauricet in the street; this is the boy who tells Antoine's parents about the missed classes, and who fittingly wears a hood, reminiscent of the Inquisition regalia. Finally, Antoine and René

are once again followed closely by the eye of the camera when they are trying to sell the stolen typewriter. Time is stretched not only through the use of each following shot, but also by using a fixed camera that records every movement, however slow, of Antoine. For example, the takes are much longer when we seen him alone in his cell and he rolls himself a cigarette. Also, at the very end, as the long tracking shot of Antoine ends, a new shot of him catches him to the right of the frame, then pans left to reveal the sea, and continues to pan until it catches up with the runner, this time to the left of the frame. Along with the following shots and the long takes, Truffaut makes extensive use of the long shot, sometimes pushing toward an extreme long shot, which allows him to show more of the surroundings. The first time we see Antoine and René in the street, one of the many occasions to follow, they are shown in a long shot that ends up following them when they turn the corner.

The distance of the camera from the cinematic subject places the latter in a realm of solitude, because it shows Antoine and his friend, René as isolated from the rest of the world. In a sequence of five shots, we see them both in the streets of Paris, and yet somewhat removed from all the ruckus. All of the shots are also following shots, but two of them move vertically as well. The camera descends from a suspended poster to the street, then rapidly pans left transitioning into another shot showing the boys on the other side of the street. Finally, the camera moves upward from the boys who are about to enter a theater, to the poster of the film playing. The apparent erratic movement of the camera seems to suggest that the two boys are elusive, they move about too fast. Furthermore, when the camera moves in very close, it actually further emphasizes the solitude of the

character. For example, in one of the few medium-close ups of the film, Antoine listens in the dark to his parents arguing. The voices, coming from nowhere, much like his later interview with the psychiatrist, appear to be menacing, as they engulf Antoine. The odds are stacked against Antoine, and the mise-en-scène of the film helps project that idea when we see him alone at home, sitting at his mother's dresser. In this particular shot, there are three separate reflections of the boy, reminding us a little of Orson Welles's use of mirrors at the end of *Citizen Kane*. Normally, a mirror shot points to the duality of the character in question, so in this case, Truffaut takes his character's ambivalence to an extreme, dividing him into four. Antoine is a teenager, and thus at a problematic age; the splitting of his reflection in four suggests his interior struggle as he tries to define himself. The lack of identity is obvious even from the act of sitting down at his mother's dresser coupled with him using her brush. In this brief scene, Antoine attempts to appropriate his mother's space, which turns out, as it happens throughout the film, to be a futile effort. But, in a way, he briefly becomes his mother. Another possible explanation for the "multiple Antoines" has to do with choices: he finds himself at a crossroads, and he ends up taking the wrong road. A more conventional mirror shot occurs the morning after, when the boy is getting ready for school, and he clears the foggy mirror in the bathroom. He pauses for a second, as if he does not recognize himself, and the camera jerks backward underlining his distress. Throughout the film, actually, Truffaut opts mainly for hand-held shots, which convey a more jarring sense of reality.

The idea of marginality is reinforced in a famous scene later in the movie: Antoine is in an amusement park and enters a very fast revolving rotor. The spinning pins

him against the wall, and he loves it, as he turns upside down, still supported by the momentum created by the rotor—Antoine is literally stuck on the outer layer of this circle. Much has been written on this episode, with suggestions varying from understanding the rotor as a mother's womb, because Antoine crouches in a fetal position, to a metaphor of the beginnings of the cinematic apparatus, the zoetrope, reinforced by the fact that the camera tilts up at one point to reveal the word "cine." Aside from the obvious tribute to the cinematic apparatus, it cannot escape our attention the fact that Truffaut is one of the four people in the rotor, and his cameo is probably an homage to Hitchcock. It does not really seem to me that Antoine moves fully into the fetal position, but that he rather simply turns upside down. Pushed to the outer limit of society, his whole world is about to be turned upside down (in a more recent film, *La Haine*, 1998, Matthieu Kassowitz insists on break-dancers, as they twirl on their heads—an image that creates the same effect as that of Antoine in the rotor). The story of Antoine does not depend on the physicality of places and people, it is the story inside him that is more important, and in his unaware attempt to balance interior and exterior, he does resemble a *flâneur*. On the other hand, Truffaut and his camera are aware of the inside-outside conflict. As to this point, Richard Neupert notes that, "Antoine moves between an aimless liberty in the streets and an often oppressive world of confinement in small, social spaces" (180). Physically, being inside does not help Antoine; in fact, there are two different pieces of dialogue he has with his parents that prompt his flight. When we witness the first dinner of the family, his mother tells him to put away the homework notebook. Later on, when Antoine is with his stepfather in the kitchen, the latter

questions him about school. When Antoine says he was not called upon in class the father replies with “dans la vie il faut prendre des initiatives.” The path that Antoine chooses, knowingly or not, is somewhat congruent with the teachings of his family; he does renounce school, and he does take initiative. The only problem is that it might lead him nowhere.

His intention is that he should disappear (“il faut que je disparaisse,” he says to René), and in a way he does because he blends into the décor of the city. The first time he does not return at home after school is when the teacher finds out he had lied about his mother’s death. That night Antoine takes to the poorly lit streets of Paris. In harmony with the New Wave aesthetic, the shots at nights use no other additional light source, and thus, Truffaut places Antoine in a very ominous space. When he first leaves René with the promise that the latter would find him a place to sleep, the camera remains still as he moves away into the darkness, his shoulders slouched. Then later, after he leaves the printing factory where he had slept for most of the night, the camera slowly follows him roaming the empty streets. There is first an episode in which he tries to help a lady, played by Jeanne Moreau, find a dog. Then he goes by the window of a shop on which the words “Joyeux Noel” are written, and the notion of contrast between “joyeux” and the state he is actually in is quite obvious. Furthering the contrast is the next shot which comes from inside a store, while Antoine slowly passes outside, in the front. We go from shooting him outside a store, to shooting him from inside a store, and in this instance the director reiterates his character’s inside/outside conflict. The next scene shows Antoine preparing to and then actually stealing a bottle of milk, which he subsequently proceeds

to empty very fast. The entire sequence is constructed in a noir style, from the two shadows projected on the wall behind Antoine when he steals the milk, to the long shot of him drinking it in a dark corner, his body blending against the background rendering them equally ominous. After he gets rid of the empty bottle, he goes down a long flight of stairs so that he can wash his face in a fountain. At this point, the camera does not stay on him, but it stops and reveals the entire park. It then catches up with him, as it continues to pan left, and we can see that the park is empty, although right next to it, the streets appear to be already very crowded and noisy. It is interesting to notice the contrast between the empty little park, and the busy streets surrounding it, a fact that leaves Antoine solitary again, in a restricted space.

A perfect example of a separate story breaking away from the main narrative happens to also be the best example of a *caméra-flâneur* moment in the entire movie. The sequence opens with a fade in, and it closes on a fade out signaling that it is an episode that could be a story in itself: from both the street level and from atop of the buildings, the camera follows the boys during gym class, as one by one they all abandon their clueless teacher in the streets of Paris. It is during this sequence that I find Truffaut's camera to mesh perfectly the Italian neorealism aesthetic with the *flâneur* characteristics, all the while without being too intrusive, or voyeuristic. The initial shot, at eye-level, follows the boys exiting a building and turning to the right of the screen. This is a long take, and the boys move farther and farther, the shot almost becoming an extreme long shot. Just when we think that nothing else is going to happen in the shot, and that there will be a cut, the first group of two breaks away from the rest. The long wait that leads up

to this moment, though, is reminiscent of the shot from *Bicycle Thief* mentioned before. Once the boys begin dispersing, and after another street level shot of little Abou crossing, the position of the camera is switched to a view from above. From this elevated spot, the camera tracks the movement of the group, which loses more boys at every turn, and thus it literally hovers over the city. The distance to the actual subject of the shot, the group, is so great that everything else around becomes of equal importance: we can freely observe the shops, the other people walking in the street, and the cars. This high-angle shot, unlike those in film noir, does not project fear; it rather invites contemplation. The street essentially becomes the subject of the shot because it is moved to the center of the frame, as the group moves toward its outside. A few scenes later, the same streets are shown at night from even higher above, in one of the few establishing shots. It is only the city that is important in this shot—there are no people in sight.

The city does take on a life of its own in *400 coups*. As I mentioned earlier, Truffaut wants to avoid showing the touristy side of Paris; instead he focuses on Montmartre, on the Gare du Nord, and on the southern part of the Pigalle. While these neighborhoods are not entirely unknown to foreigners, they are intrinsically Parisian; they offer a more local flavor than the Eiffel Tower area visited in the beginning of the film. When Antoine's shrine to Balzac catches fire, the family decides to go to the movies, and the film they are about to see, as I mentioned before, is Jacques Rivette's *Paris, nous appartient*. The choice of the film is not random, because, on the one hand Truffaut supports the work of one of his close friends, and, on the other hand, it sends another message about new ownership. The city does belong to the New Wave filmmakers. Later,

when the family comes back from the movies they discuss the film, and we realize even more that the choice of Rivette's film was not arbitrary when Antoine says he had liked it (a young boy who appreciates Rivette is somewhat unlikely). When the father jokes about the quality of the film, the mother replies saying that "il avait du fond," reminding us all of Truffaut's preaching against the "cinéma de papa," and his quest for new meanings.

The love for the city of Paris, and especially for Montmartre, is obvious in the three-shot sequence that follows the episode at René's house (Powrie remarks that the shooting inside René's home emulates Cocteau's style, another director to whom Truffaut pays tribute). In this instance, we move outside of the diegesis again, although this time around there are no fades; however, the long take in the middle is flanked by two similar shots of the two boys, Antoine and René running out of and then into the house. The entire episode would be rendered pointless because of their quick return to the house, and because nothing happens except their running about. So, its meaning can only be to further establish the physical placement of the boys in Montmartre. The second shot of the sequence begins as a long shot of the two coming down the stairs of Sacré-Coeur, and it morphs into a following shot that will first pan right, and then left, as the boys seem undecided about which way they should go. The two pans allow for ample time to view Montmartre, at the bottom of Sacré-Coeur, and farther down, at Pigalle.

The seemingly pointless runs and roaming around of the two boys continues with random petty thefts including that of a photo of Harriet Andersson, an actress often used by Ingmar Bergman. Interestingly, in *La Nuit américaine*, Truffaut dreams he steals stills from Orson Welles movies—stealing in both contexts becomes more of a "borrowing"

act; it is Truffaut's way of acknowledging the influences of Bergman and Welles. The boys continue on their petty theft spree, as they also steal an alarm clock, a rather bizarre choice, but as they are running away with it, the alarm goes off inside Antoine's jacket. It is a tongue-in-cheek suggestion that his time has come, and in fact, from here on out his life spirals downward. They go to the movies and we get a medium shot of the two, with Antoine on the right blowing out bubble gum. I could not help thinking of yet another connection to *Bicycle Thief*: in the scene when Antonio and his friends search for the bike at the market, in the background we see a man blowing out bubbles as a sign that the search is futile. Similarly, in Truffaut's film, the boys are wasting their time. However, later during the puppet show, the attention shifts from the boys who are talking detachedly in the back to the children watching the show intently. There are a total of twelve shots of the audience, entirely made up of children, excepting the counter shots of the stage on which *Little Red Riding Hood* is playing. Most of the shots are static, medium shots, except for the eight shot, which tracks to the right, pauses, and then continues to track. A lot has been said about Truffaut's fascination with children, but in this case, his insistence and number of shots allotted to the scene point to another fascination—that with the audience. In a film that plays on the duality of its main character, Truffaut transforms the film itself into a mirror; the screen is literally a mirror held up to the audience's faces. The children are us, or even more poignantly, the children are what we should be as an audience. They are involved, they react, and they live the action on stage. We are made acutely aware of the cinematic act during this scene, and yet our awareness does not carry with it a strong sense of Brechtian alienation.

Antoine's fate is decided when he steals the typewriter, an action he could not simply erase anymore. As he goes up the stairs, toward the room from which he will extract the machine, we see more shadows on the wall behind him; this time the bars of the stairway seem to trap the shadow of his body, which prefigures the real bars of prison. It is interesting to note that on one of the few occasions that he goes up the stairs, Antoine in fact seals his bleak fate. Indeed he is mostly seen coming down stairs: at the apartment, taking out the trash, after his first night away from home, running with René on the Sacré-Coeur steps, descending into a subway station, brought to the basement of the police station, and finally when going down to the beach. The recurring image of him descending is instilled in the audience's brains throughout the film, which, in my opinion relieves the tension in the climactic apprehension, and subsequent breakdown of Antoine. By the time he has been taken into the custody of the police, we, as audience, have already come to accept his fate. While some may argue this technique takes away the element of surprise, I think that it keeps the audience removed, as much as possible, from feeling too much compassion for the main character. The drama belongs to him, and not to the audience.

Ironically, Antoine is caught when he tries to put the typewriter back, which is another example of Truffaut's version of reality; it does hit you when you least expect it, or when you least deserve it. Preparing for his attempt, he puts on a hat, reminiscent of Humphrey Bogart's style and yet another sending to film noir. The references to the noir style come back again in one more shot, when Antoine arrives at the correctional facility. As the camera moves to the right of the frame, it reveals a dark corridor, at the end of

which we barely see the contour of a guard, who then proceeds to turn on the lights. When Antoine is first taken to his father, who will in turn take him to the police, we get a long, following shot of the two walking amid a crowd. It is almost hard to make them out, and when they exit the frame to the left, the camera lingers for one second on the windows of two shops in which we can see models of angels floating and twirling. The image of the angel comes back at the correctional facility; when two random teenagers are talking about their crimes, the camera tilts up to reveal a statue of angels. The fate of the boy is left up to divine intervention.

The episode at the police station is filled with emotions. The camera seems to be unstable, restless, as it keeps moving back and forth. Before Antoine is assigned to a cell in the basement, he is taken by one of the officers. There is a long shot of both of them walking in one of the corridors, and then, as the camera backs up, and they open a door, we realize that they had been shot through a window. This technique is again a tribute to Orson Welles; the beginning of *Citizen Kane* also plays on the uncertainty of physical placement. Are we inside, outside, or inside the snowball? Truffaut uses this shot to further make Antoine's struggle between the inside and the outside resonate with the audience. Before he is moved out of the station, Antoine is once relocated to an even smaller cell, which is rather a cage, in fact. His personal space is getting smaller and smaller. In the shots that follow, the camera appears mostly to move away from the boy, as it tracks backward in both instances we see him incarcerated. Once he is in the van, though, the camera stays closer to him, although even then there is a sense of separation because the shots, after all, are tracking Antoine from a moving car. The scene ends with

a ray of light reflecting slightly off a tear coming down Antoine's cheek. This is the moment when the camera gets in the closest possible to his face. He has broken down.

At the correctional facility life is not easy for Antoine. In stark contrast with the playful atmosphere at school, and gym class when everyone was skipping out, we have a shot of the detainees filing in an orderly manner. When two guards bring in an adolescent who had escaped, the camera follows the trio as they split the crowd of young boys staring at the event, and head down a path bordered by trees. Momentarily, the departure of the proper files of young men conceals the guards and the prisoner, but once everyone is out of the frame, exiting left, we can see them again. The camera lingers on their movement, even though the main character has already left the screen. Here, we have another good example of Truffaut's *caméra-flâneur*. When it does go back to the rest of the boys, the camera also shows a big outdoor cage, with three children in it. The number three mirrors the numbers of prostitutes who displaced Antoine from his first confinement, back at the police station. It is a parallel that cannot be ignored, no matter how disheartening the message could be: are the children in the cage destined to end up like the prostitutes? I think it is one possible reading. But, these are the groundskeeper's children, and they could be placed in the cage in order to be protected from the boys, fact that leads to another outside/inside lesson. The boys who are "free" on the outside of the cage will be the ones who will end up as hoodlums; the three children, even though "incarcerated" right now, will not take the prostitution road.

What is certain from the scene and the various associations that can be made is that the social system is unsound. Antoine's personal system becomes completely

obliterated when his mother visits him and basically renounces him. But it does not matter anymore, he is not even listening; he is lost. The point of view, close-up shot of his mother, that reveals only the upper part of her head and conceals the mouth, speaks volumes about Antoine's feelings toward his mother. In a later chapter I will elaborate on the implications of (female) voice in cinema, but it is worth noting at this point that this is the third time we hear a disembodied voice—following the argument of the parents, and also the interview with the psychiatrist. The voice of the mother (and the psychiatrist who is a surrogate type of mother) is normally perceived as a positive element, but functions quite to the contrary in these three instances. Separated from the body, the voice becomes menacing, and it alienates Antoine. When his mother leaves the correction facility, Antoine is left completely on his own.

The episode of the interview has six shots, each of them transitioning into the next through dissolves, which give the scene a dreamlike quality, and turn our attention to the use of voice-over. Narrating through voice-overs became somewhat of a standard and even necessary element in the construction of narrative for most New Wave directors. The added voice added dramatic effect to the films, because most often the narration had a life of its own, commenting, seeing, and doing so differently from the image. Truffaut, although not as insistent about voice-over, has also taken advantage of the possibilities emerging from the proper use of sound. *400 coups* had its entire soundtrack added post-synchronously, and there are several examples in which voices and sounds help tell a parallel story to the main narrative. In the case of the interview scene, it was by complete accident that Truffaut ended up using just Antoine. It turns out that the actress

who was supposed to play the psychiatrist could not make it on shooting day, so the director shot just Antoine's answers, which he loved, and later on he only added the voice of the actress. By working separately on the soundtrack, Truffaut further facilitated the creation of many other, smaller stories within the frame of a larger one. In a way, his stories suffer the same type of permutations as those in the West African oral tradition, and as those we have seen in the Mambety chapter.

Contrary to its African counterpart, though, in terms of a moral lesson the ending is nebulous in *400 coups*. Antoine decides to escape, and during a soccer match, he takes off. He eludes the guards through an old slapstick comedy trick: he hides under a bridge and then proceeds to run into the opposite direction. His entire run (more than a minute long) is continuously tracked from the side, as Truffaut chooses again not to cut. The act of running, with the camera patiently following, is an attempt to put everything behind him. Hope renewed, Antoine reaches the beach, and he had always wanted to see the sea. He is, even if belatedly, awarded this small satisfaction of finally reaching the shoreline. He goes toward the water, then returns and faces the camera, which literally freezes on his face, which, in Richard Neupert's opinion, is "a sort of tribute to Italian neorealist story ambiguity" (181). I find that the effect created is one of surprise; it is as if the camera was caught by surprise and did not know how to react. Antoine is looking straight into the camera, straight at the audience and his eyes project the question of what is going to happen next onto the audience. This is one of the most famous endings in cinema, with both actor and camera reaching an end. Both are out of options, and for a quick second they become one. And they stop.

There is a tension between the inside and the outside in this movie. The indoor shots (school or home) are predominantly static, and Antoine, along with the audience, feels incarcerated. Outside, the shots are mostly active; the long, mobile shots give the sensation of freedom. The contrast between settings is meant to emphasize the director's preference for the peculiar, and the marginal position of the main character. *400 coups* has other examples of characters on the "margins:" at the police station the three prostitutes in a cage, the three children in the cage—marginality does not escape anyone of any age. However, the examples of marginality abound in Truffaut's work, beyond *400 coups*. For example, middle-aged Charlie, in *Tirez sur le pianiste*, used to be a concert piano player but now is content to play in bars; he is reminiscent of a character in American gangster movies, and he is seen walking in the streets, obscured by poor lighting and his hat, and he never seems to fit in. There is Julien in *La Chambre verte*, obsessed with the death of his wife, and completely torn from the reality surrounding him. He too finds himself on the outside, looking in, although his exile is maybe self-imposed. We do get a number of shots suggesting that he is out of place in the current situation: we see him hidden behind a quasi-opaque glass door and his face is shown distorted. There is Julie in *La Mariée était en noir*, Truffaut's most obvious homage to Hitchcock, of whom we do not know anything except that her sole purpose in life is to avenge her husband's death, as if she is no longer part of the society she lives in. This suggestion is emphasized by a shot in the beginning of the film, showing her descending into a subway station, as darkness gradually takes control of her body. Julie's character is probably tributary to Catherine, a character who gives us the Truffaut definitive vision of

the modern woman in *Jules et Jim*. New Wave, as a movement, seemed to push for a more positive representation of women; women finally had opportunities to be a more central part of the story, or even to have lead roles, like Jeanne Moreau's Catherine. The last part of the chapter will briefly discuss Truffaut's portrayal of women, specifically Catherine, as a means of transitioning into the work of Ousmane Sembene on marginality in the Senegalese context.

The characters portrayed in *Jules et Jim* continue, in some sense, the tradition of not being concerned with elements of modernity, although the insertion of footage from the First World War, with an insistence on explosions points to a commentary on the futility of art in a (modern) era of destruction. This is, of course, the Frankfurt School's[55] line of thought that suggests beauty is no longer possible in a world torn by violence and war. Truffaut continues the ideas of Adorno and Benjamin, as the images of war become the focal point of the film, and somewhat take over the fictional part that follows. Jules and Jim are never seen working, they spend time together, talking, walking, working out; they go on dates, on boat rides, and they read poetry and translate for one another. They are quintessential dandies, and the *caméra-flâneur* follows them through their everyday activities, going to cafés, going to the gymnasium, or merely walking in the streets. They are in fact prototypes of the modern-day *flâneur*. However, the film is more about Catherine than anything else, which is strangely emphasized by the conspicuous absence of her name from the title of the film. The title makes it seem as if the film is about the two men, when in fact it is the woman who is the driving force behind the story.

[55] Not everyone, but definitely Adorno and Horkheimer.

Moreover, the way Catherine is shot would subsequently change the way women are shown on screen, because of the insistence on making her the primordial element of the film.

The character of Catherine foreshadows Truffaut's later question in *La Nuit américaine* (1973), "Are women magic?" In *Jules et Jim*, the answer appears to be affirmative. Catherine's appearance is preceded by the voice-over stating that "Ça avait commencé comme un rêve," which places the female character in the realm of the fantastic. The first time we see her there is a sequence of nine shots, all of them either close-ups or medium close-ups, alternating between front and profile. The sequence is flanked on either side by a similar long shot of the backyard where the two men meet their friends. The shots move very fast in front of our eyes, and on two occasions that sensation is further enhanced by two quick zooms. The effect created is that Catherine becomes a fleeing type of apparition. Although she is on display, we do not have time to really look at her because of the disruptive editing. The insistence on her face is hard to miss, and later in the movie we get a very long take of a mirror shot of Catherine putting on cream and then taking it off.

In addition to the close-ups, the viewers get once again freeze frames. And in a sequence where Catherine talks about how she used to be, she says, "je faisais des têtes comme ça," which is followed by a series of five freeze frames, with Catherine not placed in the center of the frame/picture, but rather toward the outside. By decentralizing the subject of the frame, Truffaut points to her marginality, but also removes her from the central focus of the audience's subjective eye. On the other hand, though, both the scene

in front of the mirror and the series of freeze frames show slight ambivalence from Truffaut toward his lead character, because in fact she is not perfect. Jules says sadly "not especially beautiful, intelligent or sincere, but she is a real woman," and that is what matters—in this instance what is real is equated to what is modern. The mere fact that the woman finally has a life of her own in cinema is enough to decree Catherine a "new woman." However, Catherine's status as a new, modern woman, is further challenged by several shots of statues in an abandoned outdoors museum that the trio of friends visits on a Mediterranean island. These close-ups of women's heads appear to be in contrast with the series of shots mentioned above, because of the obvious opposition between a moving object and an inanimate counterpart. However, the similarities between the statue and the *freeze frames* of Catherine cannot be ignored completely, since both elements are actually frozen in time. The statue represents tradition because of its affiliation with Antiquity values and definition of female beauty. The idea of beauty has a direct impact on the two men, as they "first discover the feminine image in the features of an ancient statue" and "Catherine will be the embodiment of this ideal image, fueled by a regressive desire" (Sellier 195). But in another possible explanation, the juxtaposition of the two elements, statues and close-ups of Catherine, can also point to the evolution of the female form and the ways in which an artist—a director in this case—chooses to display it. Catherine is the modern woman who challenges the archetype, and in this instance she appears to represent the 'eternal feminine'—a unique woman who dominates and controls the male characters.

The differences between Catherine and the two men are emphasized by the fact that she is constantly ahead of them—not only in the way that she maybe manipulates them and their affection for her, but literally ahead of them whenever they walk or bike. And of course she is also always the one driving, and the one who drives the car off the bridge at the end. Catherine, then, provides the audience with a strong critique of the Other; in this film it is the men who are weak, and she presents a new version of women. She is a strong and independent woman. In a very brief sequence earlier in the film, as the three characters are walking in the street the audience see two people writing on a wall "mort aux autre" and as they run out of paint, unable to mark down the "s," the slogan becomes "death to the Other," which in my mind is a clear indictment of the classical position of women in mainstream cinema. We have already seen how in Godard's films, the Other shifts from just the woman, to both women and men becoming Other in the advent of capitalism. Both men and women lose the sense of identity, and have to struggle to regain it by fighting against against the effects of modernity. This (re)creates the dichotomy suggested by Jean-François Lyotard in *The Inhuman*. In the chapter entitled "Rewriting Modernity,"[56] Lyotard claims that the human race has to fight to find its subjectivity, and does so by attacking the foundation of the disruptive element, modernity.

In the first two chapters, this fight is carried on at the level of sound mainly, as Godard and Mambety subvert mainstream storytelling by using sound to find alternative ways to create narrative space. In the case of Truffaut, we move to another type of

[56] Paraphrase, pages 24-35.

critique of modernity, a more indirect one. By focusing on the position of the marginalized subject in the contemporary society, whether it is a teenager like Antoine, or a woman like Catherine, Truffaut reshapes our understanding of modernity in the city because we comprehend it through the eyes of those characters. Furthermore, that vision is completed through the use of the *caméra-flâneur*, which generates an entirely new perspective of the city. In the next chapter, I continue my incursion into the realm of the city, and its effects on female subjectivity. This time we move to Ousmane Sembene's city, Dakar, and to a much more clear insistence on the trope of women as Other.

Chapter IV: New Women, New City, New Modernities

This chapter moves to the work of Ousmane Sembene, and it explores Charles Taylor's idea of multiple modernities in an ever-changing city, through sounds and music, and also through female characters. Therefore, I am trying to combine all the themes of my project, modernity, sound, and female gender displacement, in the context of the seminal film, *Xala* (1975). I am moving from the city of Paris, as it is projected by François Truffaut, to Sembene's city, the capital of Senegal, Dakar. A further connection between the two directors could be made at the level of the camera work, because I think that the concept of the *caméra-flâneur* also works when transposed to Dakar. Insisting on the city and its inner workings, Sembene presents Dakar as an ever-changing space. The hybrid quality of the city does not only come from the variety of shots but, maybe more importantly, from the multitude of characters and the specificity of each one involved in the plot of the film, and the physical interchange between these characters and the city. What I am interested in for this particular chapter is the way in which Sembene draws upon these interactions and the idea of community, both amplified through the use of sound, in order to generate multiple modernities.

Amid the many interactions, a good deal of attention is cast upon female characters who, more than the men, are charged with the re-creation of the African community. The question of gender—and the director has an obvious concern for the position of women in contemporary Senegal—will allow for the shift to the vision of the women filmmakers in the next chapter. Sembene's understanding of the politics of

gender seems to push for an acceptance, a recognition of the capital role that women have in modern society and that it is they who are pushing it forward and reshaping it as they go. They are the catalysts needed in order to continue the revival of African societies. However, this process requires sacrifice, and it creates a great divide within these women because it leads to a conflict between family/tradition and career/modernity. In this case once again, as discussed in the introduction to this project, one needs to re-appropriate modernity, to acclimate oneself to the demands of modernity, and to come to terms with the newly shaped identity. The issue is complicated, though, because of the notion of multiple modernities, which in turn would require multiple re-appropriations.

Charles Taylor's notion of multiple modernities is exposed in his book, *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Modernity itself is first defined by Taylor as an "amalgam of new practices and institutional forms (science, technology, industrial production, urbanization), of new ways of living (individualism, secularization, instrumental rationality); and of new forms of malaise (alienation, meaninglessness, a sense of impending social dissolution)" (Taylor 1). I particularly like his use of the word "amalgam," which takes me back to the introduction to this project, and Christine Buci-Glocksmann's hypothesis that modernity is born at the intersection of the Baroque, the nineteenth century Benjaminian vision of Paris, and the avant-garde. While I find this argument compelling, I think that it can be completed with Taylor's findings. In other words, modernity is the part (Baroque, Paris, avant-garde) and the whole (the result), simultaneously. In the case of Sembene, modernity is present in his films, and especially in *Xala*, through individual parts, and also through the *amalgam* that is consequently

created. Literally then: sound as technology, the city as urbanization, and the female characters as alienation, all of these elements contribute to the formation of new modernities.

The idea that modernity can mold into different entities comes from linking modernity to the individual; each individual has his or her own qualities and characteristics, which means that modernity has to adjust or be adjusted to each and every separate case. Charles Taylor uses the term, "social imaginary" to describe "the ways in which people perceive their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (Taylor 23). The author gives three reasons why he chose the word "imaginary," but only the first one is of interest in this context: people *imagine* their social surroundings mainly through images, stories, and legends (Taylor 23). And, I would suggest, through sound. As we will see in the analysis of Sembene's *Xala*, the oral tradition, the stories and the legends are ubiquitous. The individual's social self-understanding takes three forms, still according to Taylor: the economy, the public sphere, and the practices and outlooks of democratic self-rule (69). For the purpose of this chapter, and to underline Sembene's vision of the community, the notion of the public sphere is capital. The definition of the public sphere is "a common space in which the members of society are deemed to meet through a variety of media: print, electronic, and also face-to-face encounters; to discuss matters of common interest; and thus to be able to form a common mind about these. […] The public sphere is a central feature of modern society" (Taylor 83). Thus we can talk

about common space when people come together for various acts and purposes, such as ritual, or simple conversation. The end result, though, has to be that the people involved within those common spaces often have to reach similar conclusions about whatever issues they share. Interestingly, Taylor does not mention that there could be conflict, which seems like a very distinct possibility within the public space. But, what transforms common space (the way a regular society would understand it) into public sphere (which is Taylor's view and expression) is the accumulation of all the various common spaces under one encompassing space. We, as an audience, are presented with many such common spaces in the films of Ousmane Sembene, and the overarching idea is that a public sphere will emerge and, through that unification, it will lead to the emancipation of an entire people.

The nation represents one of the "most powerful narrative modes," (Taylor 176) alongside progress and revolution. As a narrative mode, a nation changes constantly, thus always providing us with new ways of looking at modernity. In a similar fashion, the city is also a place that is under constant transformation. In fact, I find that the two entities, people/nation and city, are in a continuous dialogue that allows for a perpetual, reciprocal alteration. According to Kevin Lynch, whose work focuses on the effects of the city on the individual, "people adjust to their surroundings and extract structure and identity out of the material at hand" (43). In the same vein, Michel de Certeau's definition of a space (espace) carries similar implications: "l'espace est un lieu pratiqué. Ainsi la rue géométriquement définie par un urbanisme est transformée en espace par des marcheurs" (173). The suggestion is that modernity, and as a part of modernity, the city and the space

attached to it, are all shaped by individuals, by walkers. We refer here to a collective, and in my opinion, even though the *flâneur* is quintessentially a lonely figure, it is still emblematic of a group. Each individual within that group, every *flâneur* contributes to the reshaping of the city landscape. We have already seen in the Truffaut chapter how the city of Paris is constructed and reshaped according to the movement of the main character. This is one of the parallels that can be drawn between the New Wave aesthetic and Sembene's cinematic style.[57]

In Sembene's case, individuality carries further meaning, because the cinematic character has to reconcile more than just his or her relationship to the city, and to the environment in which each of them lives. Here, each individual has to rebuild a relationship with the community, and through the eye of the community, come to terms with the notion of modernity. One of the ways in which he or she manages to accomplish this, is through sound—more specifically through song and through oral tradition. Sound for this chapter will be understood very differently from the previous thesis that sound leads to the creation of separate narrative planes, which I have discussed in relation to Mambety's films in Chapter II. There are stark differences between the two filmmakers: their beliefs and styles remind one of the initial separation of cinema thought between the principles of Louis Lumière, and those of Méliès. The former advocated recording daily events, in a natural setting; the latter began to manipulate the "reality" of film by inventing special effects, and consequently expanding the possibilities of the film medium. Likewise, while Mambety heavily stylizes the shots and sounds of his films, and

[57] Richard Neupert suggests that a young Sembene may have been influenced by the legacy of the French New Wave in that it offered new options in terms of modes of production (303).

thus subverts the codes and conventions of classical cinema, Sembene is more subversive in content rather than style. He makes constant use of satire, as he attacks and critiques the socio-political scene of Senegal. There are, of course, a few examples that align Sembene with counter-cinema practices as we will later see with the stylized denouement of *Xala*.

Ousmane Sembene will not give his audience many innovative images, because, like his predecessor Lumière, he advocates clarity for his films. Françoise Pfaff remarks that, "his main concern is to tell an interesting, unified, and plausible story, with one major theme and no confusing subplots…This is why his films are characterized by an overall clarity of narration adapted to African audiences as a comprehensible, identifiable whole…For him…a linear progression is essential" (1984, 79). By favoring a linear narrative mode, Sembene further separates himself from what we have seen with Mambety. Usually, this type of narration translates onto film through long sequences (shot in long and medium shots) and a minimal discontinuity in time, as opposed to the heavy editing and temporal fragmentation of *Touki-Bouki*. In addition to the preponderant long and medium shots, a Sembene shot frames the subjects in such way that they are fully incorporated into the action, which suggests a continuous symbiosis between character and the surroundings. The result is that Sembene's stories begin to resemble more those of the griots, given the fact that these stories also showcase a clear linear progression, with a well-defined "hero."

On the connection to the griot, Sembene himself notes that "the artist must be in many ways the mouth and the ears of his people. In the modern sense, this corresponds to

the role of the griot in traditional African culture. The artist is like a mirror. His work reflects and synthesizes the problems, the struggles, and the hopes of his people." (as quoted by Pfaff, 29) One of the subgroups of *his people*, the outcasts, allows for another connection between the modern filmmaker and the griot to materialize. The outcasts of society are usually represented by beggars and physically challenged people. As observed by Pfaff (34), these unfortunate people are often a part of West African oral stories, and they certainly show up in Sembene's films, especially in *Xala* where they play a very important role. Sembene stays close to the people, and in real life he is well-known for his level of involvement with an audience. He would often be present for a showing of his films, and then stay on to dialogue and discuss the social issues with the spectators. That kind of interchange is furthermore similar to the direct contact that has always existed between the griot, storyteller, and his or her live audience. This type of contact has been made possible through sound: in the case of the griot, it is the simple act of speaking up in front of the crowd; however, in the case of the filmmaker, sound takes on multiple facets and roles.

The use of sound in these films is the most important link between the visual story of films and traditional oral storytelling. As mentioned before, Sembene is not as subversive in the way he uses sound as Mambety or Godard are. He advocates natural sound, and rejects the heavy employ of music on the soundtrack. Nevertheless, as it is the case with images and shots, Sembene does sometime go against the norm, and chooses to subvert traditional filming technique. He occasionally extends the subversion technique from the visual to the aural, like the distorted or amplified noises he employs in *Emitai*

(1971). Similar amplification or reduction of sound is used in *Xala*, as I will demonstrate later. Other sound-related choices are revealed when Sembene talks to Françoise Pfaff: he first tackles the topic of sound by saying he is interested in silences and gives an example from *Emitai*, of two children walking in a forest. The natural sounds of the leaves, and the trees, bring about for him the "cinema of silence" (Pfaff 63). Thus silence can be understood as complete quietness—a complete lack of any sound on the track—but also as natural sounds occurring during lack of dialogue. In *Xala*, there are no such instances, and even the trip that the main character takes to a village is accompanied by music on the soundtrack. To Sembene, "music is made to stress, to accentuate, or to intensify the action of the film…music works like a signal" (Pfaff 65). In my analysis of the film, I will return to the ways in which the director chooses to incorporate music into the story, because I think that the use of sound and music in *Xala* allows for the formation and completion of Sembene's social dream of unifying the African community. Strengthening my argument is Mpoyi-Buatu's assessment that "music, *our* music can bring about the rediscovery of speech, of a language, but a critical language. That is the only way we can get *our* own modernity and cease always to be ruled by the modernity of others" (66, my emphasis). The concept of community again comes through strongly. Even though Sembene brings people together mainly through the use of image and the visual, sound and music remain important because they indicate the path taken to modernity: through the oral habits of the griot—the storyteller or singer who adds cohesiveness to the community.

The connection to the oral tradition, and to the role of the griot, is an important aspect in the attempt to fully understand Ousmane Sembene's aesthetics. Unlike the New Wave, which accounts for the other half of my project, African cinema does not emerge as a full-body of work from pre-existing movements, theories, or schools of thought. Instead, each African director is obviously influenced by their formation as filmmakers, and by the current trends in cinema. Sembene's films, however, are not stripped entirely of pre-existent traditions. The structure and delivery of *Borom Sarret* echoes Italian Neo-realism, for example. Actually, all of Sembene's films are not glamorous productions overall; they are mostly realistic, and produced on low-budgets. As Pfaff observes, "Francophone African filmmakers are primarily interested in reflecting its (that of the continent) transition from tradition to modernity. They tend to focus on the contemporary sociopolitical and economical forces at work on particular groups of people in designated geographic areas" (Pfaff 14). As a result the themes encountered in those films, and in particular in the films of Sembene, include life in the rural areas, rural migration, poverty in the city, cultural and social alienation, the corruption of the new powers in the government, education, the status of women, emigration etc. The separation of categories that we have seen in the Mambety chapter, according to Diawara and Gabriel, could be reused in the case of Sembene. However, I feel that his films escape categorizations because of their exceptional thematic breadth. All these thematic elements feed off one another, and we can even add Mybe Cham's topics to the amalgam created by Sembene's films. Cham's views, as mentioned in Chapter II, include conflicts between cultures, challenges posed by post-colonial life, disillusionment with political independence,

declining quality of life, political instability and corruption, rethinking gender and gender roles and expectations, or the need to rewrite African history from an African point of view.

That point of view on history brings us back to the individual, who, I repeat, is as important as the community in my view. Most critics agree that Sembene emphasizes communal over individual space, but I think he does so *by way of* the individual space. In other words, he starts out small, and from a precise focus on each individual character, he creates a larger context, a community, which eventually takes over as the most important aspect of the film.[58] The importance of communal space comes from the following connection: one of the capital traits of traditional African life is the collective aspect. That aspect seems to lose force in the context of the city, in which the characters are often depicted as out of place. Nevertheless, the collective aspects of traditional African life are brought to light, in spite of the difficulties of adjusting to life in a large, modern city. If anything, the desired effect is that the collective aspect of the African village is reconciled with the alienation of the individual in the city. Thus, a meshing of the two is required, and Sembene signals both the importance of tradition, and also demands progress and modern rebuilding. The outcome of this dual process remains inconclusive, and requires an exercise in projection from the audience, as suggested in a few of Sembene's films that end in a freeze frame, most famously in *Xala*, but also in *Black Girl*

[58] Let me give an example of such progression. At the beginning of *Xala*, we see each invidual member of the Chamber of Commerce in their own private space, hovering over their briefcases full of money. Then we move to El Hadji, and from his actions we discover the larger context of the corrupted African businessman. A type of community emerges from each of these separate individuals.

and *Ceddo*. The film pauses, albeit in its ending, to allow the spectator to form his or her own opinion: "Sembene's freeze frame invites the viewers to find their own conclusions beyond the confines of the story or in their immediate reality" (Pfaff 52). The spectator doubles in this instance for the African subject caught between the world of tradition, and the advent of technology. They both have to pause and reconsider their place. According to the director himself in an interview with Noureddine Ghali: "film simply serves us as a canvas on which to reflect together with each other. What is important is that cinema becomes eye, mirror and awareness" (Ghali 46).[59] The idea of "togetherness" comes back to emphasize the importance of common thought, common analysis, and a common goal—awareness—all in the context of the public sphere of the community.

Before moving into a close analysis of the film *Xala*, which deals with all the issues mentioned above, I would like to place it within the context of Sembene's other films, some of which have already been mentioned, and signal amid those the sporadic presence of similar problems and concerns. His first film, *Borom Sarret* (1964) tells the story of a cart driver who has to go from the outskirts of Dakar to the center, the downtown area which is predominantly a rich neighborhood. The cart driver is the perfect example of someone placed in an unfamiliar space—another representative of marginality. Interestingly, the director lends his own voice to the cart driver, thus setting himself up as being on the margins of society, too. This twenty-minute film becomes an odyssey because it is impossible to reconcile the two parts, the rich and the poor—there is no peaceful co-existence. When the main character finally passes the borderline, the

[59] All the references from the interviews with Ghali are from *Film & Politics*, edited by John Downing, 1987.

distinction between the two worlds is emphasized by a radical change in the soundtrack: we move from the simple and quieter Wolof string instrument, the xalam,[60] to Mozart. This instrument is heavily used in *Xala* as well. The separation between social classes is emphasized through the power of sound and music, through an opposition between tradition and Mozart who represents the exclusive world of the West. The same dichotomy is explored in another context, this time visually: there is a sharp contrast between the motion of motor vehicles, representing modernity, and the slowness of the cart. The slowness is even further highlighted in a separate scene in which the man who drives the cart stops to pray, and the camera follows all of his slow gestures.

A comparable contrast appears in a more recent film, *Faat Kiné* (2000). Within the same space of the city, women carry their babies strapped on their back and at the same time transport buckets of water on their head; but this space also includes European luxury cars. The beginning shot of the film shows a few women carrying those buckets on their heads as they make their way through traffic; the camera follows them from a high-angle and then it begins to zoom out, revealing the downtown area of Dakar, *La Place de l'Indépendence*, and distancing itself from the group. This type of progression follows a tendency to move from the particular to the universal, the big picture. In addition, there are two more such instances, where the camera, placed somewhere high, gives a panoramic view of the busy city. What these shots do is to allow the spectator to take everything in, and maybe even accept urban sprawling and development. The opposition between tradition and the emergence of modernity in Dakar is repeatedly

[60] This is a small instrument with three or four strings and tight skin head, held horizontally. It is called *ngoni* in Bambara, and *hoddu* by the Toucouleurs along the Senegal river.

made obvious, and in the main character of this film, the independent Faat Kiné, we may be seeing an older version of the character of Rama, El Hadji's daughter in *Xala*.

Faat Kiné is indeed Sembene's defining feminist text in which women actually begin to own trophies, instead of being one. Faat Kiné is a modern woman, who has her own business, and is for the most part autonomous as far as men are concerned. She does not take out loans or accept foreign currencies, in stark contrast with *Xala*'s El Hadji. She has lunches with her friends and they openly talk about sex, touching upon such topics as HIV and condoms, or even Viagra. In this era of television monopoly, one could make the connection to the popular television series, *Sex and the City*. Much like the characters of that show, Kiné and her friends also represent the modern, sexually liberated woman. However, Sembene makes sure to have shown the price she paid to obtain her freedom—the scars of her back from the beating by her father, and also the deceptions in her love life (her two children are with two different men, who both walked out on her). It is in a way a warning that her success can be short-lived and that the independence she has won came with a price and it will be hard to sustain. She not only represents an alternative for women, but her actions offer an alternative to the Senegalese men, who still look elsewhere (to the West) for help; people should free themselves from the influence of the West. She represents a pillar in the new vision of the Senegalese economy, but maybe even more importantly, she pulls after her two other generations—her crippled mother, Mammy, and her daughter Aby, who has just passed the BAC.

Sembene's vision for the new generation is made clear when Kiné's son, Djib, also a 'bachelier,' shares his dreams of exploring Senegal and also of studying abroad,

but, most importantly, he stresses the desire to come back. Moreover, when he talks about his vacation time, he says he wants to travel inside the country and "discover it." This is the part missing from most teenagers' dreams; America and the West are the destination desired for a better life (or at least for vacationing) and for bettering one's self, but no one talks about going back. In *Xala*, the suggestion that people should work in their own country is taken farther, as Rama is actually enrolled at the university in Dakar; consequently the country holds on to its values and valuable, smart people. The director thus critiques the direction taken by many of the Senegalese youth, and he continues his quest to counter the values of the West by invoking the necessity of a return[61] and reevaluation of African values, as well as an increased appreciation for what the mother-land has to offer.

Beyond beginning to establish an insightful disparity between the values of the West and those of Senegal and Africa, Sembene's films use various other oppositions that contribute to the social commentary: modernity-tradition, poor-rich, black-white etc. For example in *Guelwaar* (1992), there is a shot of a Jeep completely disappearing behind a baobab tree; in this case, again, we have the conflation of the Africans with the West because they buy such a typical American car. However, this car, an object, is literally erased from the frame by the traditional Senegalese tree, the baobab. Once the Jeep is no longer seen, there are no more disruptive Western elements, and the audience can admire the long shot revealing the beauty of the landscape. *La Noire de…* (1966) which is based on the dichotomy between white and black, mirrors the difference between the rich white

[61] Sembene may be fighting a lost battle here.

French and a poor Senegalese maid. The main character's position is always emphasized by the use of high angle shots, when for example she cleans the kitchen floor; the floors in the house are painted in black and white stripes, so the subliminal message that the audience gets is that Diouna, the black maid, is imprisoned in that house. But everything else seems to be reduced to the black and white dichotomy: the dress Diouna wears, even the whisky consumed by the Frenchman is labeled "Black and White," and the final shot of dead Diouna: a black body in a white bathtub.

The separation between whites and blacks is relevant to the context of the film *Camp de Thiaroye* (1987), which deals with the interaction between the Senegalese tirailleurs, freshly returned from the war front, and their French counterparts. The tirailleurs are closed off in a camp, and the camera underlines the disconnection of the soldiers with the outer world through a very effective alternation between a close-up shot, and then a long shot of the barbwire surrounding the camp. These shots are repeated, along with the interjection of still shots from Nazi camps, suggesting that there is no difference between this camp and the concentration camps during World War II. Sembene, thus, brutally aligns the treatment of the Nazis toward the Jews with the treatment of the French army toward their supposed allies, the Senegalese tirailleurs. The French officers are portrayed as being scared, cowardly, uncultivated, and racist. One of the main characters, on the other hand, the Senegalese officer Diatta is seen reading Western literature, and he is the only one who speaks English, and thus able to communicate with the American allies. Officer Diatta transcends the role of a simple soldier. Sembene constructs a new prototype of the Senegalese soldier, smart and well-

instructed, which opposes the stereotypical French opinion and treatment of the tirailleur, seen mostly as an expendable property. That French view of the tirailleur is confirmed in the ending of the film, which unveils a complete massacre of the camp by French tanks.

This film is made entirely with funds from Senegal, Tunisia and Algeria, and none from France, so it is meant as a clear indictment of the economical manipulation coming from the West because the most common problem in African cinema stems from production issues, and thus is finance-related. If a film is sponsored by the country's government, then it is made mainly for a local and specific population, and it could take the form of a tourist film or a president's portrait; if a film is financed by Westerners, then it poses the problem of crossing into other cultures and no longer being necessarily recognized as authentic, African work. Sembene famously had to mortgage his house in order to finance *Ceddo* (1977), and he is one of the few directors who have strived to maintain control over his films by producing them as much as possible out of his own pocket. A direct result of low budgets for his films has been the decision to shoot outdoors, and use natural light (thus not having to hire light technicians for indoor filming), much like the French New Wave and Italian Neo-Realism directors did. Often, the choice to shoot outdoors in natural light is linked by critics to the preference for a linear narrative mode in an attempt to model realism. While there is truth to that, the lack of finances cannot be ignored. Similarly, Sembene appears to favor hand-held camera, which is quite prevalent in *Xala*. However, this chance points again to the fact that the lack of financing implies a lack of tripods, dollies, cranes etc.

Shooting a film in Africa means overcoming many other difficulties, most of those stemming from a lack of an infrastructure: shooting in 16mm,[62] no access to film stock, no film equipment, no laboratories, dubbing studios or good technicians. As a consequence, during the credits for African films, the names of the technicians, whether for sound, for image and cinematography, or post-production, are mostly Western names. Another problem is at the level of distribution, which is fine within the respective countries of production, but becomes problematic when films have to be circulated outside the country and in the West. Even within the countries, sometimes independent films have a hard time reaching an audience. However, there is an increasing presence of African cinema at Western film festivals, but unfortunately, not much more beyond that, and in Sidney Sokkona's view, "at the moment, the survival of African film partly depends on the West." The dependence on the West is heavily criticized by Sembene in *Guelwaar*, in which the main character advocates no longer asking for help and supplies from the West (no longer begging!). In *Xala*, his attack is even more virulent.

The quintessential Sembene film is *Xala*, because it touches upon all those issues, while really focusing on both the struggle with modernity and on offering an alternative to women. Although the film was made in 1974, and it was released the following year, it remains relevant today because of its thematic richness. The main character, El Hadji, wants to take on a third wife, but has a spell cast on him so he cannot consummate the marriage, and, at the same time, he loses control over his business, goes bankrupt, loses his second and third wives, and ends up surrounded by his first family but having to

[62] Although Sembene's feature films all use 35 mm film.

confront some bad decisions from the past. The film begins with a close-up of a djembé—a traditional Senegalese drum—and it moves into a medium shot of the drummer, as the camera tilts up from his hands tapping the African drum, to a female dancer, and then it eventually pans out to reveal the outside of the Chamber of Commerce. This kind of transition, from small to large, is very typical of Sembene, as was already mentioned in the case of the opening for *Faat Kiné*, and it goes against the usual norms of classic Hollywood cinema, which emphasizes movement from general to specific.

A classic example is the work of Alfred Hitchcock, and I will only make reference to one of his most famous shots. In *Notorious* (1946), the camera moves on a crane from the top of a ballroom all the way into a close-up of Ingrid Bergman's hand, which opens up to reveal a key. This is the object around which the entire scene is constructed, and on which rests the suspense element (one might say it represent the *key* element). My inclusion of Hitchcock here is not gratuitous, as Sembene himself mentions the master of suspense when discussing music and soundtrack with Pfaff, saying that music in Hitchcock's films announces suspense (Pfaff 65). Although I think that there are some connections between the two directors, especially with regard to their concern that a film should present a "good story,"[63] the important thing to establish at this point is the tendency to go against the norms of Western cinema, which Hitchcock represents. I have pointed to a similar tendency in the films of Mambety, and the long, static shots which follow a character moving from the right side of the frame, all the way to the left side,

[63] It is quite vague what Hitchcock means by "good," but I assume he refers to the necessity of an interesting plot, something that keeps the audience involved.

where they exit the frame. The right to left movement counters the typical Western (reading) habits, from left to right. On a more literal level, the patience of the camera emphasizes the way time unfolds in many African societies: things move more slowly, and the pace of life is far less rushed than what it is in the West.

The opposition to the West is further established in the next sequence as we witness a few Senegalese men cleaning a fictitious Chamber of Commerce of all Western symbols. At the same time, another opposition takes place at the level of sound, as the drums are drawn out, and we hear a male voice-over addressing a "Mr. le Ministre." There is a stark contrast between the reference to a minister and the image, still lingering on the female dancer; a glaring discrepancy is created between social strata. The men outside the Chamber place all the objects on the steps in front of the building: two sculpture busts (one of which is of Marie Antoinette), and a pair of soldier boots that can only be the boots of a tirailleur. Sembene himself actually enlisted during the war and fought in the ranks of the tirailleurs. The statue of Marie-Antoinette's bust was initially censured at home,[64] along with ten other shots, although the film was shown in its entirety abroad; it was only on the territory of Senegal that those scenes remained suppressed, but Sembene declared that he did everything possible, including adding pamphlets to the distribution of the film, so that the people were aware of the missing ("amputated" as he called it) pieces. The soldier boots and busts show a refusal of both the influence of ancient European thought and art, and the contemporary French socio-

[64] I can only speculate as to why, since it is not clearly specified by Sembene, but I would think that such an important French symbol could escalate discussions/conflicts within the Senegalese government between those supporting complete independence from the French, and those who still have strong connections with the French government.

political involvement. The voice-over becomes the voice of the people when it states emphatically that once moved in this direction, "we can't turn back." The use of the pronoun "we" includes the voice-over, which one can associate with the director, as it becomes a part of the revolution. Furthermore, the presence of a quintessentially European art form—sculpture[65]—contrasts with the beginning of the film, which is heavily dominated by traditional Senegalese sounds, African music and dances. Two art forms collide, and the subtext is that Sembene's film—with film being yet another medium that emerged from the West—tries to establish itself as an original African art form.

After the beginning sequence, we move inside, where we witness a meeting of the committee of this fictional Chamber of Commerce, which really doubles for the Senegalese government, or any form of authority in Senegal. The men are all shown as corrupt: when they all open the briefcases placed in front of them by a white official, one can see that the briefcases are full of cash (interestingly, though, the bribe is in Senegalese francs, not in foreign currency). The bribing scene is another one of the censored episodes. As the president of the committee speaks, we notice the map behind him, and it is a regular, divided Africa map. The presence and placement of the map is not haphazard, because it emphasizes in this instance that the corrupt political man will not bring the African nations together, and there is heavy indication in Sembene's work (and, as we have seen also in Mambety's, with *La Petite vendeuse*…) that African

[65] I am thinking here of sculpture in marble in the context of Ancient Greece. I am aware that one could argue that sculpture is quintessentially African, too, although I would imagine the main resource would be wood.

directors call for a better sense of community between African countries. Throughout my analysis of the film, I will make several comments about the maps on the wall, culminating with the dialogue/confrontation between El Hadji and his daughter, Rama. Graphic and visual signs abound in Sembene's films, and especially in *Xala*. Other such references can be found in *Black Girl* (a poster of Lumumba) and *Emitai* (a poster depicting the colonial army).

Going back to the president of the Chamber of Commerce, his words also suggest that he is stuck in a certain type of tradition: "modernity mustn't make us lose our Africanity." In this instance, Africanity refers to a set of values and rules that favor the rich, and the male. There is certainly ambivalence concerning this word, Africanity, and we see different variations of it throughout the film. The main character, El Hadji, varies his understanding of the word, but we also have clear-cut, opposing examples. The president on the one hand represents the negative connotation because he supports the ways of the past; Rama, the daughter, suggests a positive outcome because she embodies a new hope for the future women of Senegal. When El Hadji stands up for the first time, and he speaks, his convictions are deeply negative; there is a map behind him as well, and interestingly, when he stands up, his head obscures the entire West side of the African map. By supporting his president, and taking the bribe as his colleagues do, El Hadji begins his journey on the negative side. *Xala* is, among many things, his journey to recovery and absolution.

When the men of the committee walk out of the Chamber, we witness another clash at the level of sound. There are a lot of car noises, in fact present throughout the

film, but there is also a repetitive sound of a siren, not the typical police/ambulance car type, which comes in later, but rather a monotonous, regular and somewhat muffled sound. This reminds us of the use of sound I explored in Mambety's films, although in this instance, sound is used more to accompany the exit of the political men (therefore, the repetitive siren announces, or rather alarms us because of their negative association with accidents or death). The sound of the siren does not create a different narrative plane, as explained in the Mambety chapter. Even though Sembene is not known, or recognized, for inventions at the level of film, or sound, because he rarely chose to stylize the shots of his movies, the use of sound in *Xala*, and most importantly, the soundtrack, cannot be completely ignored. As a modern griot, a man who sees cinema as an opportunity to tell a story and continue the West African oral tradition, Sembene had to use the medium of sound to his advantage. Thus, even though he does not add disruptive elements to the synchronous soundtrack, the choices of sounds emphasized or subdued, or of the music, really help bridge the gap between storytelling on/in film and the traditional, oral storytelling in the Senegalese villages.

Sound is prevalent in the beginning of *Xala* because of the insistence on honkings. As the political men leave, they all get to their private cars, and the camera emphasizes the separation, as it follows the same action taken by three different men. It is a long, slow, and repetitive take, but it establishes the connection and affection of these men for their European luxury cars. The car is another Western element that has deeply penetrated African culture, and it has separated the people from tradition. We rarely see these men in outdoor spaces, as they move from inside of the Chamber, to the comfort of their cars. In

a later sequence, El Hadji travels to a village in search of a cure for his curse, and we see him sweat and suffer in the heat, because he and his driver have to get there by carriage. He is uncomfortable being outside of his air-conditioned white Mercedes, which doubles as a modern and mocking version of a white horse—El Hadji is a far cry from a knight.

As he and his driver move away from the city, the camera separates itself from the action as the shot progresses from a long shot to an extreme long shot. More separation is created through montage, as the film cuts from the German car to a carriage moving slowly in the dusty sub-Saharan desert. Sembene has a tendency to alternate between long shots and close-up shots depending on the context of the story. He "favors long shots, panoramic shots, and eye-level shots (in rural areas), while in urban settings he uses more close-ups, medium shots, and more sophisticated camera and lens movement, as well as contrasting shots with varied angles to delineate his protagonists' conflicts in unfamiliar territory" (Pfaff 50). The technical remark is certainly true for the one trip to the village in *Xala*; however, even in the long shots, El Hadji is unmistakably in unfamiliar territory in the village, as opposed to the city where he feels at ease. The first image of his white Mercedes on a dusty road in the middle of nowhere is a long shot, and it signals the obvious separation between urban and rural elements. When the camera goes in closer to a medium shot, it reveals his face covered in sweat, and consequently him wiping it. El Hadji is still in an urban setting inside his car, which supports Pfaff's observation. He brings the city to the village, and as we will see shortly, that transfer does not work very well.

Sembene insists on the fact that the business and political men portrayed in *Xala* are dependent on comfortable transportation. The car is really of great importance, but to the members of the Chamber, not to anyone else, most of whom are seen walking. As the men leave and head to El Hadji's wedding, there is a cut away to the future bride, who is also in a car, and who in fact is exchanged for a car, because El Hadji brings one as a gift to her family. From here on, the camera follows the bridal procession in five different shots, all from above, high angle, and hand held. The distance of the camera allows for an appreciation of the city of Dakar, which is revealed in a panoramic view. The constant and annoying honking is reminiscent of Jean-Luc Godard's *Week-End* tracking shot, which we analyzed in the first chapter. In this case too, an over-saturation of city life with automobiles is suggested. The ad nauseam repetition of the same piercing sound creates a certain level of distanciation, much like in Mambety and Godard. The spectators are forced to listen to chaotic sounds of the street, and they suddenly become aware of the exaggeration of noise. The noise begins to mean something else, something other than just the noise of the city, which is, as a large metropolis, quite raucous. But it becomes obvious that the continuous honking has an alternative purpose. Sembene uses this repetition of noises to punctuate the fact that the wedding between El Hadji and Ngoné is not a regular alliance that happened because the two were in love. The spectators now associate the annoying honking with the wedding; the latter then carries the same level of negativity as the boisterous streets. On another level, the distance that the camera exhibits also suggests that this is a new situation; that the face of the city is newly transformed,

and that the Senegalese individual is not yet used to the ruckus created by the advent of modernity, and by the multitude of cars roaming the streets of Dakar.

In contrast to all the cars, we get several shots of people walking in the street, or of legless beggars crawling around, but these images are much more prevalent and poignant in Mambety's work where a certain degree of stagnation is suggested; Mambety suggests that the road toward progression tends to falter, which is not the case for Sembene's films. Mambety abandons his characters in a steady state of alienation, while Sembene pushes for a re-acclimation of the individual to the current challenges of alienation. However, in the latter's work, the distinction between motorized as opposed to un-motorized seems to be more clearly delineated, as El Hadji is shown as being out of his element without the car, while the beggars are always on foot and appear to control the entire space of the city. The beggars, who in the end turn out to be mainly peasants who came to the city to find a solution for the drought, also provide enough of a mass to begin to balance the representation of the social strata. There is a heavy presence of the bourgeoisie in the beginning of the film, and at the wedding; in turn the later stages of the film are dominated by the more unfortunate social groups, as Sembene changes the focus onto marginal groups.

There is much to be said about Sembene's views on the nouvelle bourgeoisie of Senegal, which to him only tries to emulate the European bourgeoisie. To explain the background of the evolution of the nouvelle bourgeoisie in Senegal, and for that matter in all other colonial/colonized countries which have achieved their independence and freedom, one has to look at the writings of Franz Fanon, and in particular at his ideas in

The Wretched of the Earth. A central point of his argument concerns the troublesome transition to power after gaining independence: "the national middle class which takes over power at the end of the colonial regime is un underdeveloped middle class. It has practically no economic power, and in any case it is in no way commensurate with the bourgeoisie of the mother country it hopes to replaces" (Fanon 149). This new social class does not look out for the good of the people, it looks out for its own wealth (like the Western bourgeoisie), thus creating not only a new bourgeois, but in fact a new type of colonial power—the neo-colonial. The people who come to power right after independence is gained act very much like the old colonizers. The similarities come also from the fact that these people have to rely on a continuous trade with the former colonial power, because the economic welfare of the country still depends on that relationship.

However, Fanon believes that the relationship does not usually generate enough capital to support a real bourgeoisie: "the basis of its strength (the national bourgeoisie) is found in its aptitude for trade and small business enterprises, and in securing commissions….it cannot achieve that accumulation of capital necessary to the birth and blossoming of an authentic bourgeoisie" (1965, Fanon176). As a consequence, what we are left with is a "copy-cat" bourgeoisie, which comes under heavy criticism from Sembene. In his own words, "our African bourgeoisie currently has no ambition other than to be a copy of the western bourgeoisie; you have to see its manner of holding receptions, its etiquette; you have to listen to its speeches—it speaks to the peasants in French" (Ghali 43). Sembene puts into practice his beliefs, and the entire wedding ceremony is designed to replicate these unnatural habits. At one point, during the

wedding, Oumi, the second wife, picks up the plastic models sitting atop the wedding cake, and she makes a face. The two plastic figures are of a white couple; this fact, along with the lavish Western wedding dress points to the desire of the new bourgeoisie not only to emulate the Western counterpart, but to a desire to impress and dazzle. There is an obvious physical separation between the street and the garden where the wedding is taking place, and that gap is widened by the presence of beggars on the outside as well. The crowd on the outside can only look at the rich guests walking inside the courtyard where the wedding will take place. A little poor boy wants to pick up one of the coins thrown "generously" by El Hadji, but he cannot because of a police officer who steps on it. His scrapping for just one coin is juxtaposed with the lavishness of the party inside.

Amid all of the wedding preparations, and the women's shrills (which in fact allows for a nice transition from the honks of the cars, to the actual wedding ceremony punctuated often by those traditional shrieks), we get to know one of the most important characters in the film, El Hadji's daughter, Rama. Rama is the perfect representation of the direction Sembene is suggesting that the new Senegalese woman should take. She is a student at the university in Dakar, drives a moped, and seems to be independent from her father's finances; when he offers her money she says she does not need it. The first confrontation takes places right before the wedding. Rama had urged her mother to get a divorce, to which Adja responded negatively, and explained her position of dependence on El Hadji. But Rama does not have to accept the same rules that had governed the women of Senegal. She speaks up and declares that she would never share her husband with another woman. When El Hadji comes out in the living room, Rama is sitting down,

but then she stands up in order to let her body and gestures support her attack. She says that, “every polygamous man is a liar,” clearly stating the women’s position on the issue. She stand up for women, and stands up to her father, while physically standing up as well. However, El Hadji makes her repeat the words, and then subsequently strikes her hard across the face, sending Rama to the ground. He yells at her, “do your revolution elsewhere,” and then adds that he was one of the people who sent out the colonizers. We thus return one more time to the words of Franz Fanon on the new type of bourgeoisie who act like the old colonizers. In other words, they become the new oppressors using violence to achieve their ends.

The conflict with the daughter is on-going, and the two present themselves in sharp opposition. This is made very evident in a scene later in the film, when Rama confronts her father one more time, this time at the workplace. When she walks in, they are framed together in a medium shot, from the side. She wears African clothing, and he is still dressed in his European suit. As they begin to speak to one another, and she states her worries about Adja, an interesting interaction takes place: the father addresses Rama in French, while the daughter insists on using Wolof, the traditional language. I want to make a point here about the director’s preference for the native tongue; while some directors choose to shoot in French because it allows for wider circulation abroad, Sembene always favored Wolof because he felt that “Senegalese reality is better expressed in an African language rather than an alien tongue inherited from colonialism” (Pfaff 25). As we move into a shot-countershot formation, we see each character in a medium close-up. The shot-reverse shot is a quintessential part of the grammar of film

that Sembene and others inherited from Western film. This type of sequence is meant to emphasize the psychological implications of the relationship between two characters. I will expland on this point in my discussion of Kaja Silverman's understanding of suture. Sembene decides to move away from the long shot and the long take in this episode, because the internal struggle occurring between father and daughter is more important than their physical placement in space. This episode accounts for an example of the director's willingness to break away from stylistic trends, such as the prevalence of the long shot in African film, in order to adapt to the requirements of a particular scene.

When Rama speaks, we notice behind her a map, this time though, it is a map of unified Africa, with no separation between countries. In a general comment, without reference to any of the maps, Pfaff notes that the daughter "serves as a metaphor for a future Africa, unified and powerful, having erased the boundaries imposed by nineteenth-century Western colonialism" (159). To the left of El Hadji, another map is visible, the same type we saw before in the Chamber of Commerce, and which represents divided Africa. The two characters further the separation between the maps, as they represent divergent mentalities. In the medium close-up of El-Hadji a two-litter bottle of Evian water takes the foreground. He had offered some to his daughter, but she refuses, "I don't drink imported water." In contrast, El-Hadji just had his driver wash the car with Evian water, and the latter also pours the same kind of water in the car's carburetor. Eventually, the father erupts and asks Rama why she does not use the French language. She stands up, and heads to the door, and does not answer the question directly, but addresses to him some last words, still in Wolof. The separation between the two is thus further underlined

by adding the aspect of language: the new woman surprisingly suggesting a return, in some ways, to tradition, to speaking the national language, which in fact is taken as a step toward emancipation. Sembene exposes Rama's overall confidence and security in her own future as the stepping stones in the process of emancipation, but he does so via the traditional language.

As Rama exits, the map of a unified Africa is now to her left, and once she has moved beyond the frame the camera lingers a little bit before the next transition, just in case the audience had missed the detail. As with the map on the wall, the camera also insists more than usual on the posters in Rama's room. In an earlier sequence, Adja goes in to talk to her daughter. As she enters the room, she turns right, but the camera does not follow her immediately. Instead it stays upon the first poster, of Amilcar Cabral. When the mother leaves the room, we see another picture on the wall, of Samori Touré. Both are real heroes who have fought for the independence of Guinea and Mali, and they are representative historical figures of the anti-colonial struggle. Sembene in fact refers to Cabral as President, in an interview with Ghali, suggesting that Cabral should have been the rightful leader after he led the liberation movement in Guinea-Bissau. Cabral was a major proponent of the African liberation, a similar kind of liberation to which Sembene points in his films. Samori was just as important a leader in the fight against colonization, and he temporarily resurrected the Mali Empire by creating his own Islamic state which he defended from the French for almost twenty years during the late nineteenth century. As Rama's mother leaves the room, the door closes behind her and the audience can see a large Charlie Chaplin poster pinned on it. This may be a little more difficult to explain,

and most critics mention Cabral and Touré, but do not say anything about Chaplin. I understand the presence of a Chaplin poster as alluding to the lighter side of this film, which is considered by many to be a comedy, even a comedy of errors. In fact, Sembene has been equated by some to Molière because of prevalent choice topics such as impotence and cuckoldry. Moreover, Chaplin's character of the tramp[66] symbolizes liberty and the free spirit, both qualities sought by Rama.

Xala is certainly concerned with the role that the modern Senegalese woman plays in society. Of the other women characters, the two wives, Adja and Oumi provide an interesting generational clash. It is only the first wife, Adja, who remains very much traditional. She does not stand up to her husband, she wears traditional clothes, and is seen initially chewing on a stick, which is a very common practice among lower class Senegalese. In fact, I think that the director suggests that the lower class is more traditional, and hence, he opposes it to the new bourgeois habits of the higher class. Adja is an ambiguous character, because she seems to represent the lower class, but through her marriage she had ascended to a higher status. Pfaff appears to have found a version of the film that translates Adja's name as "Awa," which according to her, "refers to the original woman….without Eve's temptress connotations" (156). The connection of her name to the original woman makes sense: Adja/Awa is the first wife, a traditional presence who may represent the archetypal African woman because she "personifies the

[66] Further connections can be made to explain the Chaplin poster: Chaplin was a very popular director/actor among the poorest classes of society. Sembene is a strong advocate of the lower class, the marginal people. Chaplin was also expelled from the US in 1952 for ostensible communist sympathies.

dignity, reserve, patience, and loyalty often attributed by African authors to the traditional African woman" (Pfaff 156). The audience is made very aware of the differences between her and Oumi, the second wife. When El-Hadji goes up in the house to get Oumi, she actually ends up yelling at him. She bosses him around, "Get up! Let's go!"; she asks for money, and is never satisfied with how much she gets, or with the frequency of his visits. When he gets angry, he stands up, but Oumi does the same thing immediately, and places her finger in his chest and pushes him down, as he grows quiet. There is an interesting similarity between the earlier scene in which El-Hadji slaps his daughter who had just stood up to him and this scene in which Oumi wins the argument and also imposes herself physically. However, I do not think that the implied suggestion is that Rama is on her way to becoming like Oumi. Instead, the director presents two variations of the modern woman. On the one hand, Oumi is the strong, young wife who dominates the older man, but who still subjects herself to traditional practices. On the other hand, Rama is a more hopeful representation of the future because she first establishes her independence from men, and from the confines of society. Oumi is simply an exception to the rule; Rama is the actual alternative for the modern African woman.

Concerning the two wives, one can easily see the differences between Adja and Oumi, even in the way they dress; the latter wears a wig, Western clothes and sunglasses, as opposed to a traditional booboo and a chewing stick. The contrast between the two women is most convincing when they both wait for the wedding ceremony to be over. They sit next to each other, and the clothing style and attitudes are radically different, with Oumi still wearing sunglasses indoors. There is in fact a suggestion reinforced by

the sunglasses that the private space, the indoors, is almost always affected by the outside space, and thus the personal and private give way to the general and communal. When El-Hadji talks to Oumi, the window of her room is open and the sounds of the city inundate the enclosed space. We hear, once again, the ruckus of the outside, the cars, and random voices of people. The same thing happens at the wedding, during the dialogue of the two women, the music from the outside carries over to the inside, even though the sound is somewhat muffled. The sound dominates both interior and exterior, and it dictates the reactions of the characters. Noise from outside can overwhelm a conversation happening on the inside, or even become the actual focus of the scene, like in the two cases above, Oumi's room and at the wedding.

Yet there are clearly differences between inside and outside, differences that establish certain levels of alienation endured by the characters. We have seen how El Hadji is rather uncomfortable when outside, and more in his element when indoors, in an air-conditioned room. In a later scene, when he requests a loan and discusses his demand with a bank officer, the two men joke about the necessity of the air-conditioning; El Hadji even goes as far as saying he is addicted to it, and cannot sleep without it being on. Conversely, all of the beggars, peasants, and physically challenged people we see, are outdoors, moving around, and about the city. In Sembene's view, the dependence on European gadgets points to the malaise of the contemporary African man and woman. The constant attempt of the new bourgeoisie to imitate the European one, which I have discussed above, only increases this malaise, and I will quote Sembene at length on the issue:

> For Black Africa's traditional culture no longer responds to and can no longer cope with urban development and its architectural structures. For this bourgeoisie only consults with European architects who come to hand out European models, without taking account of the way of life, the meaning of the family, the meaning of the civilization of Africa. The homes are designed for a single couple, whereas in African societies the dwellings are much more spread out, and much more ventilated. They build houses for us in order that we can then buy air-conditioning…We know all these little signs that are in the film, the air-conditioner and other things, and we observe that they alienate the individual. (Ghali 43)

The character of El Hadji never seems to suffer too much because of this alienation. He is unaware of its effects on him, and even thrives in a European context: suits, car, air-conditioning etc. His love for things all European, Evian water included, position him as an opposing force to tradition. And yet, tradition is embedded in his persona down even to his name, which implies that he has taken the quintessential and required Muslim trip to Mecca. In addition, he desires to take on a third wife, and he brags that his wives were all virgins. El Hadji maintains a strong level of ambivalence about who he really is throughout the film, and one of the characters who brings out his nature even more is the object of his desire, the third wife Ngoné.

Young Ngoné is a very important female character in spite of her lack of lines and dialogue. Her presence is not congruent with that of the other strong women in this film, Rama and Oumi. As a matter of fact she continues certain stereotypes of the young

African woman who is given away in an arranged marriage. Her presence, however, does provide for a heavier contrast with the emancipated women, and especially with Rama's vision for the future. We first see Ngoné in the car, headed to the ceremony, and there are several close-up shots of her veiled head. As I have discussed earlier and in the Mambety chapter, African directors tend to favor long shots and long take, in order to reveal as much as possible of the background and to let the story develop. The close-up is another part of the grammar of film that in the Western tradition of filmmaking is used to underline the emotions of the character, to dramatize a narrative moment, or to accentuate the relationship between the spectator and *a* cinematic subject. In other words, the close-up facilitates the identification of the spectator with the cinematic subject on screen, or, and this is why I italicize the indefinite article "a," the close-up may also underline the importance of an object. In a particular context, an object can become the cinematic subject of a shot, or even sequence of shots, like the famous key in Hitchcock's *Notorious*, which I previously mentioned. Ngoné's face is rarely shown, and the result is that she is stripped of her subjectivity.

We are also made aware of her beauty, and the use of the close-up here follows a trend among African directors: "to inscribe the beauty of the characters and their tradition" (Diawara 160). In similar fashion, in the next chapter we will see that Safi Faye frames Mossane, her main character, in close-ups too in order to emphasize her natural beauty. While Ngoné's beauty is certainly accentuated in those close-ups, the bride is wearing a traditional European white veil. The nouveaux Senegalese bourgeois identify themselves with European traditions in one of the most important social moments of

one's life—a wedding. However, there is definitely a sense of ambiguity at work in this scene, because the veil is also an Islamic symbol, and in this case it also obscures the face of the bride. The veil provides for separation between the audience and Ngoné, and the camera never penetrates far enough. The desire to see is denied. In a way, the metaphor of the camera being unable to reveal to us the true Ngoné parallels El Hadji's inability to consummate the marriage. In the end the message could be that Ngoné is not meant to be married, or at least not yet, not to El Hadji. Her virginity doubles for the virginity of the African land, and the beauty of its landscape. She is a daughter of the land, and she has to be preserved, not given away to a new bourgeois. Ngoné is another version of the modern African woman, and by extension, of Rama.

The separation of the audience from the character of Ngoné is made even more compelling in the scene before the wedding night. As El Hadji is in the bathroom, preparing, Ngoné is in the room with her mother. We never get a good direct look at the girl. Instead, she is placed to the right of the frame, and a poster of her (she is replaced by an image) on the wall seems to be the focal point of the shot. Even in this poster, she has her back turned, and the picture is taken from a three-quarter angle. Next to the poster, we see Ngoné's projected shadow; thus, we are twice made aware of her existence, and yet we never really see her on camera. The bride is split into two separate entities, and neither represents who she really is. She is dehumanized, once a photo, once a shadow, because she is transformed into an object. Further undermining her quality as a (speaking) subject is her mother whose voice we hear as we look at the poster and the shadow on the wall. The mother instructs her on how to behave on the night of her

wedding. This establishes the traditional role of the voice of the mother, which I will discuss in the next chapter. Unlike the findings of that discussion, in this particular instance, it suffices to say that the voice of the mother does not soothe. She says things like "man is the master," "don't raise your voice," or "be submissive," with the latter comment arguably re-establishing an order of the old. In spite of the efforts of a woman like Rama, this is the society women currently have to face, where tradition is upheld thanks to the male dominance, but also thanks to the complicity of older women.

The poster of Ngoné continues the tendency of the film to put visual markers on the walls, and we return to it in a subsequent scene. El Hadji travelled to look for a cure for his curse, and thinking that he found it, he returns. The voice of the marabout—the religious healer—is heard as voice-off as El-Hadji once again looks into a mirror and prepares for the first night with his new wife. It is the same exact bathroom, in which we saw him before during a visit, but with one essential detail changed. The mirror now is a triptych, which allows for three reflections of the character. The change is made evident because of the previous mirror shot, which yielded only one reflection—a shot that is repeated once again when his preparation is done. The mise-en-scène choice of the triptych mirror cannot be missed because is it flanked chronologically on either side by reflection shots in a regular mirror. The three reflections[67] of El Hadji suggest a further breakdown in his persona, as he is torn by everything that is happening to him; also, more of an obvious reference, is that he is about to deflower his third wife. As he crawls into the bedroom, following the marabout's advice, Ngoné is scared and moves away from

[67] Which also remind us of Truffaut's Antoine four reflections mentioned before.

him. She is in the foreground, to the left of the frame, and he enters from the right upper corner. The camera is placed behind the woman, and her beauty is further objectified, because we only see her bare backside, and then the camera moves up onto the poster one more time. The fact that we never really see her, or hear her, and yet we have seen her beauty literally on display makes her into an object of desire, with the emphasis on object perhaps even more than on desire. Sembene stages this scene in such way that the woman is effectively turned into an object, a prized possession, much like the picture on the wall, but in doing so, the director also denounces this objectification.

El Hadji's intention to marry a third wife has strictly to do with his social status. A wealthy man can afford more wives. The audience becomes aware of the fact that the woman in this instance is nothing more than an object, an element that could contribute to his social status, or even, more drastically, just property since he offers the family a car in exchange for the wedding.[68] There are several shots of the car, placed on a trailer outside the house; the car, like the woman, is on display for everyone to admire. And yet, in spite of the film's characterization of Ngoné as an object that carries on the cliché of the submissive African wife, she still provides a moment when she stands up to El Hadji. Significantly, it is her only line, but when he comes back "healed," she tells him she has her period, and he has to walk away, rather disappointed. The camera follows him in a long shot as he crosses the garden where two days before there was much celebration. This time he walks with his head down, also in heavy contrast with the shots of him traveling back from the village, healed. He is once again defeated. As he leaves Ngoné's

[68] Historically, marriage was sometimes construed a transaction in the West, too, but I think that it is the proliferation of such habits in the contemporary society that irks Sembene.

place, the camera follows his car going into the city and being virtually swallowed up by all the other cars and noises. El Hadji becomes a regular person who is lost in the immensity of the city, and amid all the noises, he loses all of his power. He is slowly pushed to marginality, as he becomes a Truffautian character: in the last shot of the film, there is a freeze-frame of him, reminiscent of Catherine from *Jules et Jim*, or of Antoine from *400 coups*. His face is turned to the right, and his body is almost out of the frame, similar to the way Ngoné is shot in the bedroom scene, but I will return to the analysis of the ending.

What interests me in relation to El Hadji's loss of power is the generalization to other political and/or bourgeois men, because the position occupied by these men in the current society is subject to heavy questioning by the director. Sembene subverts typical male primacy by rendering the main character "impotent." El Hadji loses his power at various levels, and the fact that he carries the *xala*—the curse that renders him unable to perform sexually—only emphasizes the fact that he loses control over everything else. He is not an astute businessman, he cannot keep his third, and then subsequently his second wife, and he is constantly challenged by his young daughter. There are other moments in the film when his alpha male status is challenged, like the instance when Ngoné's mother asks him to sit, naked, on a mortar so that he and his new wife have a good physical relation. When he refuses, her reaction is, "You're not a white man. You're nothing special." Gender and race struggles merge together in this scene, as Sembene tries to hit as many sensitive issues as possible. This also reminds us of Franz Fanon's separation of races, "the black man is sealed in his blackness" (1994, 9), and "(the black man) must be

black in relation to the white man" (1994, 110), which point to an impossibility of reaching across the races. The mother's harsh words for El Hadji are a close approximation of Fanon's ideas. The subversion of the African male, and in particular the African male businessman and new bourgeois, is forcefully continued throughout the wedding.

The director's attacks on African men who cannot manage their businesses are on display throughout the wedding ceremony. A few words on a historical juncture are needed here in order to understand fully the virulence of the director's remarks; in the same year the film was made, 1974, the government of Senegal had supported the emergence of private businesses. As noted by Soumanou Vieyra, "Many of those benefitting from the financial inducements instituted had managed their businesses so badly that they had gone bankrupt" (2000, *African Images* 37). This is of course the end result of El Hadji's business, but there are other examples. We witness several unrelated characters talking about their business, and about the way in which they conduct business. A first example is the two men who talk about sharing a percentage on a deal, and it is unimportant what deal exactly is under question. The film cuts to their ongoing conversation, and once they decide on a percentage to be shared, one of the two wants to pay with a check, to which the other one reacts negatively, "I leave no traces," and requests cash. Much as we saw in the beginning sequence when the officials open up briefcases full of money, the currency for African business is untraceable cash, suggesting that everyone has something to hide, and that their dealings are less than legal. Another couple of "politicians" run into one another at a door, and they invite each other

to step through the door first. They refer to each other metonymically, rather than using names: “you are the government,” “you are the people.” Responding to the last remark, the man representing the people decides to wait, “Alors, je reste,” and neither goes through the door. This scene is another significant instance where Sembene is mocking the (government) officials who represent the people, who do not take action, who wait and do nothing. Both sides, the people and the government do nothing, but for different reasons: the former is powerless, while the latter is ineffectual.

In similar fashion to the attacks on the useless and unconvincing businessmen, Sembene turns a very critical eye to the new bourgeoisie and its behavior. The masquerade begins with two young rich men talking about where they spend vacations. My assumption that they are rich comes from the fact that everyone invited to this “showy” wedding party seems to be in the upper social echelon; another clue as to the wealth of the guests is their clothing—all the men wear very nice, European suits. The young men, in a further revelation of their wealth, talk about vacationing in Spain, to which one of the two comments that he no longer goes there because “there are too many Negroes.” His friend continues by saying, “ah, the negritude travels (gets) around.” It is a glaring shot at a misunderstanding of the two young men about the Negritude movement and the teachings initialized by Césaire, Senghor, and Damas. However, there might be more to this than what we can see on the surface, since Sembene has not been a supporter of the movement, and has occasionally spoken against it.

What complicates the matter even more is the fact that the writings of Franz Fanon (a strong advocate of the Negritude movement) on the bourgeoisie mirror

Sembene's critique of it. The negritude movement was developed in the 30s and 40s in Paris, and it attempted to counter the racist and reductive views of African civilization and art by maintaining that black people were "peculiarly gifted in the art of immediate living, of sensual experience, or physical skill and prowess, all of which belong to them by birthright" (Ghali 52). Sembene's problem with the movement, beyond, perhaps, the simple fact that one of its leaders was Leopold Senghor, the first president of Senegal after the 1960 independence year, was that it emphasized some of the existing beliefs in the European-African dichotomy. That is to say that Europe was still seen as rational and technologically apt, while Africa was content with "being." The inclusion of the two young men who talk about the good life or travelling and vacationing speaks directly to this contentment and complacent behavior. Negritude does not advocate enough action for Sembene's taste, because the director favors a more militant and forceful attitude. According to Jean-Paul Sartre also, in his orphic introduction to the *Anthologie de la poésie noire*, negritude does lack a sense of action, because it projects "une certaine attitude affective à l'égard du monde" (6). Sembene appears to want more of a revolutionary attitude, rather than an affective one—more action, less sentiment and theorization.

In a diegetically unrelated episode, but one that continues to portray business men negatively, we witness the interaction of another couple of wealthy men, who are trying to seduce a young lady. Their discussion is interrupted by a question on the translation of the word "weekend" into English. The bourgeoisie is thus portrayed as ignorant, not knowing even something as elementary as the fact that the word "weekend" in French, is

actually borrowed from the English language.[69] The server who clarifies the question for the two gentlemen then walks away, and as he moves by the camera and out of the frame he grimaces and says "Shit" with a distinctive American accent, because his voice is dubbed and the sound post-synchronized in the studio. This word functions as an obvious disruption in the soundtrack, and it denotes the ridiculous nature of the question, underlined by the fact that a house servant actually knew the answer.

Finally, the third group that Sembene attacks during the wedding ceremony is that of the politician. We have seen from the beginning that these men are portrayed as corrupt and caring only about their own welfare. At the wedding, the three more important men from the Chamber Committee sit and talk about El Hadji's wedding night. In the background, just as it was in the Chamber of Commerce, a white official oversees the action. His role is never explained, and one can wonder about the level of influence he has on the political African man. The white man is the one who had originally placed the briefcases in front of everyone, so he represents the disruptive factor from outside the country, and the still powerful influence of the colonizing Hexagon, as well as the corrupting influence of money. We know he is French because his name is Dupont-Durand, and amusingly he has two last names, both of which are very common French names (an equivalent in English would be Smith-Jones), and which further confirms his background. These "officials" never talk about anything of substance, and at the wedding they end up discussing sexual prowess, as they give El Hadji advice for the wedding

[69] As a side note, I want to return briefly to my earlier comments about the highway shot from Godard's *Week-End*, to mention that the translation episode cements my belief that the car honking inundating the city of Dakar is indeed an extension or a reminder of the earlier New Wave film (*Week-End* came out in 1967).

night—they even suggest pills. Thus, it is not only El Hadji who suffers from impotence; it is suggested that the other men also need help to perform physically. Of course, the subtext refers back to their impotence, or inability, to lead a country. These men should not be in charge. When El Hadji is eventually removed from the Chamber of Commerce committee, at the end of the film, the members of the committee pick a man off the street as his replacement. We witness that man, Thieli, picking the pocket of a marabout in the street, and then walking into a store and getting himself a very nice suit and a cowboy hat. Basically, suggests Sembene, the only qualification one needs in order to be in a position of power is to own a fancy suit!

As the adventures of El Hadji continue with him struggling to find a cure for his impotence, the focus of the film shifts a little to the beggars in the street. We have multiple shots of beggars or of invalids walking the street, both of whom El Hadji calls "human rubbish," and even asks the police to come and disperse them. The police officers have a fictional name in this film, "cerbères," which is an allusion to the mythological three-headed dog that guards the gates of Hell. It is an interesting choice of a name for the police officers, who are thus painted as negative characters. A government organ like the police should serve the people and not abuse its power. The police officers, as Cerberus, use their power to guard an entry—the access to the higher governmental authorities. The government uses the police in order to separate its affairs completely from regular people. The metaphor of Cerberus can be carried further: Sembene suggests that the government has become a form of hell. Moreover, even though the Cerberus officers are employed by the Senegalese government, we see them led by a white man in

two different instances. Just as in the Chamber of Commerce scene, a white man seems to be in charge, and the end result is that the common man has to suffer; the invalids, who turn out to be villagers who came to the city looking for a solution to the drought that had hit villages, are arrested or dispersed by the "cerbères." The situation of the poor and their community is juxtaposed with that of the officials in the Chamber, or that of the rich and wealthy at the wedding. All the peasants walk together, and they end up together, as they all sit to drink coffee and share some bread. This community is the archetypal representation of an African/Senegalese community: people help and support one another. Of course, the reason for their presence in the city is two-fold, because they are also here to chase down El Hadji and punish him for having manufactured false evidence and stealing land from their villages.

With all the forces converging to ruin his life, El Hadji attempts to get a loan from a bank. This is the last resort, and unfortunately it does not work. When he exits the bank manager's office, he takes the elevator, and we get to see another half reflection: only the back of his head and half of his body are seen in the mirror of the elevator. He is to the left of the screen, announcing the ending in which he is also moved out of the center of the frame. When he faces his politician friends, he finally reverts to an old, lost image of himself, even beginning to speak in Wolof. He is immediately stopped by one of the committee members who reminds him that the official language is French. He is subsequently called a racist, and then a reactionary. To a certain extent, the admonishing he suffers from his peers is similar to the aggression he exhibited in the dialogues with Rama; she too, was deemed to be a reactionary. Naturally, his awakening is belated, and

he is spurned by the Chamber of Commerce. They take away his briefcase, the symbol of corruption, and they hand it to a new member, Thieli, who is just another thief as we noted earlier. El Hadji has finally hit rock bottom: the store is closed, the house in the city is lost and his family is evicted, and even his Mercedes is repossessed. The man in charge of repossessing the car cannot drive a foreign car, so the soldiers have to push it away. As the camera follows them, it then tilts up, and zooms in rapidly on the tower of a mosque. It is maybe suggested that all that El Hadji is left with is faith.

At this juncture of the film, the musical theme comes in loudly, and it is worth noting that Sembene wrote the song himself—an allegory about a lizard/leader who kills his peers whenever they walk behind him (because he fears being murdered himself), or in front of him (because they want to profit from his fortune), or they are as tall as him (because they want to be his equal). (Ghali 47) In his interview with Ghali, the director discusses this song, and I will quote him at length one more time:

> It's a sort of popular song that I wrote myself in Wolof. In one sense, it calls to revolt, to the struggle against injustice, against the powers-to-be, against the leaders of today….The songs are tied with the deeds and gestures that I have written. They did not come from folklore….It ends something like this: 'Glory to the people, to the people's rule, to the people's government, which will not be government by a single individual. (Ghali 47)

Sembene's lyrics remind us once again of Fanon's writings: "The national government…ought to govern by the people and for the people, for the outcasts and by the outcasts….ought first to give back their dignity to all citizens, fill their minds and

feast their eyes with human things, and create a prospect that is human because conscious and sovereign men dwell therein" (1965, 205). The music reinforces the meaning and message of *Xala*, the call for a unified community built on the strength of the ordinary individual. During the film, we twice see one of the peasants play the Kora,[70] a string instrument typical for Senegal: once in the street, and later inside El Hadji's house. As mentioned before, Sembene often uses the xalam as well, which is another string instrument. Both instruments provide a soft sound, unlike the drums which can be disconcerting and disruptive. The peasant continues to play his Kora when people make their way into El Hadji's house at the conclusion of the film. The song on the soundtrack features a very similar Kora and melody. Thus, we have a mixing of the diegetic music, and the music added to the soundtrack. The director sees himself as someone in the crowd—both he and the peasant create music. By mixing himself in with the crowd, the director accomplishes his initial goal of uniting people, or bringing people together. The two sounds and songs mesh too, and they create an eerie effect as the reality of the image collides with the surreal off-screen music. The space of the spectator's reality and the diegesis of the film on the one hand, and all the social strata on the other hand, are combined, and fused together in a common public sphere. Finally, the magic of music allows for a transition to the coup de grace suffered by the main character, as we return to the black magic: the curse is put back on El Hadji by the village marabout who is unhappy that El Hadji's check did not clear.

[70] As opposed to the xalam, this is a tall instrument, with a hemispheric calabash resonator, and 26 strings, that is played upright.

Inside Adja's house in the outskirts of Dakar, the denouement of the film finds El Hadji at the lowest point of his existence. The peasants invade his house, and call upon him to undress and to let them spit on his naked body, so that his actions are forgiven. As the peasants voices grow louder, the different members of the family begin to come out of their rooms. When El Hadji's son exits his room, he swings the door wide open, and exits the frame leaving behind one last reference on a wall: the room is adorned with a large poster for Sembene's first feature film, *La Noire de…* . It is maybe a funny tongue-in-cheek remark, or maybe another reminder that the Senegalese woman still belongs to someone or something (the possessive preposition *de…* is not followed by an agent).

The marabout who came back wanting vengeance on El Hadji, Gorgui, is the one who speaks up. He explains that if El Hadji wants to be a man again, he has to strip down and let everyone spit on him. At first glance, this gesture seems gratuitous and outrageous, and then the scene quickly turns to gross and disgusting. However, the audience has to push a little further for the meaning of it all. El Hadji is a man who has lost everything, and at the end of this film, we find him naked, almost in a complete reversion to childhood and to the day he was born. The undressing, and the subsequent spitting take him back to the early stages of his life—a newborn, about to be baptized. It is not one's typical choice of holy water, but the spitting does translate into a purifying matter. Only by accepting to be subjected to this disgraceful process can El Hadji hope for a rebirth, and for a new beginning. He is surrounded by his first family, and his first wife stands up to the villagers, trying to defend him. There is a sense that he was meant to be only with this family, his first choice, and it is suggested that his subsequent two

marriages are repudiated. The villagers also put a wedding tiara on his forehead (taken from the wedding dress sent back by Ngoné's family), and more insults are added. El Hadji is feminized, stripped of his masculinity, but on another level, the tiara reminds one of martyrdom, and the crown of thorns placed on Jesus' head. These findings are contradictory, but so has been the character of El Hadji, who alternates between a national militant and new bourgeois, albeit with more insistence on the latter. I think that Sembene sees a glimmer of hope in his character, and El-Hadji is granted a second chance. The parallel between Jesus and him is an insinuation that the latter will also come back from the dead; now that he has been absolved of his sins, El-Hadji can start over.

As the men begin to spit on El Hadji, he is asked to also spin around, and the camera follows him in this circular manner. He is thus exposed to everyone. The spit slowly covers his body, and actually colors it. Initially, it looks like the scene is shot through a filter, because the spit looks unnaturally yellow. My opinion, though, is that the spit itself is colored, which creates an even stronger contrast with El Hadji's skin, making it more visible (it could of course be that the spit is yellow because of the orange or lemon soda that all the peasants are drinking). However, the choice for sound in this scene is what is of particular interest to me. The sound of men gargling spit in their throats starts before we actually see any on El Hadji's body. The disturbing, exaggerated noise is first heard when we see the faces of the family, all looking on as El Hadji undresses. Many of the voices and noises appear to be added post-synchronously, which leads to an overload of the soundtrack, and to a feeling of being overwhelmed, much like the situation main character must be enduring. The film ends in a freeze frame, and as

mentioned before this is a reference to the freeze frames used by Truffaut, especially his most famous one, the ending of *400 coups*. I would suggest further, just as Truffaut's freeze frame of Antoine Doinel reminds us of an entire generation and of their practices of filmmaking because it is the emblem of the New Wave movement. In a similar fashion, Sembene's freeze frame captures the essence of his character and that of the African subject. Stuck in the side of the frame, pushed toward marginality, emotionally crippled and on his knees, there is nowhere to go but up. In both Truffaut's and Sembene's films, the ending is open and grim, but it leaves room for a positive outcome, room for hope. Antoine has finally made it to the sea, a symbol of life and, because of its openness, maybe a symbol for endless possibilities. In *Xala*, water is "spilled" on El Hadji from the mouth of the people with whom he should share a sense of community. Once he is baptized, there may be endless possibilities for his redemption as well. Fittingly, the sound carries on, moving past the image. This is not quite like Mambety's aural narrative planes, but it is a variation on the concept. The sound continues the story, causing storytelling to revert from the medium of film and image to its original and traditional African medium, that of orality and the spoken word.

I would contend that Ousmane Sembene manages to make his point clear, and that at the end of this film, we all understand what needs to be done, and we understand that the concept of community remains capital in the African society. We see, furthermore, that in order to harmonize the relationships between people, and between communities, and thus in the African public sphere, the individual has to come to terms with the changes and challenges of modernity that affect us all. Concluding, I am reminded of

Mikhail Bakhtin's suggestion about creative understanding that he made in an interview with the *New York Review of Books* in 1993: "in order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be *located outside* the object of his/her creative understanding – in time, in space, in culture. In the realm of culture, outsideness is a most powerful factor in understanding" (Bakhtin 6). How then can Sembene, even though he makes every effort, how can he fully *understand* when he is so immersed in the matrix of his own society and culture? I do not have the answer to this question, but the next chapter delves into the world of female filmmakers, hoping to develop the question further. Women, and especially those in the African society, have been pushed to the side, and marginalized. If anyone resides on the *outside* of their creative understanding, it is these women filmmakers, whose beliefs and attitudes appear to stem straight from Sembene's character, Rama—new women, new modernities.

Chapter V: Reclaiming the Body and Owning the Voice: Safi Faye and Agnès Varda

The various manifestations of displacement I have been discussing in the first four chapters take a turn when analyzed in the context of the work of two female directors, Agnès Varda on the French side, and Safi Faye on the Senegalese side. The cinematic subject that I have used as the main emblem for the notion of modernity throughout the first four chapters is twice conflicted in the case of women, especially when their characters are at the center of the film diegesis—making the switch from a marginal character to a main one places the woman under more pressure to prove her capacity to be a subject. The two female directors choose female leads for the main characters, and that in itself constitutes a displacement already: by undermining the primacy of the male cinematic subject, the two women/directors attempt to restructure the *normal* patriarchal order. The city seen through a woman's eyes is unlike the male vision of it, and Varda shows that a female character can be a *flâneur/se* without being a prostitute, and that she can assume a role normally reserved for males. The work of Safi Faye is ethnographic and feminist at once, and her main characters, much like Varda's, are also women, and they challenge the rigid traditions of the African village. Both of these directors go beyond the usual restrictions imposed on the female body by mainstream cinema, and also instate the female voice as a viable alternative to the omnipresent male voice. The control that the men have over the female body and voice is being heavily challenged because these women directors are trying to re-appropriate femininity. In order to accomplish this task, they are taking Trinh Minh-ha's advice: "Must not let themselves be

driven away from their bodies. Must thoroughly rethink the body" (36).[71] Not only do they focus on challenging the scopic regime by reclaiming possession of their own bodies, but they go further and thoroughly rethink the role of the female voice, which becomes a powerful tool of affirmation.

An important name in the West African aesthetic, Safi Faye, is a logical choice for this chapter. However, when choosing to talk about her films, I am aware of my omission of important Third Cinema female filmmakers, such as Assia Djebar and Minh-ha, an Algerian and a Vietnamese, respectively, who are widely acknowledged as pioneers of the feminine Third cinema. Given the Senegalese context of my project, I think that Faye is a more appropriate choice. She started out by working with (as a researcher), and for (as an actress in the 1968 film, *Petit à petit*) ethnographer Jean Rouch, who in retrospect may have influenced her personal cinematic language because her films carry a heavy dose of reality; they are almost documentary-like. Rouch's influence is evident not only in her cinematic choices, but, according to Nancy J. Schmidt, he encouraged her to study ethnology at the University of Paris, from where she would graduate with a doctorate focusing on Serer religion. Her interest in the Serer culture comes from her roots: she was born in a small Serer village called Fad Jal, in Senegal (Schmidt 286). Jean Rouch is, of course, credited with developing the cinéma-vérité by using non-professional actors, improvisation, lack of editing, and not allowing for many camera interferences—all of these elements facilitated his choice of genre, the

[71] Interestingly, Minh-ha's sentences lack a subject themselves.

documentary.[72] Faye's films maintain some of those aesthetic choices, but what is important about the content of those films is the heavy presence of conflict. The position of the filmmaker herself in the West African culture is one that implies strong conflicts. At this point, Trinh Minh-ha's comments on the female writer's position come to mind again: "….where she is made to feel she must choose from among three conflicting identities. Writer of color? Woman writer? Or woman of color? Which comes first? Where does she place her loyalties?" (6) The triple bind that minority women writers face is identical to the bind that a minority woman director must face. And she rises to the occasion by challenging a world in which the order follows the male and the white axis. African female directors talk about subjects similar to those of their male counterparts, but they also open up new spaces of discourse, discussing issues about which most male filmmakers have been quiet.

Faye's first film, only ten minutes long, *La Passante* (1972) is about a woman becoming aware of the fact that men on the street look at her. The woman is played by the director who places herself in front of the objectifying male gaze. This short film is a quick journey into the typical, classical cinema construction of the politics of gender that place the woman on an inferior social level. The fascinating aspect of this short film is the reversal from a male *flâneur* to a female *flâneuse* (in terms of protagonists), as evident from the title[73] itself. However, this woman, while she is not a prostitute (I will

[72] In a career spanning almost fifty years, he made close to a hundred and twenty films. One of his most famous is *Moi, un noir* (1958). His later, *Chronique d'été* (1961) is considered by many critics from *Cahiers du cinéma* to be his best work and a film that belongs with the New Wave movement.

[73] We have here yet another reference to Baudelaire, and his poem *La Passante*.

return later to the image of the prostitute as the only possible female *flâneur*), fails to look and observe as her male counterpart does in the streets of Paris. So, she is only partially a *flâneuse* because of what she does—she walks about—but she also remains the focus of male attention and inspection. Still however, the subject of this film marks an important beginning to a trend that will come through more forcefully in the later films: placing the woman at the cinematic centre of attention, but escaping the objectifying male gaze at the same time.

Kaddu beykat (1975) changes register and discusses the problems encountered by peasants in rural Senegal; however, the conflicts between the peasants and their government is only the upper layer of this film. Faye also privileges the voices of female peasants. Her two main characters who are awaiting their respective marriages are portrayed in such a way that they become the primary agents behind the agricultural production of the village. Furthermore, the female peasants are still described as the ones who carry the burdens of all household issues. It is also interesting that the director chose to use her own voice for the voice-over comments, much as she did with the self-casting for the first film. As we will see later, there are many connections between the work of Faye and Varda, and Varda and Orson Welles, none more important than the use of their own voice. At the end of *Kaddu beykat*, Faye's voice is heard, and she assumes responsibility for her work and her words. The words "I wrote this letter…." create the same effect as the words of Welles at the end of *Touch of Evil*, to which I will come back. As Melissa Thackway notices, "she introduces the film and concludes the film in the form of a personal letter […] throughout the rest of the film, she allows the images and

villagers to speak for themselves" (152). The extent to which she lends her voice to the film is not essential; however, the presence itself of a feminine voice is capital in the process of subverting the power and *ever*-presence of the male voice. The presence and use of a female voice-over continues with *Fad'jal* (1979), which is the name of her own village. The film reveals the history of the place, which was founded by a woman. Finally, *Mossane* (1996) exposes the struggles of a teenager girl, the title character, who finds herself torn between love and respecting her family's wishes and the traditions of the village where she was born. There is no voice-over in the traditional sense in this film, but an all-female choir constantly fills up the aural space of *Mossane*. The result is that women are further empowered, in this instance as a group, not only as individuals.

Safi Faye may be the most intriguing figure in Senegalese cinema, next to Djibril Diop Mambety. While her careeer starts with her connection to Jean Rouch and the aesthetic of the cinéma-vérité from where she may have borrowed some of the intertwining documentary style, what I am particularly interested in is her use of voice-over. The voice-over is, of course, a common aspect of the documentary genre, but Faye uses it in more elaborate ways, because she mixes fiction and reality. The issue of voice in African cinema, and especially in African cinema by female filmmakers is an issue of representation. Furthermore, there is a need for active speaking, rather than language from a passive standpoint. Trinh T. Minh-ha declares in her documentary *Reassemblage* that she does not "intend to speak about. Just to speak nearby." The less frontal approach implied by the word "nearby" indicates the source of the problem, because there should be speaking *about*. A switch from passive, nearby speaking to active speaking, to giving

women the authority to speak about themselves, is needed. A good beginning is that Faye gives voice to her female characters; these women are "allowed" to speak. Furthermore, as we will see in the analysis of the film, women not only speak for themselves, as Mossane does, but they speak for each other. The chants and songs heard throughout the film are sung by women, and they speak of and for Mossane, who is one of them. The idea of community is reinforced by this newly founded sisterhood, who, as we have seen earlier with Charles Taylor's multiple modernities, create their own space and their own version of modernity.

Safi Faye's films are indeed an interesting mixture of documentary and fiction, and I would like to return to some of those so that we can gain a better understanding of her body of work. For example, in *Kaddu beykat*, she gathered the villagers, gave them a topic and then recorded with a stationary camera the conversation that ensued. There was no other direction, which is consistent with the typical cinéma-vérité style. Her first film, *La Passante*, is in many ways representative of her later themes and concerns. Playing the part of the passerby herself, this is a woman who becomes aware of the fact that men are attracted to her—she realizes she is an object of the male gaze. There are two men looking at her, and one is white and the other one is black. This is an interesting dichotomy, because it universalizes the view of men. Even though the two men are opposites, and maybe even opposing, they both do the same thing when it comes to how they look at a woman. So the gaze remains the same and the actual distinction, white versus black, European versus African is less important than the fact that the two men come together because of their common interest, the female body. There is no dialogue in

this film, no one says anything and that reinforces the importance of the body, because the only output is through image.

Her first long feature film, *Kaddu beykat* (1975 - *Letter From My Village*) is considered her best work, and concentrates on life in a Senegalese village, showing at a very slow pace the daily routine and rituals of the peasants. The title is somewhat of a mistranslation, and a more accurate, literal translation may be "the (spoken) word of the peasant,"[74] which to me evokes the presence of voice(s), so I prefer the more literal translation of the title. The film presents a subtle comment about the intrusion of the West, because the two main characters, Ngor and Coumba, cannot get married because of the insufficient harvest. Normally there would be enough, but because of the exports going toward the West, the exchange of food for money that the West initiated, there is less and less for the common villager. As a result, the man, Ngor, is forced to go to Dakar where he hopes to find work. The villagers cannot support themselves through agriculture and have to rely on help from the outside. So, interestingly enough, the city of Dakar takes on the outsider perspective, a fact reinforced by the contrast between the busy, tumultuous streets of the city and the calm and repetitious life in the village. Faye, like other African filmmakers mentioned in the previous chapters, uses a lot of long shots and a stationary camera, both emphasizing the slow pace of life in the village.

The dichotomy of insider and outsider is reinforced by the voice-over, which belongs to Safi Faye, reading the letter. Faye, then, becomes a conflicting figure of someone belonging to the village, but also removed from it, observing it from afar and

[74] "Kaddu" can mean "mot," "parole" or "avis." Ousmane Sembene had a newspaper, in Wolof, called Kaddu.

letting the story of the village unfold. The fact that Faye physically belongs to a village becomes more clear with *Fad'jal* (1979)—an ethnological movie set in her native village, which lends the title to the film. At the end of *Kaddu beykat*, she affirms, "I wrote this letter. All the rest is by my farming family." She takes charge of her legacy, and she also detaches herself from the film product. However, since the villagers often speak into the camera, acknowledging its presence and Faye's behind it, they bring her in once again; they make her an insider. There is only one such instance in *Mossane*, when the main character looks into the camera and talks to the audience, maybe to the director, and that is a very good example of the mixture between documentary and fiction.

Faye's latest film, *Mossane* (1996) is a more traditional film if we consider the fictional aspect. This is an invention, but it touches upon important issues within the social context of the Senegalese village. *Mossane* is a story of becoming that is centered on a female character, Mossane, who transits from adolescence into womanhood. The movie continues to advocate for a reversal of gender power issues by focusing on a female character, but it reminds us in its denouement that such reversal may not yet be possible. This type of denouement alerts the audience that Faye is aware of the impossibility to subvert the male primacy in cinema fully; this ambivalence will also be showcased in the films of Agnès Varda as I will show later in this chapter.

The plot of the film is rather simple: Mossane was promised since birth to Diogoye, an emigrant living in France, but she falls in love with the poorer Fara, who is just a student. The conflict between generations, between tradition and the desire of emancipation and sexual freedom leads to her denouncing the arranged marriage in front

of everyone and then to her fleeing the village. Isolated, alone, and physically exiled from her birth place, Mossane eventually finds her death, which turns out to be the only possible denouement. This a typical punishment in classic cinema for a woman not following the 'right' path, and not coming to "her senses." However, this may also be a necessary ending that does not throw the movie into the realm of the fantastic. Instead, Mossane does not succeed in making her parents change their mind, and at the end of the film something tragic happens, as opposed to a re-entry into "normality" where everyone moves past all of the issues and gets along just fine. I think that her death, to which we will return during the analysis of the film, in spite of its obvious negative connotation, makes the film's message so much stronger. Faye signals that there is a necessity to allow women to make independent choices, and this has to be accomplished at any cost, including the ultimate sacrifice.

Mossane is extremely beautiful (the choice of her name is not random, "moss" in Serer meaning "beauty"), and she is constantly shot as such, in close-ups, to emphasize her perfect features. Faye actually has said that, "I wanted the most beautiful girl in the world to be African" (Sigler 155). The panoramic views are picture-perfect as well, underlining Mossane's beauty—there are a few slow pans of the landscape that reveal the beauty of the rural environment. Since there is not a heavy contrast between the two, landscape and daughter of the landscape, Mossane and her environment appear to feed off one another's positive energy. They coexist. So, when the village and the family insist on her leaving for France, to marry Diogoye (who keeps sending gifts to the village, "blinding" them), Safi Faye suggests that they give up one of their most valuable

treasures, stripping the village itself of its very identity. The preservation of the local values is important, and yet something has to change in the approach to arranged marriages, in the way women are treated as exchange goods. The issue, however, is more complicated, as Diogoye is also a son of the village and Mossane's marrying him would uphold and continue the tradition of the village beyond its simple geographical limits.

What is interesting about Safi Faye's approach is exactly this ambivalence toward the situation. She does not seem to take a clear side on the issue. The same can be said about the denouement. It is unclear what the main character's death does for our understanding of the film and its message. Death does not solve the conflict between parents and daughter: it is just another way of losing a member of the village. But in some ways, the departure of Diogoye also means losing a member of the village. Death and departure lead to the same result. Furthermore, the choice that Mossane makes at the end remains ambiguous as well. While her actions point to her deciding to kill herself, the actual death is never shown. Rather we witness her fleeing through the woods and in a boat on the river, but not the actual moment of drowning. I will return to this point at the end of my analysis of the film, which should strengthen the points made on the female voice and the subversion of a male-dominated system.

The film begins with a long shot of Mossane, backlit, as she is washing in the river. The ending of the film obviously brings her back to this moment, closing the cycle of her life. If one thinks of returning to dust, a concept more common in the Western world, in this instance the director sets up the persona of her character by giving her birth, literally, from water. The allusion is that Mossane becomes a version of Aphrodite,

although she does not quite emerge from water, as we will later see with Mona, one of Agnès Varda's characters. Filming Mossane against the light obscures the details of her body, and particularly her face, but her figure is revealed clearly. As mentioned above, the entire film tries to establish her as a great beauty, and the camera emphasizes her figure and facial features. This beginning sets her up, voyeuristically, as an apparition, almost unreal—a woman emerging from another world. The song heard in the soundtrack, as we watch her bathe, reinforces the feeling that she is not real, as the lyrics read "a fog comes down," which sets up an eerie mood. Unlike the traditional, documentary-like voice-over in *Kaddu beykat*, here Faye uses songs to complement the image and the story. The songs are all sung by women, sometimes a solo voice is heard, but most of the time, it is a choir. Thus the beginning sequence of the film concentrates on establishing the female body and voice as its main focus.

In the very next scene, Mossane brings water to her sick brother, and the presence of water is continued, but in this case a healing factor is added. She is very connected to her world, and when her cousin brings her a Western magazine to look over, she refuses. Unlike the women in the market that Mambety shows looking through those types of magazines (see chapter II), Mossane remains a pure product of her village, unaffected by Western influences. As she sits down working on a piece of cloth, her cousin checks on her braids, and we get the first hint that she is concerned with the way she looks. After all, Mossane is only fifteen years old, and finds herself at a conflicted stage. It is

interesting to note her age, because she is not yet a woman.[75] The fact that she has not established her persona allows for a more forceful attack, from the root of the problem, on the male social system. Not only do we see the effects of this system on mature women, but we get to see how every young girl is set up to be inscribed within the same set of patriarchal rules.

Summoned by her mother, Mossane has to run to the healer and bring him back to help her sick brother. The quick trip she takes provides the spectator with a few stops, and it almost resembles a miniature odyssey, which places her character in a fantastic realm. There are three stops on the way to the healer, and in between those, she is shot in long and following shots, slowing moving across the landscape. First, she stops next to a bull (later we come back to this type of bull, when the village sacrifices an animal in order to receive rain); next, she briefly talks to an old woman who says she is looking for roots to heal her eyes. And finally, she passes by a monkey, on which the camera insists for a few seconds, once Mossane is out of the frame. These stops are not random, and the first one is quite obvious—the village chooses to sacrifice a bull for their rain incantation, but they sacrifice one of their daughters as well. Both animal and Mossane end up dead, and no progress is made. The rain does not come as a result of the sacrifice; instead it comes much later in the film, after an anti-incest ritual is performed, but I will return to this scene later. So the sacrifice does not yield any immediate, positive results, and of course, we do not get to see any positive results from Mossane's death. The old woman

[75] There is no obvious rite of passage moment in the film, and the marriage never materializes. Even with her actual love interest, it is not obvious that she ever has sex with him, although it is certainly a possibility, but later than at this particular moment.

may be the most interesting intermezzo in this quick sequence. Representing the past because of her age, the old woman is searching for something, some plants to heal her eyes. The old generation is in need of a new vision, but the young generation does not help, as Mossane moves along quickly trying to get to the healer. The last stop is the most puzzling one, the obvious insistence on the monkey offers no clear message.[76] However, the fact that Mossane disappears from the frame could foreshadow her later disappearance from the surroundings of the village.

Safi Faye's background as an ethnographer is evident in her detailed descriptions of the village traditions. The film, while obviously concerned with the fictional, its plot and its main character's evolution, doubles as an almost documentary, or an anthropological piece. We witness the healer's habits and the way he performs his magic; later on, we get the entire sacrificial ceremony for the bull, and the invocation for water and rain. Interposed in the middle of that sequence is a quick moment when Fara steals away Mossane from the ceremonies and all the villagers. However, the main focus of the sequence is on the sacrifice of the bull. The scene begins with a long shot of a fromager[77] tree. The shot is from a static camera, and it almost appears to be a still photo; after a few seconds people begin to enter the frame and they all head toward the great tree that now

[76] The monkey does not figure as one of the prominent animals in the Koran, like the cow, the lion, the camel, or the snake. It represents, of course, one of the Chinese calendar years. In general terms, the monkey symbolizes curiosity and agility. The former quality could be of interest in the context of this film, as Mossane is on the precipice of adulthood, and has become more curious about her body and sexuality.

[77] The fromager is also called a silk-cotton tree, or Kapok tree (*ceiba pentadra*). It is different from the staple tree of Senegal (the baobab, which we see behind Mossane and her brother in the anti-incest ritual scene) in that it has huge stabilizing fins where it meets the ground. Interestingly, this tree is not indigenous, but was widely dispersed from its South American habitat by Portuguese colonists from Brazil.

doubles as a veritable axis mundi. It seems that the steadiness and moral balance of the village is given by the presence of this great, imposing tree. The details of the ceremony are great, and they include even the actual cutting of the throat, although it is not as graphically portrayed as in the beginning of *Touki-Bouki*; in this instance we do not see the actual gash in the throat of the animal. Instead, the director redirects our attention to the spilled blood, which slowly advances and mixes in with the sand, and then dissipates into the water. The image foreshadows Mossane's death, which will happen in the same river, and the audience makes another connection between the sacrifice of the bull and the sacrifice of the daughter of the village. The ceremony is accompanied by another song in the soundtrack, and once again, as throughout the film, it is made up entirely of female voices.

The all female-choir puts great emphasis on the female voice, but from a softer stance, an artistic source. A voice-over has more authority, but the song is one of the oral ways in which African stories have been passed down from generation to generation. In the Serer and Wolof traditions, the story-teller is often a man, but sometimes that role is filled by women. In the case of Mossane, Safi Faye subverts the overall domination of the male voice, by constantly turning to female voices. As opposed to the griots, the griottes are more likely to sing than speak, or tell a story. So, on the soundtrack, and very distinctive from the female choir, Faye uses one of the most recognizable singing voices in Serer culture, the famous griotte Yandé Codou Sène.[78] The voice of the main character, Mossane, is aided by the ethereal voices in the soundtrack. The result is that

[78] Sène is widely characterized as having been "Senghor's *griotte*."

the voice of the young daughter is shaped by the (mature) voices we all hear from an unknown source from beyond the screen. Kaja Silverman's view of the voice of the mother as an acoustic mirror is replaced by this singing voice that is present from the beginning, the scene in which Mossane bathes herself in the water, which could constitute the initial scene of her birth. Thus, the reverberation mentioned by Silverman in Rosolato's acoustic mirror,[79] is in fact a product of the voice of the community of women—it is not just the voice of the mother (although, at moments, Sène's voice overtakes the rest of the choir), but a voice of mothers which is consistent with the idea of community so important in the African tradition, and which obviously comes through strongly in the description of the life in the village. I will return later to comments about Silverman and Rosolato's work.

The reversal to a society dominated by women is also suggested by Faye in the lone sex scene of the film. The simple fact that there is a sex scene points to breaking boundaries and the limits of Islamic conservatism. The scene is shot mainly through drapes, adding a slight element of privacy, but the most important factor in the scene is the position of the married couple: Mossane's cousin is on top of her husband Dibor. Moreover, it is she who cuts the episode short when she hears her younger cousin come inside the house. Even though the husband tells her he is close to climaxing, she still hurries him out. We have here a complete reversal of power. The woman is in complete charge of her body and of the relationship with her man, her husband. She decides when

[79] I will explain the theory behind this term later in the chapter, but because I will refer to it before that point, I will note now that the acoustic mirror is a concept akin to Lacan's visual mirror stage, but that deals with sound and with the formation of a child's identity through and because of the voice of the mother.

to stop, and she emasculates the man by sending him away without climaxing.[80] As the cousin covers herself, Mossane enters and the two women end up talking about sex, which is yet another important factor: in a closed-off society that does not openly talk about sex, the director points to the importance of sexual education. Young fifteen-year old Mossane listens to her cousin describe how "mon coeur saute comme une baguette sur un tam-tam," in relation to her physical feelings toward her husband. This is an interesting metaphor that explains the woman's emotions through an invocation of sound. In other words, love and sexual desire have a similar reverberation through the body as sound does through the drum.[81] Mossane's cousin talks about sexual pleasure, mentioning the clitoris,[82] and we see Mossane's innocence when she retorts "what are you talking about"?[83] The two women stay together, and they shower together, in a longer sequence that continues to show the importance of a strong and open relationship between an older, more experienced woman and a younger girl. This is an important scene because it establishes a wish that Safi Faye has for women to be more open with one another, and transcend religious and social boundaries.

The religious and social boundaries remain in place, however, and the director makes sure to insist heavily on the rigid thinking of the villagers. The village, along with

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[80] On a less drastic level, their relationship could be a model for a marriage based on mutual respect and understanding in which the man does not force his will upon the wife.
[81] Several Senghor poems compare the female body (and more specifically the stomach, ventre) to the drum. The sound that emerges from inside the drum is like the life force (babies) that comes from inside a woman.
[82] This is a thorny issue in African cinema, especially in the context of excision, but some films that will be mentioned shortly do refer to it or even make it a central focus.
[83] All the translations into English from *Mossane* are mine. The only available DVD version has subtitles in French only.

the life and customs that happen in and about the village, becomes a second plot-line; this is not a mere subplot; it is much more important than that. The village itself is transformed into a character, much as the city of Paris is a character to Godard and especially to Truffaut, or as we have seen with the city of Dakar for Mambety and Sembene. However, there are great differences between the way the city is shot, and the way Faye's village is shot. There is not the same kind of emotional involvement that we have seen from the characters of the other directors. This is a more detached description of a place, one that is more concerned with accuracy. If the *caméra-flâneur* can function in a city, here it cannot—it has to keep back and simply record. In the village there is no aimless wondering, and detached observation; the inhabitants know the village too well, so there is no room for discovery. Thus, the identity of the village comes from a multitude of perspectives, unlike the subjective opinion of the Parisian wanderer. The village is created through an intricate matrix of relationships between the inhabitants, who depend on one another, and who, as a consequence, lose the individuality characteristic of a *flâneur*.

We can see this type of interdependent relationship between Mossane and her cousin, or between Mossane and her mother. Mossane's discussion with her mother, which happens in a later sequence, is in stark contrast with the previous conversation the young girl had with the cousin. This scene begins with more images relating to water, as the mother is shown frontally, on a chair, washing herself. The choice of a slightly low angle shot, basically revealing the naked body of the mother reminds of the seminal article by Laura Mulvey: the male viewer in the audience finds the female lack as

threatening as Freud's little boy who first becomes aware of the lack of penis in a woman.[84] Before continuing with my analysis of the film, and of this particular scene, I think it would be important to review some Western feminist theory, which will help us understand how, in fact, Safi Faye establishes a new, more powerful position for the African woman in the contemporary African society.

Given the variety of female characters in West African films, it would appear that the social position(ing) of the African woman is in constant flux, but there are many examples that point to the emancipation of women. The role reversal we discussed above between Mossane's cousin and her husband has also been suggested in many other films. As mentioned in Chapter II, Bekolo's *Quartier Mozart* (Cameroon, 1993) tells the story of a woman who becomes a man, and in the same vein Adamo Drabo's *Taafe Fanga* (Mali, 1996, *Skirt Power*) portrays women in a village who, through magic, also switch gender roles with the men. Sembene's last film, *Mooladé* (2004), and before it, Cheick Oumar Sissoko's *Finzan* (Mali, 1990) both deal with the issue of female excision. These are situations and topics meant to bring awareness to the African public, and while the examples are not overwhelming, there are certainly enough references to suggest that this has become a trend in the filmic discourse of the public African sphere.

Traditionally, African film, and Safi Faye's is a particularly good example, finds its driving force behind sets of opposing dichotomies. To the many Western European forms of Other, non-white, non-heterosexual, non-rational, non-male, a new dimension is added because of the intrusion of the colonizer—that of the twofold, or even threefold

[84] In "Visual Pleasure" (33-34).

Otherness. The woman, already a form of the Other as typified by classical Hollywood cinema, and defined by the canonical work of feminists such as Laura Mulvey or Mary Anne Doane, now has to face a second degree of Otherness. African women are once Other to the colonizer, as they materialize into an exotic object, and secondly, they are Other to their own male kin to whom, and to a certain extent because of religion, they have mostly had a subordinate role. If we think of the relationship between African women and white women, then we can even think of a third type of Otherness. One famous example would be Sembene's *La Noire de…*, which exposes the obvious social separation[85] between Diouna and her French (female) employer. In this era when Western technology is producing new media that threatens to replace the griot's stories, filmmakers, beginning with the great Ousmane Sembene, have recognized that women's roles have also changed. The African woman has found herself torn between fights on two fronts, tradition and modernity, simultaneously facing the rigidity of tradition and having to smoothly transition to modernity via technology. Film directors have been suggesting that there is a need to rearrange gender hierarchies. By placing Mossane's mother in front of the camera, and revealing her body to the audience, Safi Faye forces us to re-visit the theories behind the woman's body as Other.

To fully understand how the roles of female and male voices could be reversed, one has to start with the initial conflict, the male gaze, and the visual conflict generated by the differences between the female and male bodies. Mulvey's influential article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" tries to explain the fascination with the female

[85] I have already discussed the black vs. white dichotomy present in this film in chapter IV.

body, a body that becomes object of desire and target of the male gaze. One of the possible pleasures offered by cinema is scopophilia (pleasure in looking), and Mulvey analyzes it by linking her argument with Freud's "Three Essay on Sexuality." There clearly is a "voyeuristic separation" between the crowd (Mulvey's argument relies on having a masculine audience) and the screen.[86] A second relevant observation is that the audience (again, male!) experiences a narcissistic need. Mulvey uses Lacan's argument to show how that happens: the initial mirror image that we see as infants (or as spectators) leads to the first recognition of the self for a child. However, what the child finds is in fact a misrepresentative image. That initial reflection is a more complete, more perfect image than what he had perceived of his own body before—this moment creates his ego, and for that matter, it is an enhanced, false ego. In the same way then, these two aspects work in film too: in the first case there is a separation between the subject and the object seen on screen, in the second case there is identification. These two cases (sexual instinct and identification) contribute to the birth of pleasure, which always returns to the castration complex, from where the utmost fear of the woman arises: a woman poses a real threat to the man because "she symbolizes the castration threat by her real lack of penis" (Mulvey 14).

There are two ways to escape the castration anxiety: fetishistic scopophilia and voyeurism, which were explained by Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure" and Ann Kaplan in her book *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*. These are two basic Freudian concepts that explain the reactions of a male spectator when seeing a woman on the screen. For the

[86] This physical separation is sometimes created merely because of the opposition between the dark theater and the bright screen.

first one, “men strive to discover the penis in the woman in order to grant themselves erotic satisfaction…the whole female body may be “fetishized” in order to counteract the fear of castration” (Kaplan 14); this would give men reassurance rather than fear. The second one refers to “erotic gratification of watching someone without being seen oneself…practiced primarily by men with the female body as the object of the gaze” (Kaplan 14), and this is an investigation of the woman who becomes object of desire.

According to Mulvey, the woman is the object of the male gaze, assuming thus a passive role in this relationship: “traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen” (Mulvey 19). Since the audience tends to identify with the male characters, “he projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence” (Mulvey 20). So this is why we, the male audience find it pleasurable to watch movies. As Virginia Woolf expressed, and as quoted by Molly Haskell, “women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice his natural size” (Haskell 1). Indeed, it appears that the screen satisfies the man's ego, but the female directors in discussion here offer alternatives, and alternate ways of looking at a woman.

Then what about the women in the audience? As Judith Mayne notices, “women have been most visible in the cinema as performers, and somewhat less so as spectators.

As filmmakers, women have been virtually invisible" (51). As noted by Mary Ann Doane in *Film and the Masquerade*, the woman is left outside of a triangle formed by the man in the movie, the man in the audience and her own nude body. The one thing that happens quite commonly during violent scenes is that woman-spectator looks away; Linda Williams notices that the woman spectator is asked to "bear witness to her own powerlessness on the face of rape, mutilation and murder" (83). If we think of the woman spectator, Mary Ann Doane says, "Confronted with the classical Hollywood text with a male address, the female spectator has basically two modes of entry: a narcissistic identification with the female figure as spectacle, and a "transvestite": identification with the male hero in his mastery…it is precisely this oscillation which demonstrates the instability of the woman's position as spectator" (Doane 79). Similarly, in "Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure," Laura Mulvey considered the female spectator as resistant and that she would have to operate a "trans-sex identification," which is in essence another way of saying transvestite (40-41). Women are not given enough to identify with on screen.

The solution is that women have to reverse the gaze, the gaze that has been attributed to the male. Williams points out the fact that "like the female spectator, the female protagonist often fails to look, to return the gaze of the male who desires her" (83). But as it stands, women filmmakers have done so: "[they] have turned around the voyeuristic gaze in order to critique the convention from within, as it were" (Mayne 55). As this becomes a woman's film, it has to place the woman at the "center of the universe" (Haskell 155). It becomes crucial to de-eroticize the gaze as Kaplan puts it when mentioning Doane's project *The Woman's Film*, "The female is given only powerless,

victimized figures who, far from perfect, reinforce the basic sense of worthlessness that already exists" (Kaplan 28). A number of feminist theorists, but mainly Linda Williams, have demonstrated that the women who look, who *see*, will end up being punished in mainstream cinema; this point is very much supported by the ending of Faye's *Mossane*, in which the girl ends up dead. Mossane does not *look* in the traditional feminist sense, but she challenges the patriarchal rules of the village and refuses to accept that her fate be chosen for her by someone else. Her revolt against the norm is enough reason to have her punished at the end of the film. Williams aligns monsters and women as representatives of the Other, and as cause for men's fear: "the woman's look at the monster [is] at least a potentially subversive recognition of the power and potency of a non-phallic sexuality. Precisely because this look is so threatening to male power, it is so violently punished" (570). In African cinema, and obviously in *Mossane*, classical punishments still occur, as the entire village pushes the girl away and to her death.

Returning now to the scene of the mother washing herself in front of the camera, what is different from classical Hollywood cinema is that the insistence on the female body that is pushed out in front of the audience becomes almost a defiant gesture. There are not many male characters who are pushed to the front; they exist, but they loom somewhere in the background. Doane's triangle concept does not function in this particular scene because it is missing an important link, the active element supplied by a male presence in the film in general, and in the shot in particular. The two remaining elements are us, the audience, and the naked woman, who fills up the entire frame; a direct relationship is thus established, one that eliminates the active, male observer. This

changes drastically how the audience, male or female, perceives the body of Mossane's mother, because this is a more intimate moment that does not necessarily elicit objectification.

However, Safi Faye adds another dimension to the scene that brings on a negative association with the exposure of the female body. The mother asks for Mossane's help, to wash her back, and here we get a large close-up of the shadows cast on her back. The camera lingers on the wetness of her skin, but the emphasis is obviously on the shadows that create a vertical pattern resembling a prison. The older woman, the older generation is trapped in a certain position, or situation, one from which there is no escape. Also, their bodies are still trapped in a particular way of looking at women. The prison means being trapped in the eye of the spectator, objectified by the male gaze, the one in the audience, but with no immediate visual agent on screen. So, it would seem we have another case of ambivalence with this shot; the female filmmaker does not entirely dismiss the traditional, misogynistic way of looking at women. Immediately following this shot, the mother tries to convince her daughter that love can be born from getting used to one's partner. Her ideas continue to be reflected by the prison-like pattern on her back, because she is part of a generation whose future was always decided by others.

In spite of the advice, Mossane continues to see Fara, ignoring her mother's wish to marry well. We return to the backlit shots, echoing the shots from the beginning of the film. This time, though, both of them are in the shot, and we are witnessing the birth of Mossane as a woman, because the suggestion is that she ends up having sex with Fara. However, there is more and more pressure put on Mossane, as the healer tells the mother

that her daughter's beauty will create only problems and uses her brother's sickness to suggest that Mossane is at fault. I believe that another connection to mythology is made through a subtle reference to the problems created by the beauty of Helen of Troy, but on a smaller scale than the great war of Troy. The healer's opinion is that beauty is a curse, and that it will lead to bad things. And tragedy is exactly what happens. Mossane does encompass two great Western myths, Aphrodite and Helen, but transposed onto an African context. Moreover, she represents an alternative to those myths, as a new mythology is being created.

The healing proposed by the marabout gives the director another opportunity to show a different ceremony in great detail. The next day, after she spends the whole night outside, in a hole in the ground, tied down with her brother in a purification ritual, the camera goes in closer to Mossane's face. She looks up, and into the camera, which is the only such instance. The fact that she addresses the audience is obviously Brechtian, but it also reinforces the documentary quality of the film, and the fact that she does *look* in the sense that Linda Williams and other feminist theorists meant. Furthermore, she reverses the gaze that is reserved for the (male) audience, and in doing so, she subverts the classical male primacy we discussed in our feminist theory review. Her words "je voudrais te regarder dans les yeux jusqu'à te rendre aveugle," remind us of the encounter with the old woman who was searching for a cure for her eyes. Being blind can be understood as being ignorant, as well. But the important message in her words is meant for the audience, maybe for the men in the audience, and their gaze. The tables are completely turned, because it is the woman who directly menaces the man, and the male

gaze is threatened with a severe punishment—the loss of sight. The woman switches from a passive role to an active one; not only that, but we evolve from the subconscious fear of castration to the direct fear of losing vision.

The source of this new power that Mossane exhibits has unclear roots, but it might have to do with her connections with water. Beginning with her birth, the one element that accompanies her everywhere is the water. Two more images connected to the water symbol occur following the healing of Mossane and her brother. First, she is left behind to refill the hole in which she and her brother had to spend the night. As she crumples to her knees and starts pushing sand back into the hole by hand, heavy rain begins to come down. A few moments later she goes to the well to get water and she watches her reflection. When she drops the bucket in, the surface of the water, and thus the image we see, are obviously disturbed. Both these instances foreshadow the somber ending to her story, as she ends up dying back in her element, in water. Water, thus, gives and takes life from her.

Immediately following these episodes, the voice of the griot, Samba, sounds off prophetic and ominous, talking about how the young generation does not follow, or listen to the old generation. In a later dialogue, he undermines Fara's occupation as an agronomic student stating that "il a pris quatre ans pour apprendre à être paysan." On this occasion, I can see more ambivalence from the director: even though uttered by one of the representatives of tradition, and a man as well, these words carry a further implication. Many African students end up getting degrees and finalizing an education, but in the end they are still regarded as peasants (maybe wrongfully so) by their

compatriots who believe that the recent graduates just learn to be better at a job that was destined to them from birth. The suggestion to me, then, is that young African men should be searching for alternate careers, and they should make better use of the opportunity to study. The words of the griot are in heavy contrast with the earlier relationship between Mossane and her cousin. The older generation should be helping the younger generation, instead they complain about tradition not being kept up.

Tradition is in fact under attack as Mossane stands up to her mother and tells her she will be choosing her husband. When her courage is met with anger, she runs away, and the next sequence shows Mossane digging in dirt, repeating to herself "je me sens seule ici." She had just gotten done refilling the hole in the ground, and now, even though it is a desperate gesture, she is digging. The choir comes in again on the soundtrack, and the scene reads to me as if taken from a Greek tragedy. The camera moves away from the medium shots of Mossane and it reveals the background. A lone tree stands behind her, underlining her solitude. Her desperation is amplified by the feeling of isolation, in the middle of nowhere. She reaches inside the ground, in search of something, but she finds nothing. Her element is water, not earth, and for the first time, it appears that she does not belong. She is estranged from her own land.

The separation from the land continues throughout the party thrown in honor of her engagement. Her family agrees to marry her off to Diogoye who had sent a lot of money back to the village. While everyone around her is happy and celebrates, the shots of Mossane reveal her sadness and disconnect from the events. The cutaways between the ceremony, the celebration of the engagement, and Mossane's face remind us of an earlier

episode, when Fara stole Mossane away from the rain incantation. By using the same editing technique, the director emphasizes the separation between the younger generation and the traditional events of the village. As life goes on for Mossane and Fara, the repetition and insistence on these types of events show that the life of the village is stuck in a cycle. There is no notion of progress, and one keeps coming back to the same routines, songs, and celebrations.

As the griot is celebrating with everyone and sharing money, a very interesting episode takes place in Mossane's quarters. She is seen draped in white, only her face visible, and surrounded by her friends. At one point she asks her friends to help themselves to the gifts sent by Diogoye. The five women in her entourage go ahead and pick different types of underwear. They do so one by one, each putting on the underwear, then twirling in front of a mirror, while voicing how much they love the new underwear. It is a very bizarre scene, in which the insistence on the women's lower bodies cannot be ignored. These five women, one by one, are caught in between the eye of the camera and the mirror in the room, creating an odd mixture of voyeurism and narcissism. Mossane is caught between old tradition, and the new order of things, maybe imposed by her. These women are also caught in between a kind of tradition—that of the voyeuristic male gaze, and a new order, that of women admiring themselves and their beauty. It is the eye of the woman that gives them meaning, that makes them into subjects who look, and not only objects looked at.

After she stands up to her parents, in front of everyone in the yard, Mossane has to flee. I have to note that her fleeing comes after the only moment that the male voice is

heard in this film. Her father stands up in front of everyone and decrees that she will marry Diogoye, because she had been promised to him, and because he makes the decisions in his house. In the world built by Safi Faye this is a necessary speech, one that establishes the history behind the patriarchal order of things. And in this instance we have a first connection between Lacan's visual mirror, and the acoustical mirror, which we will be discussing shortly: the law of the father has to be obeyed via the sound, as well as the body. Mary Ann Doane talks about "the intervention of the father whose voice, engaging the desire of the mother, acts as the agent of separation….The voice in this instance…is the voice of interdiction" (2004, 45). It is important to establish the presence of this voice, because the reaction against it becomes much stronger. Until this moment, Mossane had acted against the general rules of the village; from now on, she will directly undermine her father's authority. As Mossane is running away in the night, she stops again by the well from which she had drawn water earlier. The camera looks in, there is a reflection of the moon, and then the camera moves in even closer to the water. It is not a zoom in, but rather an actual movement of the cameraman. This is relevant because in a few minutes, Mossane will be on a boat, on the river, and she will end up drowning. The ominous movement of the camera toward the dark water, as if the camera were about to "jump in", foreshadows Mossane's death.

The last shot we have of Mossane is an overhead shot, with the boat moving below the camera. She is alone and crying, and one cannot tell whether it is because of anger, or maybe she is actually scared, which contributes to the ambivalence mentioned earlier about her choice; it is unclear if she is committing suicide, or this is an accident as

she tries to escape. Once she is no longer in the shot, the camera remains fixated on the river, and the sounds seem to amplify a little, and her crying as well. Her last yell is muffled by the water sounds, but also by an extra-diegetic male laughter. As Mary Ann Doane notes about sound coming from off screen, “there is always something uncanny about a voice which emanates from a source outside the frame” (2004, 40). It is indeed an uncanny, very disturbing, hyena-like laughter, but clearly a man’s. In the death of her character, Safi Faye reminds us that this is still a male-dominated society that still gets the last laugh. The male voice and laughter also suddenly control a space we thought belonged to the women, which points again to the director’s ambivalent feelings.

We return to the village at the end of the film so that the denouement can include the second plot-line. The last few shots of the movie regroup the entire village, once in the search for their daughter, and then, after retrieving her body, in their mourning. They all carry her in their arms, and move by the river, going again by the big baobab tree, this time behind it. For a few seconds everyone is obscured, disappearing behind the big tree, still a symbol of the order and tradition of the village. Everyone is brought back together, and everyone appears to act as one, again. The individuality exposed by Mossane and her actions is no longer relevant, and the village returns to its traditional ways. As the film ends, the women’s choir comes back in once more time singing about Mossane and her story, but it is not enough to nullify the male laughter we just heard. In fact, the all-female choir also reverts to a more traditional role: instead of affirming the power of the female voice, the women in the choir now become part of the mourning process. In a

traditional society, it is the women who provide the crying, and who are supposed to display emotion.

In spite of that, I still believe that the relationship between Mossane and the female choir constitutes the most compelling part of the film. The presence of the female choir also changes the dynamic between Mossane and her actual mother. In many ways, the choir supplants the existence of the mother, and her voice as well. Within Western culture, the mother is the one most likely to tell bedtime stories; however, that has changed within the Hollywood tradition where the male voice has exclusivity over story-telling. In West Africa, even at the level of folk traditions, it is the men who are allowed to speak, the griots (the griottes are supposed to sing). The voice-over traditionally belongs to the men, as Kaja Silverman notes (1988, 48), but in this film there is a reversal to the voice of the woman, even though we encounter it in songs. This is one of the three ways delineated by Silverman in which cinema "deals" with the female voice: first, this voice is restricted to an inner textual space, maybe a painting, a song, or a film-within-a-film; secondly, a woman is forced to speak; and finally, the female voice is given an impediment, such as an accent, or a timbre that suggest an incapacity, or inability to speak (1988, 56-61). Thus, "by confining the female voice to a recessed area of the diegesis, obliging it to speak a particular psychic 'reality' on command, and imparting to it the texture of the female body, Hollywood places woman definitely 'on stage,' at a dramatic remove from the cinematic apparatus" (1988, 63). Safi Faye avoids these limitations on the female voice to a certain point, much as she did with the limitations on

the female body, albeit those women do not actually speak. Instead, the voices of the choir make themselves heard through song.

Furthermore, the ending finds the main lead screaming, followed by the male laughter, and in a way, her screaming is a forced sound, provoked by the situation—it is a consequence of the entire film, which leads me to believe, as stated above, that Safi Faye re-inscribes her character into the "normal" way of things with this ending. This reading is supported by a passage from Kaja Silverman: "what is demanded from woman—what the cinematic apparatus and a formidable branch of the theoretical apparatus will extract from her by whatever means are required—is involuntary sound, sound that escapes her own understanding" (1988, 77). Mossane does not produce her last sound, it is created for her. In letting that cry go, Mossane loses whatever power she had been able to garner up to that point, and the primacy of the male is reinstated.

The last sound we hear as Mossane disappears into the night, the menacing male laughter, is a good example of what Mary Ann Doane calls "wild" sound, and to her, the use of such a sound does not lead to a loss of the unity of the "fantasmatic body" (the body "reconstituted by the technology and practices of the cinema," 2004, 33), but rather, it "is simply displaced—the body *in* the film becomes the body *of* the film" (Doane 35). In this case we are talking about the ethereal male body that utters the sound, but it is worth signaling the presence of another type of displacement. It is much easier to trace such displacement through the visual, than through sound planes. However, I think it is important to understand how the visual works in order to be able to analyze sound shifts. The notion of suture, easily applied to the visual, is much harder to establish in the realm

of sound, even though absence and presence do exist when it comes to the soundtrack as well.

According to Kaja Silverman, visually, suture can be seen most clearly in the tension created by the opposition between shot/reverse shot, but that is not the only thing that suture can accomplish and she shows how Hitchcock used it differently in his film *Psycho*. In her interpretation of the famous scene in the shower, the camera becomes an instrument of dissection because of the multiple cuts in the narration: "the cinematic machine is lethal; it too murders and dissects. The shower sequence would seem to validate Heath's point that coherence and plenitude of narrative film are created through negation and loss" (Silverman 202). The absences, what we do not see, are what make the story flow: "the narrative moves forward and acts upon the viewer only through the constant intimation of something which has not yet been fully seen, understood, revealed; in short, it relies upon the inscription of lack" (Silverman 203). Even in the tension between shot/reverse shot we find an absence created by a connection to Lacan's mirror stage: "shot 1 is thus the site of the jouissance akin to that of that of the mirror stage prior to the child's discovery of its separation from the ideal image which it has discovered in the reflecting glass" (Silverman 203). Suture is thus the process by which we oscillate between presence and absence. It is exactly this oscillation; every moment we have suture, we run into a dead end that forces us into the position of a subject (paraphrasing Heath), but in these two films, the transition is mostly impossible because the narration does not allow it, there are no dead ends. However, these dead ends exist in the soundtrack, and the absence mentioned above in Lacan's mirror stage, should in theory

exist in Rosolato's acoustical mirror, too, because the voice of the mother, and what the child hears, is not continuous sound.

The role of narration (and with the help of synchronous sound) as much as we know it, is to transform "cinematic space into dramatic place, thereby providing the viewer not just with a vantage but a subject position" (Silverman 204). Normally, it is the narration that allows us to reach a subject position, but in doing so, we, the spectators are tricked and we forget that we are part of the narration ourselves—we are only aware of the fictive work:

> Cinematic suture is thus largely synonymous with the operations of classic narrative, operations which include a wide variety of editing, lighting, compositional and other formal elements, but within which the values of absence and lack always play a center role. Those values not only activate the viewer's desire and transform one shot into a signifier for the next, but serve to deflect attention away from the level of enunciation to that of the fiction. (1983, Silverman 204)

The result is that absences or lacks between shots materialize into cinematographic coherence: "cinematic coherence and plenitude emerge through multiple cuts and negations. Each image is defined through its differences from those that surround it syntagmatically…as well as through its denial of any discourse but its own," (Silverman 205) but that does not necessarily mean that the subject forms inside it. The coherence mentioned by Silverman leads to the idea that narration is always reconstructing, which in my opinion mirrors the hybrid form of film in general and also of the chosen films and

their characters. With the help of suture, but still remaining a part of an unstable narration, the cinematic subjects, the characters in the film, are also reconstructing and redefining themselves.

Stephen Heath explains how the connection between narration and subject should materialize: “the suturing operation is in the process, the give and take of absence and presence, the play of negativity and negation, flow and bind. Narrativization, with its continuity, closes, and is that movement of closure that shifts the spectator as subject in its terms: the spectator is the point of the film’s spatial relations” (Heath 54). The role of film is to create an impression of continuity: the interruptions that we spoke of should not make us uncomfortable, they should not be noticed; they should be softer in order to make the transition between images more tolerable. While this is much easier done at the level of image, when it comes to sound, we have come to expect, as audience, breaks in the soundtrack, absences. When we discussed Godard’s films, the breaks and the quiet periods on the soundtrack were easily noticeable just like the exaggerated visual absences, or lacks created by the unorthodox editing cuts. In that instance sound created an aural fold that split between silences and loud noises, But the two female directors use continuous sound, underlined by songs, which are streams of uninterrupted sound. So the visual closure mentioned above occurs differently when it comes to sound. In the case of the songs, we rely on flow, rather than dichotomies or absence/presence, or flow/bind. It is also interesting that the female characters of the two directors in discussion in this chapter reconstruct and redefine their identities primarily through their voice, but not the

voice inside the diegesis; rather, their voices from outside of the diegesis, which supplant an absence in the soundtrack.

Mary Ann Doane's discussion on the differences between voice-off and voice over are of particular relevance to this chapter and these particular films. I will attempt to go through the theories of sound, as they stem from her work, but also those of Kaja Silverman, Guy Rosolato and others. Doane finds that there are three different kinds of space in film, that of the diegesis, i.e. of the action, that of the screen, and most importantly, the acoustical space of the theater. The last two spaces work in order to legitimize the existence of the first space in classical narrative film, thus, "if a character looks at and speaks to the spectator, this constitutes an acknowledgement that the character is seen and heard in a radically different space and is therefore generally read as transgressive" (2004, Doane 40). The instance in which Mossane looks at the audience and speaks to the camera then, establishes her character as trangressive, breaking boundaries. In the order of spaces found by Doane, the last type of space is an aural one in which the spectator is enveloped by the sound (Doane 39). It is this last type of space that is most important here. Within this space, connections are made between the voice of the mother and the formation of the child as a subject.

The voices of the women who sing are not a traditional kind of voice-over, there is no narration, although the songs that they perform do have a narrative quality to them because they occasionally refer to the story of Mossane. It is a very interesting take on voice-over by the director, Safi Faye—not only does she empower women to tell a story, but they do so singing, which is what griottes do traditionally, but which also adds an

artistic quality to the process of storytelling. These voices are disembodied, to use Silverman and Doane's term, and are therefore presented as being strictly outside of the diegetic space: "the voice-over commentary in the documentary, unlike the voice-off, the voice-over during a flashback, or the interior monologue, is in effect, a *disembodied* voice. While the latter three voices work to affirm the homogeneity and dominance of diegetic space, the voice-over commentary is necessarily presented as outside of that space" (2004, Doane 42). The lack of a body, the lack of a source for these voices makes the audience desire to anchor them somewhere. Pascal Bonitzer, in "Les Silences de la voix," as quoted by Mary Ann Doane, raises this question about "who is speaking," which implies the existence of an *Other*: "*absolutely other and absolutely indeterminate*" (2004, 26). He also talks about returning the voice to women (Bonitzer 49). However, this voice of the Other, especially in documentaries, has traditionally belonged to men. There is an interesting shift that occurs in *Mossane*, because almost all of the voices heard on the soundtrack are female, and thus the presence of the Other is doubly reinforced—woman as Other, and voice-over as Other. The primacy of the male voice in cinema is a continuation of the male domination in the realm of the visual: as I have explained at length, the female body has been held to normative representations and functions. The woman's voice is similarly constricted by the classical male primacy. In Silverman's opinion, "Hollywood requires the female voice to assume similar responsibilities to those it confers upon the female body. The former, like the latter, functions as a fetish within dominant cinema, filling in for and covering over what is unspeakable within male subjectivity" (1988, 38). However, the female voices in

Mossane have a much different role. They are heard narrating on the soundtrack, they sing, and ultimately they are alternatives to the theoretical voice of the Mother discussed by Kaja Silverman who was inspired by the work of Rosolato and Chion.

The studies done by Guy Rosolato come to an opposite conclusion from the readings of Michel Chion, as the former finds it that the voice of the mother surrounds the child and it confers upon him or her plenitude and bliss, rather than a suffocating cobweb. But Chion also offers some contradictory statements: "one could argue that it is the first model of auditory pleasure and that music finds its roots and its nostalgia in this original atmosphere, which might be called a sonorous womb, a murmuring house—or music of the spheres" (1999, Chion 81). Music is the medium that allows the infant to be "in tune" with his or her mother, as the child harmonizes its sounds to those emitted by the mother. In the case of Safi Faye's female choir, we have multiple voices, multiple mothers, singing and creating or re-creating this "original atmosphere" of the womb. This recreation has to be done intentionally, and it recalls Minh-ha's description of the origin of the female writer's mind: "no man claims to speak from the womb, women do. Their site of fertilization, they often insist, is the womb, not the mind. The mind is no longer opposed to the heart; it is, rather, perceived as part of the womb" (37). I think that an interesting parallel takes shape here if we consider the fact that the film is a metaphorical site of fertilization for the director. The film is, in a manner of speaking, Faye's child. We are witnessing the birth of her movie that emerges from her own (artistic) womb. We have already seen that Faye lends her voice to one of the earlier projects, and that fuels my speculation about the two connections director-mother, film-child. The voice (over)

of the director shapes the identity of the film, which occasionally replicates an acoustic mirror effect.

The theoretical background on voice brings us inevitably to the formation of the child in the acoustical mirror generated by the voice of the mother that is understood as a blanket of sound in the studies done by Doane, Rosolato, Chion, and Silverman. Guy Rosolato is quoted by both Mary Ann Doane and Kaja Silverman, and he stands at the core of the two women's arguments. The voices of the mother and that of the child, the subject, help differentiate the limitations of the two bodies, mother and child, and lead to the formation of the subject who separates him/herself from the body of the mother, both visually, as Lacan has pointed out, and aurally. As Silverman notes, it is the mother, because of her primordial role of a storyteller to the child, the first language teacher, and not the father, who defines and interprets the reflected image of mother and child in the "mirror stage." The addition of the role of her voice as an "acoustic mirror" in which the child first hears himself or herself leads to an understanding of how the child forms "itself" as subject (1988, Silverman 100). The formation of the subject comes into full focus by subtracting itself—from the body of the mother in the Lacanian mirror stage, and also from the echoes of her voice.

There are different associations made with this blanket of sound, for Rosolato it carries a positive connotation, a "pleasurable milieu," in which the voice is both emitted and heard by the child, unlike the dynamic of sight, which entails only the recognition. In fact, it was Rosolato who first used the term "acoustical mirror" in order to contextualize the relationship between emitted sounds and heard sounds (Rosolato 79). For Chion the

voice not only envelops the child, but it entraps him or her. What is of interest to me in relation to the reading of *Mossane* is Chion's interpretation because in the relationship between the mother and Mossane, it is the former who dominates and expects the daughter to follow the traditions of the village, thus entrapping her in an outdated system. As Chion states, "in the beginning, in the uterine night, was the voice, that of the Mother….One can imagine the voice of the Mother, which is woven around the child, and which originates from all the points in space….as a matrix of places to which we are tempted to give the name 'umbilical net.' A horrifying expression, since it evokes a cobweb" (1999, Chion 57). In the context of the film, this "cobweb" is constructed through the mother's advice, her constant reminder that she should get married, and she should not think about love. The end of the film also provides us with a close approximation of the uterine night. Alongside other villagers, the mother runs through the forest in the dark, in search of her daughter. As she runs, she is screaming her name. But her voice is lost in the "uterine night" (supplanted here by the pitch-dark woods), and it can no longer reach the child, who is lost. Mossane escapes the "cobweb," but at a heavy price, and she re-enters the normality of classical cinema. Between the two types of voices that Faye uses in the film—the voice of Mossane's mother and the voices of the choir—it is the singing voices of the community that emerge as positive and more influential in the development of young Mossane. However, because Mossane dies at the end of the film, and the last sound we hear is the wicked laughter, we cannot help wondering about this obvious ambivalence: Faye challenges the classical practices of voice in film, but chooses to conclude in a typical, classic fashion, as if to warn that,

maybe, there can never be a complete change to female domination in both the visual and the aural.

The same type of ambivalence is found in the work of Agnès Varda, even though it is placed in a radically different context. She, much like Safi Faye, had to make a name for herself at a time when female directors were not prevalent; as I mentioned before, the 50s and 60s featured only two women directors. Varda's first feature film, *La Pointe courte* (1954), is a perfect example of counter-cinema, and I would like to briefly refresh our memory about what it counters. This cinema "counters" Classic (Hollywood) narrative; the latter essentially relies on the triad, 'order/disorder/order-restored:' something disrupts the normal order of things and at the end, the disruptive element disappears, order is restored, and the audience gets closure. Characters fulfill their Oedipal trajectories (men settle down, women "come to their senses" and marry etc.). The plot is character-driven, and editing gives the feeling of seamless continuity, it does not draw attention to itself. Unlike the aesthetic of classical cinema, Varda shot her film on location, used non-professional actors, and deliberately alienated the audience by ignoring the necessity of a sense of chronology or classic narration. Geneviève Sellier observes that "the extremely personal tone for this first feature (both a reflection on the couple and a documentary about a fishing village) and its production conditions on the margin of the commercial circuit make it a typical 'auteur film' before the fact" (Sellier 217). However, this film was not widely released, and according to Sellier, it was shown in only one theater, the Studio Parnasse, in January 1956 (237).

We can notice traces of the auteur cinema theory in other parts of the film. Varda subverted the notion of genre, juxtaposed two different stories and deliberately edited the film in a disorienting manner. Furthermore, all of these aspects of Varda's filmmaking are defining aspects of the experimentation that is so crucial to the twentieth century avant-garde movement. While the first part of her career, especially with first two films *La Pointe courte* and *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962), is considered part of the New Wave, Varda moved away from the theories of the New Wavers in her later work. Along with Jacques Démy, her husband, Alain Resnais, and Christian Marker, she was part of a subset group of the New Wave called *Groupe Rive Gauche*, that did a little more experimentation, and explored heavily the trope of memory. Alain Resnais also contributed to the creation of *La Pointe courte*, which he actually wrote. Some of Varda's later films, though, clearly separated her from both those groups, as she established herself as a feminist filmmaker. These tendencies began to emerge with her second feature-length film.

Cléo de 5 à 7 was welcomed to mixed reviews and opinions in April 1962. Geneviève Sellier runs through the many positive comments made about the film in *Combat*, or in *L'Humanité*, but one of the most interesting reviews comes from Henri Chapier who expresses some reservations: "But Agnès Varda's film is not without weaknesses, and from time to time bows to the avant-gardist conventions that Agnès Varda undoubtedly didn't want or didn't dare to scoff at. In *Cléo* there is a discovery of nature, of simplicity and of other people that rings false" (Sellier 62). In my opinion, this comment points to the exact nature of Varda's personal style—a style that combines auteur cinema with the aesthetic of the avant-garde. As I mentioned in the introduction to

this project, the avant-garde constitutes the third historical moment that shapes our current understanding of modernity. In its general tendencies, the avant-garde seeks to break with tradition, much like counter-cinema, and it does so by "reworking genres, exploring the possibilities of film language and redefining the representation of subjectivity" (2004, Hayward 27-28).[87] These three categories are meant to denaturalize classical cinema and the way the audience perceives it. The avant-garde sets out to show that there are alternatives to the mainstream cinematic language, and that different modes of subjectivity are possible: the role of spectators changes as it becomes more involved in the creative process, and the politics of gender are altered. Avant-garde cinema is often associated with feminist filmmakers because of the insistence on issues of identification and representation of the self; these issues are preponderant in *Cléo de 5 à 7*, which clearly marks a movement toward gender issues.

We can start with the simple fact that the film has a female protagonist, which provides Varda with an opportunity to showcase her vision of the modern woman. Maybe the word "vision" is a slight exaggeration, because to me, the film simply provides us with an alternative to the classical way in which women are usually seen on screen. For the most part, Cléo escapes the scopic restrictions of classical cinema, and the film constructs her as "a subject, a consciousness, and not as the object of the story" (Sellier 150). The plot of the film revolves around a singer who is waiting impatiently for the

[87] Still according to Hayward (2004, 27-29), there are various stages of and differences among manifestations of the avant-garde, ranging from aesthetic groupings around First World War (cubism, futurism), French cinema of the 20s (Delluc, Epstein), Soviet cinema, German expressionism, self-reflexivity, European structural materialism, or the narrative of the cinema of *écriture*, where I see Varda's work fitting.

results of a biopsy. The story is divided into two parts, clearly demarcating the transformation that occurs within Cléo, as she makes the transition from object to subject. In the first part, Cléo is overly concerned with her looks, a fact that is emphasized by her constant need to look herself in a mirror, and, miraculously, she seems to be surrounded by mirrors everywhere. She is so self-involved and shallow that she even equates ugliness with death and beauty with life: "as long as I'm beautiful, I'm alive." The importance of physical beauty is made obvious because Varda constantly shoots her main character in close-ups or medium close-ups in the first part of the film. The result is that Cléo's perfect facial features are emphasized much as Mossane's are, as we have seen above in Faye's film.

The switch toward a more aware style of life happens during a song Cléo performs in her apartment, which physically marks the transition to the second part of the film. The lyrics of the song make her realize the position she is in, that of an object, a woman with no opinion; she also becomes aware of the fact that "I only look at myself." As she sings, the shot changes from the apartment set and goes to a black background, literally placing Cléo in a space that resembles a stage. The optical illusion leads to a realization on the part of the audience: the woman is actually taken out of the diegesis of the first part of the film, and the transition to her new world is now possible. When she suddenly accepts who she had been until that point, she reacts strongly; she violently interrupts the practice, changes her clothes and dresses all in black as opposed to her previous, light-colored outfit, and then goes out into the streets.

Soon after this moment, she meets her friend Dorothée in an art studio, as mirrors continue to play an important role, but Dorothée is also worth some of our attention. She is a model, and she poses naked. Cléo does not seem to be fazed by her friend's lack of inhibition, which hints at the transformation that is currently taking place in her own life. Cléo is discovering autonomy, and her epiphany is marked by the naked body of Dorothée. Furthermore, the naked female body also escapes the typical objectification of the scopic regime because it serves an actual, deeper purpose. We return to the theme of broken glass/mirros when Cléo leaves the studio. We witness a mirror being broken into pieces, followed by a shop window getting cracked. The structure of the first part of the film, filled with intact mirrors, is subverted by the broken mirrors in the second part. This is a new order, as Cléo faces a new version of herself. She has to face *herself* on two occasions, when she sees herself in the broken mirrors, but this is a divided and confused self. The broken glass allows for self-recognition, but she sees multiple versions of herself. The duality and confusion that emerges from the act of looking into a mirror is discussed by Minh-ha, and I will quote her at length:

> The image is that of a mirror capturing only the reflections of other mirrors. When I say 'I see myself seeing myself,' I/i am not alluding to the illusory relation of subject to subject (or object) but to the play of mirrors that defers to infinity the real subject and subverts the notion of an original "I." … I write to show myself showing people who show me my own showing. I-You: not one, not two. In this unwonted spectacle made of reality and fiction, where redoubled images form and reform, neither I nor you come first….In the dual relation of subject to subject or

> subject to object, the mirror is the symbol of an unaltered vision of things. It reveals to me my double, my ghost, my perfections as well as my flaws….Hence the superstitious fear of broken mirrors and the recurring theme in Western literature of the…..man who, fighting desperately against death, shatters mirror after mirror, only to come again and again, after each attempt at eliminating his reflection, face to face with himself. (To see one's double is to see oneself dead.) (Minh-ha 39)

Obviously, in the case of Varda, her "man" is in fact a woman, and Cléo is fighting death, because at least at that particular moment in the film she still believes she has a terminal disease. And there certainly is a sense of repetition: the mirrors, the reflections, and the broken glass are heavily used throughout the film. Cléo does see her double, and in fact the film portrays her in two opposite circumstances. She sees herself "dead" on two levels: once in the beginning when she projects her own death because of the uncertainty of being sick; and secondly, the reflections in the broken mirrors remind her of her previous self—a self she is now leaving behind.

The two parts of the film are delineated cinematically also. In the first part the camera follows Cléo constantly, and when in the streets long, tracking shots are mostly used, barely revealing the city. In the second part, however, there are more cuts to Cléo's point of view as she begins observing, and the shots that focus on her, physically, are much shorter. We shift to a *caméra-flâneuse* that maps the city of Paris, and documents the shops, the terraces in the street, and the pedestrians, just as we have seen with Truffaut's Paris. Cléo is no longer concerned just with herself, so her look is suddenly

directed outwards, and she becomes a seeing subject; she makes the transition from object to subject. She had previously stated that "il y a mille femmes en moi," so she still represents all women, but more importantly now, she is a new woman, a woman observing and seeing, not only looked at, which marks the beginning of her liberation. The *caméra-flâneuse* moves away from Cléo, and frames her in long shots and even establishing shots from across the street. The space that opens up between the camera and the character also echoes a sense of freedom.

The next step she takes toward complete freedom is by embracing the aural planes, too. The first time we hear her sing, she is in a taxi, and one of her songs comes on the radio. She declares herself annoyed with her own voice, so she is still at a stage where she begins to question her identity (given the fact that she makes a living with her voice). Moreover, her voice is trapped inside the little radio box, and then inside the car. In spite of the car windows being down, it seems to me that Varda suggests she is like a bird in a cage. The initial resemblance between Cléo and a caged bird is further supported by the moments she spends on the swing hanging from the ceiling in her apartment—a larger version of the miniature swings found in birdcages. The next time we hear her is the transition song that takes her to the streets, which we have discussed above. The most important step, though, is the song she performs in the park before meeting Antoine. She comes down stairs in a seemingly empty park, and suddenly begins to sing. The outside belongs to her, and she frees her voice from the constraints of media and finances (the radio), and the physical constraints of the apartment. Freedom is achieved through the power of the voice, and through singing. After meeting Antoine, she also acknowledges

out loud that her name is actually Florence. By renouncing her stage name (the city is now her stage), and revealing her true identity, Cléo can start to enjoy her independence. Her voice finally runs free, and the moment reminds us also of the choir singing in *Mossane*; and as in Faye's film, the ending brings on a certain level of ambiguity.

First, I find it somewhat troubling that her best moment almost coincides with the meeting of a man, in whom she is very quickly interested. So she begins her new journey under the auspices of a male counterpart. The presence of Antoine diminishes, I believe, Cléo's odyssey, because at the end he is there to "support" her when she goes searching for the results of the biopsy. A man is still needed. There is even more ambiguity in the end of the film, when we are not entirely sure what will happen with Cléo; the news she had been waiting for does not come, but the camera abandons her in the hospital garden where she is still accompanied by Antoine. Varda leaves the ending open, as the audience becomes aware of the peculiar choice of the title: the movie stops at six thirty, so there are thirty minutes conspicuously missing from the story. It is the director's way of saying, maybe, that the road Florence has embarked on is far from being finished, and there is much more work to be done in order to hold on to her freedom. It could also be that the traditional expectations of the audience are not met intentionally, which would be consistent with Varda's avant-garde tendencies; we were promised two hours in the title, but we only get three fourths—the rest is for us to fill in.

We encounter the same type of ambivalence in *Sans toit ni loi* (*Vagabond*), which is a beautiful road movie. At the center of the film we have the character of Mona, a free spirited woman roaming around in the south of France, and who eventually freezes to

death. We see her dead from the very beginning, and a narrative voice is heard on the soundtrack. This is a very important moment, and there is plenty of speculation. Both Susan Hayward and Alison Smith believe the voice belongs to Varda herself. Not surprisingly then, the narrative voice is not assigned a name during the end credits, which continues to fuel this discussion. Just as in the case of Safi Faye, the film grants women the power of the voice, but unlike Faye's film in which the female choir comes back into focus multiple times, in Varda's film this is the only occurrence when we hear a woman's voice outside the diegesis.

Consequently, it is interesting to notice that Varda's film only hints at the fact that women try to recapture their voice. The film maintains ambivalence toward their emancipation throughout. The voice-over intervention tells the audience that Mona's story is to be put together by different people's accounts. These are people she had run into during her voyage. Some of their testimonies, because they read as such, are told directly into the camera, in documentary-style, which adds a sense of reality to the story. Other characters speak to interlocutors, but it is as if the latter do not even pay attention, and their presence seems gratuitous. The effect is that the audience still listens to the testimonies as if the characters were speaking straight into the camera. The interlocutors *become* the audience, and vice-versa. The multitude of the people listening to this story is underlined by the many different points of view that we hear in the film. There are eighteen separate points of view; these eighteen voices allow the director to build a very subversive film, because, yet again, we are going against the norms of classical cinema. The effect of this particular type of narration is threefold, as Susan Hayward notes, "it

cause a disengagement from the story….[secondly] the effect is to unfix the gaze, to render it inoperable. Because there are so many points of view, Mona cannot be caught in any of them….Thirdly, and finally, through this contrast of movement versus immobility, Varda subverts the traditional codes of classic narrative cinema which depict man as the gender on the move and woman as static" (2000, 272). Mona cannot be inscribed in the traditional scopic regime, but, unfortunately, the film begins with her death so her freedom comes at a very steep price. Moreover, even though Hayward's observation about Mona being very active is astute, ultimately no one is more static than her—after all, she ends up dead. It is the same punishment suffered by Mossane, so both women directors have a twofold intent. They first undo female objectivation, only to then show that the alternative leads to the usual death of the cinematic woman/character.

The voice-over presence at the beginning of the film recalls the Orson Welles verbal signature at the end of *Touch of Evil*, and the voice of Safi Faye reading a letter at the end of the film *Letter from my Village*. As noted by Alison Smith, Agnès Varda herself discusses the resemblances between her film and *Citizen Kane*, saying that they both lack a great story (Smith 35). But the interesting denominator is the way in which the stories are told: through what people say or think about just one character, which in Varda's case is Mona. So, just as Welles claimed that it was he who had made the film through the voice-over signature at the very end, so does Varda with *Vagabond*, but at the very beginning. When the voice-over begins to be heard, the camera moves through dunes of sand, following random footsteps and it ends in an extreme long shot of the main character, Mona, emerging naked from the sea. There is an obvious connection to

the birth of Aphrodite, who is delivered from the foam of the sea, and another connection to Mossane and the first scene from Faye's film. The voice-over ends the brief intervention with "il me semble qu'elle venait de la mer," consolidating the similarity to the birth of the Greek goddess of love. Susan Hayward finds that the shot is also reminiscent of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (1485), and that there are some tensions at work in this film between the question of life/birth, and that of death. When Mona runs into a gravedigger, and then is chased out of a cemetery, the story is reminiscent of Bergman's *Seventh Seal* (1957). There is another such instance, at the very end; Mona exits a greenhouse, a place symbolizing life, and ends up falling into a hole where she will eventually freeze. Her death also echoes another classic, Renoir's *La Règle du jeu* (1939), and the death of the main character, Jurieu, who stumbles after being shot outside of a greenhouse. All of these connections are not random; the director expertly mixes classic storytelling and classic film intertexts with a new way of filmmaking. The result is that the avant-garde tendencies are exposed again through the subversion of genres and styles.

Some of the references mentioned in the above paragraph lead to strong contrasts. For example, there is a strong disparity between the classic(al) beauty of Aphrodite and the new version of the woman presented by the director. Throughout the film, Mona stands alone, and her identity is put in question by all the people she meets. The first person who interacts with her is a truck driver who picks her up. When he tells her that all the tourists are gone and that there is no one left, "il y a plus personne," she replies, "il y a moi," asserting thus her position in the world. In a few moments though, she is more or less thrown out of the truck, and she is left behind. The camera remains in the cabin of

the truck and it catches a glimpse of Mona in the side mirror as the truck moves on. “Il y a moi” becomes “il y a que moi,” in this quick sequence, which really sets up the tone for the rest of the film: Mona always abandons, or is being abandoned. Varda creates a new type of woman, solitary, and independent, albeit on the margins of society. Mona has some of the *flâneur* qualities, because she is detached from what is happening around her, somewhat indifferent, and even borderline lazy. Furthermore, as she moves around the country, her voyage is mapped in a similar fashion to Cléo’s wandering around Paris, and the *caméra-flâneuse* functions in this instance, too. Unlike Faye’s villagers, Mona is in fact new to the surroundings of the countryside, so she can observe and discover.

In contrast with Cléo, though, Mona is a more consistent representative of *flânerie* because she is constantly moving around and walking. Another important difference between the two women comes from the class separation. As a singer who makes a good living, only Cléo has an important trait of the *flâneur*: she leads a leisurely life, and she can afford to wander about the city. Mona, on the other hand, is a vagabond who *has* to wander from place to place. So Cléo and Mona are not the traditional *flâneurs* we discussed in Chapter III, but they both have enough *flâneur* attributes to warrant the comparisons made in this project. Varda herself is not consistent in her depictions of the two characters. At times, the director grants her characters full power over their selves and the surroundings in which they dwell. At other moments, the director swings into the opposite direction; she reminds those same characters and the audience that the contemporary social order of life still involves living in a male-dominated society. Cléo shows flashes of being a *flâneuse* in the second part of the film, but she ends up walking

together with the soldier she meets in the park. The liberation experienced by Cléo, and the subsequent wandering she does about the city, could both be nullified by the denouement of the film. The woman cannot walk by herself forever, and the re-creation of her subjectivity is dependent on the presence of a man. The character of Mona, though, is seen walking about places more consistently, she is almost always alone, and she remains solitary to her death. In order to emphasize her movement, Varda makes steady use of a particular shot—the long, tracking shot, done from a side with a hand-held camera. This repetitive shot—we see it used fourteen different times—makes it seem as if Mona never stops her wandering.

Furthermore, as Alison Smith notices, the movement of the camera is from right to left, going against the Western norm of reading from left to right (Smith 15), thus portraying Mona as moving against her own culture. This gesture is consistent with both the director's and the character's relentless refusal of norms—the norms of classical cinema in the case of the former, and the rules of a patriarchal society for the latter. The tracking shot going against the tide is noticed by Susan Hayward too, who adds a few more points to support the fact that this film goes against canonic laws, in this case against the norms of a regular road movie, and I will quote her at length:

> First, it is filmed going backwards down the road…second, the narration is a series of flashbacks all interwoven rather than an ordered sequence of events…third, the tradition is for the point of view to be that of the roadster(s), but in the film it is everyone else's but Mona's that is given; fourth, the roadster is in this instance a woman on her own, fifth, a road movie implies discovery,

> obtaining some self-knowledge—but this is not the purpose here: in her filth and her solitude, Mona has acquired her identity, her marginality, and gazes uninterestedly past the others—including us. (2000, Hayward 273-274)

However, the camera is not simply concerned with following just Mona from the beginning to the end. In fact, it often appears to pick her out at random from a crowd, in the natural stride of the camera movement. Other times, the camera appears to remove itself from Mona. On one of those occasions, the camera gets more distracted, and as Mona enters a bakery, it follows a little girl with baguettes in her hand who is exiting the store. The camera does break "stride" using the same travelling hand-held technique, with no cut interrupting the flow of the sequence.

Then again, there are certainly many little stories that are being told that accompany the main plot, and which provide us with many interruptions. While the camera does not always follow those subplots or side stories, they are nonetheless present: the story of Yolande and her romantic ideals, the story of the professor who almost dies electrocuted, or the story of her student, Jean-Pierre, and his unhappy, ungrateful wife. All these stories contribute to the main plot, but they are small distractions along the way that function like a diegetic version of Truffaut's *caméra-flâneur*. In other words, it is not just the physical movement of the camera about the city, but also the movement of the camera in and out of the film's diegesis.

Ultimately, the resemblances between Mona and the Benjaminian (male) *flâneur* are much more transparent than in the case of Cléo. Unlike the popular singer surrounded by friends, and who then later meets a love interest, Mona has one of the most common

traits of the *flâneur*, his solitude. She is alone most of the film, and when she is not, she talks about being or wanting to be alone. One important distinction, though, is that Mona never walks in a big city, and the *flâneur* is mostly associated with the life in a big city, like Paris. Part of the *flâneur's* purpose, in the context of modernity, is the (re)mapping of the city through his subjective gaze and experience. Mona walks the outskirts of the southern cities in the beginning of the film, but she is mostly seen in the fields, or in the countryside. To really underline the fact that Mona could be a *flâneuse* in her own right, and without having to be a prostitute as Susan Buck-Morss would argue, Agnès Varda inserts an episode in which she places Mona next to an actual prostitute. It is Mona who moves toward the prostitute, who is rather immobile, waiting on the side of the street. Mona sells her some of the cheese she had stolen from a shepherd's farm and then she is chased away because she is scaring away the customers. The fact that the actual prostitute does not want to be associated with Mona means that the latter does not fit in the classic canon of the prostitute. Then again, Mona does not fit in with the professor either. One of the first shots of the two of them focuses on their hands; it is a large close-up of the two pairs of hands, one clean and manicured, and then by contrast, Mona's, which are dirty and withered. Essentially, Mona does not belong anywhere, and the two opposite episodes reinforce her solitude. Like many of Truffaut's characters, Mona is a character marginalized by society, who has to fight to preserve her own idea of identity, and who remains on the *outside*. Actually, she probably dwells even farther on the outside because she cannot even be a part of such a marginalized category like the prostitutes.

Mona's identity is indeed put into question throughout the film. Along with that, the identity of some of the characters who speak into the camera, especially the women, are examined. One of those women who had helped Mona by giving her some water talks at the dinner table about being free. She addresses her family, but then ends up talking by herself, looking into the camera, and suddenly addressing herself to the audience. She spaces out, as she talks about wanting to go away: "this girl who came by goes wherever she wants to. She's free." Then she goes on repeating that "I would love to be free." There is a strong contrast between the desire of this young woman to be like Mona, and the sad reality of the poor condition in which Mona finds herself. Varda's ambivalence continues to play a big role, as there are positives and negatives to finding one's own path in society. Similarly to the young woman wishing for freedom, another character, Yolande, keeps talking into the camera expressing the desire for something new and exciting in her life. She had seen Mona and one of her random lovers sleeping in an abandoned house, and she mentions that moment as something she wants to experience for herself because she is a hopeless romantic.

All of these women who envy Mona, her freedom, or her lovers, generate the feeling that the director is pushing for *her* women to strive for that kind of freedom. Conversely, Varda warns about the negatives of such idea as well. Being a free spirit implies a certain level of loneliness. In addition, the grim ending and beginning of the film place Mona in a vicious circle from which she cannot escape; she is dead regardless of whether the film ends or begins. The rules of patriarchal society have her pinned, and she never emerges fully free. It is a mere impression, much like the projections of the

other female characters, the young woman, or Yolande. Mona is reminded of the harsh rules of the patriarchal world when she is raped in the woods. Furthermore, one of the male testimonies says, “des filles qui vagabondent comme ça, c’est rare, très rare.” This declaration sets her apart from other women who follow their imposed Oedipal trajectories, but it also implies a level of restriction and it suggests that she should not be doing what she is doing. And then finally, when she finds a place where she is happy, with Assoun, who treats her really well, she is eventually kicked out. This happens because of Assoun’s friends, who are all males, and who “don’t want a woman in the house.” As she exits, and Assoun puts her in a car, all of the men come out of the house, and we can hear their voices growing impatient. She is accompanied in the eviction process by a choir of angry male voices that provides us with a strong contrast with Safi Faye’s all female-choir. Once again, the woman finds herself on the outside of the male rules; she is both physically and psychologically abused, as the man reasserts his dominance over the female body and voice.

Another interesting connection to Faye’s soundtrack and use of music is made through Mona’s love of, or obsession with, music. Whether it is playing on a radio, a jukebox, or the television set, she always seems to be drawn to music. In fact, what prompts the first truck driver to ask her to get out is the fact that she is not pleased with the lack of a radio in the cabin. Later in the film, when she walks into a bar, although she barely has money for a coffee, she puts a coin in the jukebox. The examples continue: at the carshop she flirts with a young man who owns a radio and is very pleased when he turns it up; when she is with her lover in an abandoned house, they both listen to his

transistor; when she meets Assoun and goes into his house, she sees a TV and her first question is if the TV set is functional; and finally, when she is in the car with the professor she asks for music. However, in this last episode, when the professor says the radio does not work, Mona's answer is quite puzzling: "c'est pas grave, j'ai l'habitude sans musique." It is obvious how she could get used to not having music given her erratic lifestyle, but the insistence on wanting music at every possible moment is so clear that one has to wonder what her answer really implies. Music takes on more meaning that just a simple pastime. To me, it points to the void in her life; it represents what she really needs but cannot have at all times. Maybe the music represents her freedom, or maybe it represents something else. What is important, though, is to signal Agnès Varda's insistence on an obvious lack in Mona's life. There is something that she craves but cannot always have. Her on and off relationship with music mirrors the trip she is undertaking through life, which is also marked by a lack, and by solitude.

Without a doubt, Mona is one of the loneliest characters ever seen in cinema; in my opinion, she rivals—in another De Sica and Italian neo-realist reference—the old man, Umberto D. Mona is lonely in spite of her frequent meetings with random strangers; in fact, these instances only emphasize her solitude, because invariably these people soon abandon her or are left behind by her. Such an example occurs when she hides away with a guy who wears a chain around his neck and who provides her with marijuana. In her conversations with the professor we find out that marijuana is her second love, after music. Again, we are talking about something that she cannot have at all times, and something that transports her to a different reality. While at the abandoned house, Mona

seems to be happiest, and it is worth noting because this moment is out of the ordinary; unlike during the rest of the film, she is not alone in this house. But, as in the case of Cléo who finds a man at the end of her journey, the presence of a man brings with it other complications in the case of Mona as well. At one point, Mona looks into a dusty mirror and then she writes her name on the dusty surface, followed by her lover's, David. Her gesture validates the quasi-relationship. However, David erases both names very quickly invoking the fact that they should not leave any traces since they are in someone else's house. The act of erasing both their names punctuates the fact that they are not in a traditional relationship; it is something that can be erased at any time, with the swipe of the hand. Furthermore, because it is a man who erases her name off the mirror, it is suggested that Mona cannot have her own identity in the male world. She cannot affirm her identity, or even proclaim her own name. On the other hand, as I have already stated above, she does have an impact on the lives of several women whom she meets on the way. It is, though, a completely different story when it comes to dealing with the men, because she cannot penetrate into that exclusive world.

So, Mona's freedom is fleeting, even though she states, "seule, c'est bien." She does not appear to mind being alone, but she ends up dead because of it. The suggestion of freedom comes and goes throughout the movie, and it seems central to this character. Freedom defines her, and it defines Varda's new woman, but it obviously comes at a price: Mona dies, Cléo is left uncertain of her health and future (and on the Senegalese side, Mossane dies too). During one of Mona's stops, a philosophical shepherd equates freedom with loneliness: "liberté totale et solitude totale." One can only be really free if

alone, he seems to imply. Meeting the shepherd is one of the instances that really emphasize Mona's solitude: the shepherd lives in a quintessential patriarchal society that obeys a traditional patriarchal hierarchy. The shepherd works the land, and the woman takes care of the children and the kitchen. Placed in this context, Mona is not supposed to last very long. When she does not, she moves on. In the end, it is a matter of choice: Mona does not want to be around people, and in the few instances she is, she gives the impression that she is more interested in listening to music.

The uninterested attitude she has toward life and people allows for contemplation and the camera helps underline that feeling by lingering on the sites she visits. The places she goes by are constantly shown, much as Paris is revealed in *Cléo de 5 à 7*, whether that is done from a taxi, or on foot. For example, the first ride Cléo and her assistant take runs almost ten minutes; later, when she walks in the city, the audience gets to see the shops, the parks, and everything else that surrounds the characters through the main character's eyes. However, the places where Mona walks are places seldom visited. At the very end of the movie, her wandering becomes a sort of rambling in the streets. She is frightened because she walks through a town during a mud festival, and a bunch of "creatures," that appear to be men, cover her in mud, and push her around a little bit. This is one last, and very powerful, example of a society ruled by men that physically imposes its will on the lonely female drifter. This turns out to be Mona's last episode, because she will soon freeze to death.

The female characters of both Safi Faye and Agnès Varda attempt to subvert the primacy of the cinematic male subject, but they only succeed sporadically. The

ambivalence brought into play by the two female directors in all of their films points to the uncertainty and volatile attributes that plague the contemporary, modern society. But I think that this is a necessary outcome in the voyages that Mossane, Cléo and Mona undertake. The reality remains that the contemporary society is still male-driven, even though progress has been made in order to level the gender field. If these films had had different endings, they would have run the risk of falling into the realm of the fantastic. As they stand right now, they function as adequate reality checks. So, the work of both Faye and Varda raises plenty of relevant questions. It definitely makes the audience more aware that there is a need to restructure the way one looks and hears the cinematic female character. It also points out that such a paradigmatic shift is not yet possible in the latter part of the twentieth century, and the beginning of the twenty-first century. In the end, what is clear is that modernity has to accommodate yet another change: the female subject, while still negotiating her status as both object and subject, finds herself in a constant hybrid state generated by her position as both product of (as an object), and counterpoint to (as a subject), modernity. The female cinematic subject also yields multiple versions of modernity. The problematic relationship between, on the one hand, women, film, and the audience (male and female), and ultimately, modernity on the other hand, will eventually produce a new, emancipated version of the cinematic female subject.

Conclusion

The primary goal of this project has been to challenge the current understanding of modernity through an analysis of the role of sound in the French New Wave and Senegalese cinemas. There are multiple ways in which modernity has been defined and redefined; my attempt has been to look at three elements, themselves results of modernity, and to explore the effects they have had on shaping the very source from whence they came. In the context of cinema, these three elements, sound, the city and the female subject, share many intricate connections, and they are themselves examples of domains pertaining to modernity: sound represents technology, the city is the result of the urbanization process, and the female subject often conveys a sense of alienation. Throughout the thesis, I have tried to look at each permutation that involves the question of sound: the sounds of the city, the sounds *in* the city, sounds made by women, women's voice(s) singing voices, women in the city, city as one sound, and the city as a quintessential place for the formation of the modern female subject.

All of these permutations find different shapes in the films of various directors who personalize the elements they have at their disposal according to a unique style. The filmmakers' treatment of sound, the city and the female subject leads to alternating the condition of modernity, and the results that ensue generate customized modernities. In the films I analyzed, for example, the growth of industrialization affects all three elements, but at different intensities in the two national cinemas. The depiction of the city in Truffaut's and Godard's films is flooded with the various effects of industrialization,

while Sembene and Mambety's Dakar is only starting the process. In the French films I discussed, alienation, and specifically the alienation of the female subject, occurs because of the hectic life in the city, and also because society goes through a loss of the sense of community. In Faye's films, that sense of community is still strong, not yet lost, but alienation still happens because of generational and religious conflicts.

The five chapters reveal other such examples of discrepancies in the two cinemas; much like the terms of sonic jump-cut and sonic rack-focus, my own analysis poses critical jumps and rack-focus effects from one element to another and between elements. The critical jumps underline a constant struggle between the notions of interior and exterior (whether literal or metaphorical), one that reminds us of the Baroque discussion in Chapter I. That contrast carries through the entire project: the breaking down of the fourth wall, also discussed in Chapter I, involves a heavy dose of alternation between outside and inside (in relation to the screen, but also to the audience). The same alternation can be found in Mambety's torn subjects; then it becomes more specific with Truffaut's *flâneur* who deals with an inside struggle for the most part. For both Mambety and Truffaut, the balancing act between outside and inside involves a psychological response from the filmic subjects. We then moved to Chapter IV, which demonstrated the importance of Sembene's city and placing women at the centre of the city ruckus. And we finally transitioned into the work of female directors, who, yet again, mix notions of inside and outside. Varda and Faye's main characters, who are women, have to negotiate their new subject status on two fronts. First, there is an internal, psychological struggle,

and secondly, we witness an external manifestation, too, because of the settings in which they are placed: Varda's city and Faye's village.

We have seen that the constant struggle between interiority and exteriority only complicates our discussion of modernity. And as I have shown throughout the project, modernity has to be defined at a cross between the two. It is not a concept fully defined by the interiority of Truffaut's marginalized characters, nor by the exteriority of the sounds of the tumultuous Godard or Sembene city, but rather by a combination of all those elements. And this is where the difference between modernity and modernism takes a clearer shape as well. The latter can be more easily delimited historically. Chronologically, modernism spans the end of the First World War to about the Seventies. There are of course debates, for example the period from 1910 to about 1940 is often called high modernism, while early modernism is situated between 1880 and 1910. However, when it comes to the question of modernity there cannot be any such limiting dates; modernity cannot be enclosed within fixed parameters. Instead, modernity is a concept that potentially has been present for much of the human existence. I would even argue that technological advancements in Antiquity and the Middle Ages were very early signs of a notion of progress that could be associated with modernity. The polemical aesthetic of both the New Wave and Senegalese cinemas constantly confronts modernity, and in my particular interest in treating these two cinemas I have suggested that they do so more radically than other cinematic movements, especially in the film of Godard and Mambety. These connections can also be made in other cinematic movements, of course, but not to the same extent I believe. One example would be the films of *Cinema Novo*

Brazilian director Glauber Rocha, who consistently established a counter-point between image and sound in his films. *Land in Anguish* (1967) and *Antônio das Mortes* (1969) follow in the footsteps of the French New Wave self-reflexivity, but they also contribute to the creation of a personalized aesthetic for Brazilian cinema. This is made possible through the particular use of sound, one that reminds us of Godard, but that remains particular to the socio-cultural context of Brazil. There are other connections between Rocha and the New Wave and Senegalese cinemas: the Brazilian director heavily influenced the seminal Third Cinema manifesto written in 1969 by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino. In fact, the Brazilian Cinema of the 60s was far more radical in its intentions than its European counterparts; it was a revolutionary type of cinema that challenged mainstream cinema but also the very aesthetics of film. Rocha created his own style which he coined the "aesthetics of garbage" (by way of hunger and violence).

Another important difference from other cinematic movements is that my project has bridged the New Wave and Senegalese cinemas through a reexamination of modernity as a constant metamorphic entity at the juncture of three unique, shifting perspectives that are undoubtedly characteristic of these two specific cinemas. First, I have shown that the contested notion of the Baroque brings to light the constant struggle between the outside (image) and the inside (meaning), through a lack of linearity, as the narratives of both cinemas in question fold in upon themselves to create permutations of stories. The customized modernity is seen here in the small details, and in the smaller-scale narratives. Second, I have used Baudelaire's depiction of nineteenth century Paris, which is dominated by a figure of marginality, the *flâneur* who enacts a fusion between

exterior and interior, both geographically and spiritually. In this instance, the directors customize modernity according to individuals—the idea of modernity comes from the subject of the narration rather than the narrative itself. Third, we have seen that, through an experimental juxtaposition of genres, twentieth-century avant-garde creates counter-cinema, whose aesthetic renders the cinematic subject a critique of modernity. The three perspectives have been brought together through an analysis of the sound issues present in the two cinemas. My readings have explored films by six French and Senegalese directors, who choose to assail modernity through three distinct approaches: a direct, (sound) Baroque aesthetics exemplified by Jean-Luc Godard and Djibril-Diop Mambety; an indirect gaze upon characters who dwell in marginality (Ousmane Sembene and François Truffaut), and a mixture of the two, with Agnès Varda and Safi Faye, whose female characters struggle to gain the status of speaking and acting (*flâneuse*) subjects. Although they emerge from marginality, these women assert their own voice and undermine the primacy of the male subject in cinema, at the level of both image and sound. We have seen the female characters in these films transition toward becoming active elements, the ones who see rather than the traditional object of the (male) gaze. This transition, itself an active act, is paralleled by the constant movement that is implied by the *flâneur/flâneuse*'s habits. In this case, we combine the narrative with the subject of the narative, and the female directors give us another type of customized modernity.

At the core of the project, though, sound has remained the principal topic, as both cinemas use it extensively in order to challenge the primacy of the visual. My dissertation has emphasized this aspect of film, because I believe it is important to add more about the

sound dimension to our technical analysis of films. While reading film as text has its advantages and uses, to me, the technical aspect of film is equally, if not more, important. And within this type of analysis, the role of sound is often omitted as we focus more or solely on the visual. My close readings of the films throughout the project discussed the visual, and, at the same time, they refocused our attention on the aural, while introducing two technical terms, the sonic jump-cut and the sonic rack-focus, which I hope will facilitate reading film from the perspective of sound. Film sound is indeed critically important, and it comes to (cinematic) life almost in a material manner: it can be felt, not only heard. Sound creates a sense of a new spatiality, which leads to new (aural) narrative planes that reshape the current paradigm of the relationship between spectator and film. For example, the aural fold created by Godard's specific use of sound generates a new paradigm for the relationship between the modern cinematic subject and cinema itself. Sound is displaced from the screen, and it comes together again within the physical space of the theater, occupied by the audience. The audience, in turn, is displaced (metaphorically) from its seat and onto the screen, as the viewing subjects are more in tune with what happens on screen. As evident from the title of the project, the notion of displacement is at the core of any attempt to define modernity, and I have touched upon several other types of displacement: the displacement of narrative planes through sound in cinema, the displacement of the cinematic subject from urban areas or within urban areas, the displacement of male primacy, the displacement of the female voice, or the displacement of the individual female from/within the society.

In *Notes to Literature*, Theodor Adorno talks about a twofold connection between the individual and society: "[there is an] actual relationship between the individual and society. It is not only that the individual is inherently socially mediated, not only that its contents are always social as well. Conversely, society is formed and continues to live only by virtue of the individuals whose quintessence it is" (1991, 44). Even though Adorno's analysis is done in the context of lyric poetry, it can be extrapolated to Charles Taylor's notion of multiple modernities that I have covered in Chapter IV, and to our general conversation about a possible definition of modernity. Sound, as we have seen before, can clearly have multiple effects. Because each individual has his or her own relationship with film (just as they do with the society they live in), the aural space between the screen and the audience is filled in a personalized manner. A running theme throughout the entire project has been the actual impossibility of finding an adequate definition of modernity; the relationship between each individual and the society he or she lives in leads to several versions of the understanding of the process of modernity. In other words, modernity is not necessarily defined by each of these individuals, but rather transformed according to particular interactions between forms of technology and forms of malaise. If the individual is the quintessence of society (like Truffaut's marginalized characters), then he or she can also be the quintessence of modernity (Truffaut's customized modernity).

Some examples of these particular contexts: in Truffaut's films we are shown not only the dynamic between characters dwelling in marginality, but also that of the city in which they live, as well as a third dynamic that combines the two. The latter dynamic is

an emblem of modernity. Each character develops his or her own relationship with the city, while struggling to emerge from marginality. Characters and surroundings can be taken as a whole, but they can also be separated, and in the latter case the city takes on a life of its own. The modern city is an independent entity that can swallow up the modern subject. Truffaut's films provide us with another type of critique of modernity, a more indirect one. By focusing on the position of the marginalized subject in the contemporary society, whether it is a teenager like Antoine, or a woman like Catherine, Truffaut reshapes our understanding of modernity in the city because we comprehend it through the eyes of those characters. The same can be said about Sembene's city, which takes on yet another form of modernity. Sembene draws upon various interactions within the community which, amplified through the use of sound, generate multiple modernities.

The many manifestations of displacement I have been discussing in this project take another turn when analyzed in the context of the work of the two female directors, Agnès Varda and Safi Faye. The two female directors chose female leads for the main characters, and that in itself constitutes already a displacement: by undermining the primacy of the male cinematic subject, the two women/directors attempt to restructure the *normal* patriarchal order. The city and the village can be seen through a woman's eyes, and her vision is radically different from that of the male. The female characters of both Safi Faye and Agnès Varda attempt to subvert the primacy of the cinematic male subject, and they succeed on several occasions and levels. However, the ambivalence brought into play by the two female directors in all of their films points to the uncertainty and volatile attributes that plague contemporary modern society. Because of such displays of

ambivalence, I am inclined to suggest that a complete paradigmatic shift—a complete reversal from the primacy of the cinematic male subject to a primacy of the cinematic female subject—is not yet possible in the latter part of the twentieth century.

The narrative of my project reveals the presence of multiple modernities in the context of cinema, and through the main three elements analyzed, sound, the city and the female subject. There is one type of modernity emerging from the sounds of the city (the full corpus of all technologies combines), another one from the sounds *in* the city (for example, alienation as understood by the male or female voices), and of course a more cohesive one for the city as *one* sound (combining the Lyotard external and intrinsic qualities of modernity). Then there are the sounds made by women, or rather women's voice(s); the milieu (the city being a quintessential place for the formation of the modern female subject) in which women thrive leads to another type of modernity, and within each instance (each particular character in the films, and each viewing subject), the concept of modernity changes. And it does so largely because of the varied manifestations of sound. As sound moves, numerous displacements generate endless results, endless, customized modernities.

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